

## **"The Three Waterholes."**

by E M Chapman

Our new serial story, "The Three Water Holes," by E M Chapman, will commence in our Issue of to-morrow, Saturday. The story deals with the adventures of a young American who, fleeing his country for urgent personal reasons, settled in Australia during the early days of colonisation.

The opening scene is set in Carolina, where the Ashley family hold many broad acres bestowed upon them by Charles II for loyalty to the Stuart cause.

A terrifying storm rages over the plantation. The negroes crouch awe-stricken within their cabins. Outside the wind roars in fury, howling down the chimneys and thrashing the trees to frenzy. Above the wind's roar can be heard the trembling falsetto of old Mammy Sue's voice, rising and falling as the wind varies dying as a lull occurs, to become a shriek when a gust sweeps between the crowded cabins.

*"Trouble, trouble, trouble dis night comes trouble, trouble" The negroes creep closer together muttering. "She sees, Mammy Sue sees what is coming dis night "*

And trouble does come. The younger son of the House of Ashley is driven forth across the seas as the result of a duel. He leaves behind him not only his home and a noble estate but the aching heart of a charming and courageous girl. He visits England, then voyages to Australia as an immigrant. In Australia he meets with much arduous and dangerous adventure before he is able to prepare a suitable home for one whose last words to him *"I will come to you though it be across the world"* have always been his driving force.

E. M. Chapman has told this story well. It holds the readers' interest throughout and the action is supported by good dialogue and a power of description which lends life and vigour to the narrative.

The author has been most successful in capturing the atmosphere of the period not only in the portrayal of life in Sydney during the early days, but in the character sketching of those who journeyed inland to discover the unexplored stretches of fertile country.

*The Sydney Morning Herald. Friday 11 September 1931*

The following story uses many actual place names and the names of actual people to create a piece historical fiction. However the main players in the story are fictional.

As the "Herald" says in the last paragraph above, the story captures the atmosphere of the period of the late 1830s and the early 1840s.

The actual location of the three waterholes is also fictional, yet even this name appears to come from the discovery of a chain of permanent water holes in South Australia by John McDouall Stuart in 1858.

The use, in the story, of "Kissing Point Road" as the main road from Parramatta to Sydney is not geographically accurate as Kissing Point was the place where boats "kissed" the north shore of the river to take fruit and vegetables into Circular Quay. Parramatta Road was the main land route from Parramatta to the city.

*Ed. August 2013*

## The Three Waterholes.

By E. M. Chapman.

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### CHAPTER I.

*"Trouble! trouble ! trouble! Dis night comes trouble, trouble."*

Old Mammy Sue's voice rose shrill and ever shriller, until it could be heard even amid the roar of the storm, and the negro slaves who had left their work in the tobacco fields of the Ashley plantation, and huddled into her cabin to escape the sudden deluge, watched her, muttering uneasily.

*"She sees. Mammy Sue see what's coming dis night."*

The old negress rocked to and fro, her skinny arms and clawlike hands tightly folded, and the whites of her upturned eyes showing in the black face beneath the bright scarlet turban. Dr. Hanrahan, sitting on a bench at the back of the cabin, crossed himself devoutly. He had visited a patient at a plantation farther up the Cape Fear River, and, meaning to return home before sunset, had used the tracks through the river plantations rather than the long and lonely road through the forest; but the storm had overtaken him as he rode through the Ashley plantation, and he had sought shelter in the nearest cabin.

He sat listening to the wizened little old negress who had nursed two generations of Ashleys, and who was popularly supposed to possess some uncanny power, which made, the superstitious slaves of all the surrounding plantations fear her and seek her aid. The sudden storm and the excitement of finding her cabin invaded by so many people had affected her strangely, so that even the doctor was oppressed with a sense of fore- boding as he listened to her prophecy of approaching doom and disaster.

Her voice was a note in the shrieking of the gale, now rising as the wind rose, now drowned by the long ominous roll of thunder, and the slaves crouching on the floor at her feet shuddered with terror and shrank from her words, as though from blows.

*"Dis night de son of Ashley goes from Ashley. Dis night the little old woman in de long cloak takes away de child of Ashley."*

Thunder pealed, and for a moment the hut was strangely bright in the glare of the lightning; a limb of the century-old English oak that shaded the cabin crashed on the roof, and Mammy Sue's voice was almost inaudible in the din.

*"Across de wide sea dey seek a new land -de strange land of waterholes where de waters nebber flow,"* she muttered inaudibly, and Dr. Hanrahan bent forward to listen. Suddenly her voice rose in a piercing shriek. *"De water flows ! de water flows!"*

The tenseness of her body relaxed, and she fell forward as the doctor sprang to help her. She sobbed as he supported her, crying softly to herself, *"De great house is fallen, its pillars are broken,"* and then once more she was only Mammy Sue of the Ashley plantation, apologising to Dr. Hanrahan for the trouble she had given him, and apparently knowing nothing of her prophecy.

When the storm had passed, the doctor took his horse from the shed in which he had sheltered it, and rode on his way, oddly disturbed.

The slaves worked once more in the fields, and the words of a song sung in a soft Southern voice, followed him into the forest. He rode through the broad-leaved tobacco into an avenue of giant trees, where long strands of grey moss swung from the live oaks and the incessant drip from the wet leaves sighed an eerie accompaniment to his thoughts. It was too late to return for the night to his own home at Wilmington, and he must break his journey at some plantation. He half thought of returning to the big Ashley house, which showed on a distant height behind its tobacco fields, its white pillars and tall chimneys gleaming through the trees; but he disliked the elder Ashley, and the younger was seldom at home. There was little love lost between the two brothers, and Dick was probably at Belmont making love to Elizabeth Gordon.

*"I'll go on to Belmont,"* the old doctor muttered, thinking of the soft black hair and blue eyes of lovely Elizabeth Gordon. *"Dick Ashley will be there with a host of his fellows. Faith, the good wine turns sour in the glass when Henry Ashley looks at it, and no maid on the Cape Fear can compare with Elizabeth."*

The Ashley house showed again through an opening in the trees, and he looked at it half resentfully. To his impressionable Irish soul the shadow of Mammy Sue's prophecy seemed suddenly to lie upon it, and it seemed to reproach him for taking the road which led away from it.

*"What was it the negress had cried concerning the little old woman in the long cloak?"* He crossed himself uneasily as he thought of it. The little old woman in the long cloak, was the legendary figure who appeared once in every generation at the birth of the Ashley who was destined to carry on that race. She was a shade, half-glimpsed through the tales of old men and women, a shade who guarded the fortunes of the house. Had not Mary Ashley cried her name when her son Richard was born, and was it not commonly said that old Mammy Sue had felt the folds of her long dark cloak brush past her as she held the child?

Mammy Sue's words kept time to the click of his horse's feet on the stones of the road as he ambled on to Belmont, and the doctor pondered them, lost in thought. His horse stopped with a sudden snort, head outstretched and ears pricked, and he looked down a glade which opened between tall dark pines and spreading live oaks to a space where a young man sat motionless beside another, who lay on the ground, a pistol near his out flung hand.

*"Troubles come this night!"* the doctor mechanically echoed Mammy Sue's words. *"Now the saints defend us."*

He rode down the forest lane and looked into the desperate eyes of Richard Ashley.

*"He is dead; I killed him."*

Dr. Hanrahan got heavily from his saddle to the sodden ground, and all the love and gratitude he had given Richard Ashley's father, long ago, lived in his heart once more. He knelt beside the dead man, his thoughts leaden. The lad who lay before him was the only son of the wealthiest and most influential planter on the river, and there was little hope for Richard Ashley.

*"You fought with him, boy. Had ye no seconds?"*

The boy stared at him with still, dreadful eyes in a white face.  
*"We quarrelled and he suggested that we should fight; here in the forest."*

The doctor looked about him.

*"It happened before the storm, lad. Has no one passed on the road?"*  
*"I have seen no one."*

*"You are wet to the skin and cold as death."* The boy shuddered, and Dr. Hanrahan put a rough brown hand lightly on his shoulder.

*"Now listen to a man who was your father's friend and would be yours. There is no hope for you in Wilmington, and you must not stand your trial there. With your father's influence behind you, you might have stayed, even though, duelling is by law forbidden; but your brother Henry is disliked in Wilmington. This will be murder. I know Colin Stewart; he will exact vengeance for the death of his only son. You must leave the country to-night before it is known that young Alick Stewart fought with you in the forest."*

The boy laughed with a dreadful hopelessness.

*"Where could I go, and what is there left for me? I had rather pay the penalty in the gaol at Wilmington."*

*"Sure, that's not the way to talk at all,"* the doctor's blue eyes hardened in his red face. *"To-night the ship Erin sails from the river with the tide, and I'll give ye a letter to her captain. Michael O'Reilly will see ye safe in London, and no questions asked. Now don't look at me as though you did not hear the thing I'm saying to ye,"* he urged. *"There are many long years ahead, and a life to be lived bravely. Go ye home to Ashley now and make your preparations. An hour this side of mid-night I'll have a boat at your landing steps, and ye'll sail on the Erin with the tide."*

A soul in torment looked from Richard Ashley's eyes.

*"I cannot leave Alick to lie here through the stormy night."*

*"He'll not be here. He shall be taken to his father's house before sunrise. But hurry now lad and do the thing I tell ye. There'll be time for remorse all through the years, when you'll carry the sword in your heart, but now you must act."*

The boy instinctively stiffened, and the doctor nodded in satisfaction.

*"There's the money that'll be necessary. Sell your share of your mother's estate to-night to your brother Henry. He'll be glad to buy it; at something less than the worth may be,"* he added wryly.

*"If I sail on the Erin to-night what price will you pay for helping me, Dr. Hanrahan?"*

*"There'll be no price to pay at all. I'll not have seen you this night in the forest, and there are some who will do my bidding and keep a close tongue."*

His speech grew even more urgent, and at length Richard Ashley walked to the tree to which the horses were tied, and, mounting, rode away from the glade.

Night had fallen and a fugitive moon showed once and again between the scudding clouds. The younger Ashley rode home to the house of his father's knowing that it could shelter him no more. He was numb with cold, and desperate with misery. A squirrel slipped from an overhanging branch as he turned into the avenue of trees that led to

the door of the great Ashley house, and he watched it disappear. He gave his horse to the slave who appeared at the steps leading to the stone piazza, and crossed between its ghostly white columns to the lighted hall.

The old negro butler, who had served his grandfather, came forward exclaiming in horror at his appearance, but scarcely aware of him Richard passed to a quiet room where candle lights flickered softly over the dark panelling and his elder brother sat reading at a tall desk. At the closing of the door he looked up with a frown, then rose hastily as he saw his brothers face.

*"What is it Dick? What have you done?" "I have killed Alick Stewart"*

The brothers stared at one another fearfully, but the words Dick had spoken seemed to float in the air as though the room were full of terrible voices repeating them.

Dick cried out in anguish.

*"It was in fair fight, Henry. We fought a duel in the forest - I swear it was in fair fight. I have not left him alone in the forest. A friend has taken him home and to-night I fly the country."*

His brother's face was dark with anger *"Duelling is by law forbidden How came you to fight?"*

*"He taunted me, and I struck him. I wish that I had died in the forest with him."*

In Henry's eyes he saw little pity and sudden fierce resentment stirred in his heart.

He was outcast from all that had given his youth happiness, and in his soul was utter desolation. Then let it be so. He would cease to think of Alick dead in the forest, he would heed no more his brother's coldness, he would desire no man's pity. He spoke bitterly, "Within a few hours I shall sail for England and trouble you no more All my life I think that you have hated me."

*"And had I no cause?" Henry demanded passionately. "Am I not the eldest son, and yet had I not always to stand aside and give you precedence? Because the little old woman who is the old wives' tale of our house is thought to have been seen by a hysterical negress at your birth, I am of no account I must die and you must inherit I could not love you. You were given too many of the things that should have been mine. The thing I wanted must always be yours, because you were under the protection for the long cloak and I was not. At home or abroad it has always been the same. The very slaves will run to do your bidding, heedless of my commands. Yet I am master!"*

*"I did not know that you cared so much about that old wives' tale, Henry. I have seldom given it a thought"*

He turned instinctively to the picture of his father, for, at the mention of the old woman in the long cloak, the picture seemed suddenly to dominate the room. The two brothers stared at it in fascinated silence, and the story of their house came back to them with new and bitter meaning.

They were of an ancient English house, which had enjoyed wealth and power until the time of the Stuarts, but during the Civil Wars of that period, the eldest son had fought under Cromwell a younger brother, Francis, who was said to have been born under the protection

of the little old woman of his house, fighting in the ranks of the Cavaliers. The younger son had been taken prisoner at Naseby, and sent to the Virginian plantations by Cromwell, but when Charles II re- turned to the throne, Francis Ashley had been freed, and given large grants in Carolina. The elder brother had died in poverty in England his estates confiscated, and the legend of the little old woman who was the traditional guardian of Ashley had persisted in the new country. She flitted through the tales of the superstitious plantation slaves, and it was said that she had appeared on the day on which the father of Henry and Richard Ashley had been born. He also was a younger son, and once more the doom had been fulfilled. His elder brother had joined the army of Lord Cornwallis, while he himself had fought with General Washington so that at the end of the War of independence, the younger son reigned at Ashley in his brother's place.

It was a tale of ill omen for Henry Ashley staring in fascination at the face of the father who had died when they were boys, but Dick turned away with scornful laughter, unable to endure longer the gaze of the pictured eyes.

*"You spoke truth when you called it an old wives' tale,"* he said contemptuously. *"Ashley and all its land and slaves are yours till death. I take nothing with me save the money you give me to-night in exchange for my share of my mother's estate, if you will agree to buy the land that I may no longer claim."*

The brothers faced one another, heart- broken but resentful. They were both slender and tall, dark of hair and eyes, having fine straight features, as had all the men of their family, but, whereas Dick was open of countenance and free of speech, Henry was moody and silent.

*"I will give you what money I have, and send the rest to our London bankers. I would that this had not happened, and when you have gone I shall know little peace I have not loved you, Dick, but to-night I wish that I had done so."*

*"To-night,"* Dick answered, *there is only torment. A boat will come for me presently. Give me the money, and let me be gone from you and from Ashley"*

*"I will get the money,"* Henry said quietly, *"but you must eat and rest. Go to your room while I see that everything is in readiness."*

He watched his brother leave the room and then began to make swift preparations. There was need for action and little time for thought, but he knew sudden, bitter regret for the brother about to leave him and for the unkindness of the lost years. He sent Benjamin their white-haired and trusted slave, to wait upon his brother, then, sitting at his desk, he prepared to write to the London firm to which generations of Ashleys had entrusted their business.

Dick Ashley supped, suffering the sym- pathetic ministrations of Benjamin, and, dismissing the old man, himself picked the few belongings that he meant to take with him. It still lacked some time before midnight, and he wandered restlessly through the quiet house until he came to the room which had been his mother's. The curtains were drawn over the long French doors opening on to the piazza and he sat down without troubling to pull them aside. He knew every tree

and shrub growing on the wide lawn, and every cabin in the tobacco fields, stretching away to the gleaming river.

All this was Ashley, and this he must lose to-night. He thought in bitter despair that a whole lifetime of endeavour and of repentance would not give him back his friend or the careless happiness and security of which one hour of madness had robbed him. Alick was dead in the forest, and Elisabeth Gordon gone from his life.

One of the heavy curtains stirred suddenly, and a girl slipped silently into the room. She stood within the door, a vision of beauty and delight against the curtain's soft darkness. The candlelight gleamed on the satin and lace of her dress where it showed between the folds of her black cloak, her face had a delicate beauty of line and colour and her eyes a fire and purpose that were strange in one so youthful.

She waited until a clock in the room had ceased its silver chiming, then moved quietly to the table where Dick Ashley sat, his head in his hands. She touched him lightly, and he came slowly to his feet, staring at her as though she were indeed some vision from another world, a world which was for ever lost to him.

*"Elisabeth! What brings you here to-night?" "To-night I slipped away from my father's guests to visit a woman who is ailing,"* Elisabeth said, watching him steadily.

*"She is the wife of Martin the overseer, and, as I approached their cottage I met Dr Hanrahan and Martin stealing away to the forest. They were so dismayed that I feared I knew not what Dr Hanrahan said that you had fought with Alick Stewart and must fly to-night."*

*"He had persuaded Martin to take a boat to your landing steps while he and one of the Conrads who live in the forest, carried Alick home. The elder Conrad has ridden to the sheriff, but his horse will cast a shoe so that you will be in safety when his news is told"*

*'Elisabeth! Elisabeth!'* Dick cried fiercely, *"Why did you come to me?"*

Exaltation flamed in Elisabeth's face.

*"So that if you wished it, I might go with you to-night."*

Looking at her, Dick said gently, *"With you it has always been the hurt child or the broken thing. Had I lain dead in the forest would you not have gone to Alick in pity, as you have come to me? All this year you have protested that you did not love me."*

*"If you had died in the forest I think that my life would be the broken thing,"* Elisabeth said. *"Martin waits with the boat at the landing steps. Will you not take me with you?"*

*"How could I let you travel the road I must travel to-night?"* Dick cried in anguish. *"All my life I shall remember that you came to me to-night, beloved. I have flung away my hope of heaven. Elisabeth! Elisabeth! If I can live a new and worthier life in a new land will you come to me?"*

*"I will come to you,"* Elisabeth promised, *"though it be across the world."*

They clung to one another, shaken with emotion, Elisabeth's face alight with the flame of self-sacrifice that consumed her and the boy torn with a passion of devotion and gratitude instinctively responding to her generosity.

*"I will stay and face Colin Stewart, Elizabeth."* But Elizabeth was vehement in her alarm. *"The boat is at the landing steps, and Dr Hamahan will be waiting for me at Belmont. You must go at once. I will to the boat while you get the things you need but hasten."*

Disregarding his entreaties she slipped from his grasp and fled from the room, a slim shadow flitting across the white piazza and down the flower-bordered path to the landing stage, where the great trees flung their inky shadows across the water, concealing the waiting boat from the eyes of Mammy Sue. She had come from her cabin to see the youngest Ashley go, and she waited patiently in the shadows, a bent old woman, supporting herself on her stick and chilled with the night dew. Even Dick, who was used to the strange way in which she gleaned her information, uttered a startled exclamation and dropped the burden he carried when he saw her standing beside the white mass of an azalea, heavy with dripping blossom.

*"What are you doing here, Mammy Sue?"* "I came to bless my child," Mammy Sue said shrilly.

Dick bent and kissed her.

*"For the unselfish love that you have always given me, to-night I thank you, Mammy Sue."*

But a frenzy of impatience possessed Mammy Sue.

*"Begone, Marse Dick, begone. Satan is after you."*

Dick looked pityingly at his old nurse. *"Go to the house if you want anything when I am gone, Mammy. Henry will care for you better than I should have done,"* he said gently.

*"Go chile, go quickly,"* she pushed him towards the river with trembling, urgent hands, and he went swiftly to the waiting boat.

The man who rowed the boat gave him a brief greeting, and they shot down stream with the tide, keeping well within the shadow of the mangroves on the bank.

Sitting in the stern the girl of sixteen and the boy of twenty planned a future which should be free of the shadow that had darkened their lives. When the hue and cry should have died down, Elizabeth would join Dick in London, and he should obtain some employment befitting a gentleman.

*"I could manage some nobleman's estate,"* Dick said thoughtfully.

They were gliding to the Belmont wharf, and Dr. Hanrahan, striding impatiently across the wharf, pressed Dick's hand and gruffly ordered the boatman to push off, for the Erin would not lose the tide. But when the boat had swung into the stream once more, he waited in silent understanding of this child who also was of the Celtic race. Elizabeth gazed down the dark river, and her face was rapt and uplifted as that of any of her ancestors who had fought in the lost causes of half the world. To-night, the old doctor thought shrewdly, looking at her still face, race was telling as it always must in a crisis. The Gordons were high-hearted men and women, and the spirit that looked from Elizabeth's eyes was the very spirit of her race.

Perhaps some remote ancestor, in years when the gods still walked with men, had seen some vision of unearthly beauty, and the memory of that glory still persisted, haunting Gordon men and women until they must seek it through their lives with aching hearts.



At Elizabeth's side the old doctor muttered a word or two to himself. *"The lad is slower of spirit than his father."* *"You think that he should have stayed,"* Elizabeth exclaimed indignantly. *"Yet it is you who have sent him away."*

*"Nay, lass. It were senseless folly to stay. There's no hope of justice in this land for the lad who slew the only son of that Highland hound, Colin Stewart. Dick Ashley will yet make ye a man like his father, one clean of spirit, who'll not fail ye or fear to look a man in the face; but he will not make ye a fortune Elizabeth."*

Elizabeth laughed although quick tears blinded her eyes.

## CHAPTER II

A Square-rigged English vessel lay becalmed off Pernambuco. She was a tall ship of nearly thousand tons, but no breeze had filled her sails for almost a month. She was crowded with emigrants for the British penal settlements in New South Wales, but she was far out of her course. She had left

Liverpool late in July in that year, 1836, sailing steadily out and south, past Madeira and the Canary islands, until the north-east trade wind filled her great sails. Now she was too far south or the trade wind, and she waited for a wind that should help her still farther south to the zone where blew the great westerlies.

She was a full ship, but the immigrants crowded in her narrow cabins bore the discomfort stoically enough. The life they had left behind them in Scotland was a life of such hardship and poverty, and the country to which they fared seemed to offer such treasures of freedom and wealth, that they were prepared to endure all things to reach this land of promise.

In his cabin, the captain bent over a great map, studying it with an anxious concentration. It was a map of the world, its oceans traced with wandering lines, and dotted with the dates of strange voyages, for it showed the discoveries about the Poles and in the new settlements of Australia and New Zealand.

Captain Levitt placed the leg of a pair of compasses on a point marked Olinda de Pernambuco, and laboriously read aloud a direction printed in the corner of his map. He had known every word of it by heart for many years, but he had formed a habit of refreshing his excellent memory whenever he took his distances. It had become a ritual. "When the given places differ both in latitude and longitude, find the difference in latitude in degrees from the equator. Lay the edge of a ruler over the two places, and slide one point of the compasses containing the difference of latitude along the edge of the ruler until the other point touches the parallel" He held up a hand in warning to the mate who had appealed at the door of the cabin, and read on while the mate watched the movement of the compasses curiously. On this voyage Captain Levitt had become an enigma to his mate. He had sailed with him for years, but never before had the silent little man with the grizzled brown beard and the far-sighted blue eyes of the sailor, kept him in ignorance of his ship's course. The mate was puzzled and hurt, but Captain Levitt owned the James, and,

if he chose to sail her in a way in which ships carrying immigrants to Botany Bay were seldom sailed, it was his own business. The captain certainly thought so, for he had consistently discouraged all inquiry since the coast of England had faded from sight.

He now turned impatiently to his mate, still keeping one leg of the compasses on Pernambuco, while the other wavered over a spot that looked to the suspicious eyes of the mate to be dangerously near the South Pole "*What is it? What is it now?*" he demanded irritably.

*"We're drifting in to Pernambuco, sir, and the natives will be out in their boats soon. Are the men to be allowed to go ashore?"*

*"No!"*

The mate hesitated *"It seems hard when we're becalmed, sir."*

*"They're not to go ashore,"* Captain Levitt returned with finality, and the mate left the cabin, but, as he left, the captain called him back. *"Ask Dr McGregor to see me."*

He had not long to wait, for the Presbyterian divine who was in charge of the immigrants on board the ship James, was an impetuous man, and was himself anxious to interview his captain. He burst into the cabin almost before Captain Levitt had folded his map and put away his instruments.

*"You wished to see me, Captain Levitt?"* His tone was ominous.

*"Aye, sir Sit down, doctor, sit down."*

The doctor sat but there was a certain stiffness in his bearing, and meeting the un-pleasant light in his eye, Captain Levitt found some difficulty in continuing. At length he said slowly, *"You've a particularly large number of immigrants on board, doctor, and I'm concerned about the provisions. Unless we take some more on at Pernambuco they may not hold out until we reach Sydney."*

The doctor's eyes flashed fiercely, and the unnatural calm of his manner altogether vanished as the captain spoke.

*"And whose fault is it if they're not likely to last?"* he stormed. *"I say 'if,' sir, 'if.' You bring us far out of the usual course of the immigrant ships so that we're becalmed here for weeks, and then you hint that we're likely to be months overdue in Sydney."*

*"Nevertheless it would still be wise to buy more provisions for your immigrants while we lie off Pernambuco, Doctor"*

*"And where should I get credit at Pernambuco?"* Dr McGregor wondered. *"The food will in any case last until we reach Capetown."*

*"We'll not see Capetown on this voyage, Doctor."*

Dr. McGregor stared at him as though he were mad. *"Not see Capetown! Not see Cape- town! You told me at Liverpool that we travelled round the Cape of Good Hope."*

*"And so we do, but I don't intend stopping there. We've been becalmed here for a month already, and I'm not wasting any time at Capetown. So you must find your credit in Pernambuco within the next two days, Doctor, or put your Scotch artisans ashore."*

The captain was firm, but Doctor McGregor left the cabin vowing that the ship must put into Capetown since Captain Levitt was in fault, and he could get no credit at Pernambuco.

He passed to the deck, still angry, but busily considering ways and means. He had intended to obtain supplies at Capetown, but he knew

in his heart that he would not now allow Captain Levitt to leave Pernambuco until he had made provision for the entire voyage.

### CHAPTER III.

Dick Carey bade farewell to the captain of the ship James and stepped into the skiff waiting at her side.

The ex-convict at the heavy oars bent to his task with a slow, steady swing, and Dick studied the harbour with its deeply indented shores, wooded to their white sands and the crowded shipping of the Sydney Cove. An English frigate and a French corvette had anchored in the Farm Cove and an American whaler lay beside one of the ugly new steam vessels in the midst of sailing, ships of every tonnage. The houses of the convict city clustered on the two edges forming the entrance of the cove and the banks of the stream that wound through the hollow between them while beyond the city everywhere rolled low hills thickly covered with a dark scrub.

The setting sun shone upon convicts and assigned servants labouring with cargo from the ships as Dick landed upon the stone quay, and the cries of sailors followed him to the Customs House.

Dr McGregor had given him many kindly directions before leaving the ship earlier in the afternoon, and had promised to hand him title deeds of the property near Berrima on the morrow.

Dick left the Customs House and, turning from the wide main street, with its curious collection of shops and houses, its inns and its crowd, made his way to the bank of the Tank Stream, following it until he came to a cottage which he recognised for the one the doctor had recommended as a suitable lodging for him. He passed a bullock team returning from the Quay, and the slow, heavily plodding oxen with the yoke and chain brought a memory of his own country, where also men still strove in wildernesses.

There were few people about, and the odour of cooking came from the houses. Dick pushed open a gate in a white picket fence, and walked between flower beds where English flowers bloomed in the sandy soil to the solid wooden door of a small stone cottage. Here dwelt the wife of an emancipated convict known to Dr. McGregor.

Footsteps sounded, and a pleasant-faced woman in a simple cotton gown came to the door at his knock. She exclaimed in delight when Dick told her he came from Dr. McGregor, and ushered him to a parlour furnished with heavy furniture roughly made from woods of the colony.

*"We heard the good doctor was back to-day with more free settlers, and glad I'll be to lodge you, sir, and hear the news of the old country. My man is away in the bush, and I've nobody to mind, but supper is cooking, and you shall taste fish caught this day in the waters of the port by my brother, who is fisherman to Sir Richard Bourke himself."*

She showed Dick to a tiny room, whose one window looked upon a well beside the Tank Stream, asking countless questions concerning English doings and English ways, and then bustled away to attend to his supper.

Dick waited at his window, listening to the sounds of the town; he ached with a great longing for Elizabeth, and despairingly thought of the years he must spend before he could seek her, but Mrs.

Thompson called, and Dick went back to her parlour, resolutely determining that he would learn the ways of this country and carve a fortune from its inhospitable looking lands.

*"There's tea for you!"* his hostess said proudly, *"made with water brought from the new Hyde Park tunnel. We get it in casks at a shilling a cask, and it's fresh and sweet, not brackish like the water in the old well. An Irish gentleman had this cottage before my man rented it from Mr. Andrew. They do say he longed for a fresh cup of tea all the way from Ireland, and when he landed with his family he saw the well, and bought the cottage at once. He would hardly let his wife take off her bonnet, so anxious was he for his tea; but when he made it he found that the water was brackish. They say that he took off his wig and stamped upon it, and then he took his family away to Campbelltown. The cottage was empty for a long time, and my husband rents it for eight pounds a year. Your lodging will help to pay the rent, sir."*

She waited upon him, gossiping of the townspeople, and when he had supped, Dick went to view the city, Mrs. Thompson crying a warning as he left.

*"Be careful, sir, and walk not abroad too late. There are many evil characters in the streets, and clouds are sweeping up. It will be a dark and stormy evening."*

Dick thanked her, and went on his way into the heart of the town. In the bright sunlight of the afternoon the plain stone houses and shops, with their gardens and their roofs of bark cut in large sheets, or in small weathered shingles, had possessed an almost archaic simplicity, which the few large and more imposing buildings had merely seemed to accentuate; but now, in the darkness, under a sky which grew rapidly cloudy and threatening, the houses and shops seemed to huddle together in the narrow, twisted streets with a sinister suggestion of mystery and adventure. Rough people slunk from tile glare of the lights of the taverns at the street corners, to be lost in the shadowy lanes between them; voices sounded in loud laughter or angry oaths, and were suddenly silent. Officers in uniform rode through the streets on spirited horses, clattering over the stones of the convict-made roads, and carriages proceeding to the Governor's residence passed him. A patrol of soldiers went by with a runaway convict, and a copper-coloured aboriginal clad in the cast-off clothes of a white man stayed to watch them go. The misery and injustice which underlay the surface of the town were suddenly very apparent.

Dick wandered from George to Pitt Street, where he found a crowd outside the store of Appleton and Jones, and a crier proclaiming the arrival of a new shipment of English wares, to be shown on the morrow. He climbed a steep lane to the Rocks, where the poorer classes dwelt, to find sailors from the American whaler singing songs in a ramshackle public house kept by an emancipated Irishman, who talked treason with his customers.

A drizzling rain began to fall, and entering a narrow lane he prepared to return to the cottage on the Tank Stream. The few lights in the houses showed dimly, and evil odours rose from the mud of the undrained street. As Dick hastened away from its unpleasant

precincts, a figure emerged from the shadow of a fence and accosted him.

*"Could you give a few coppers to a man in need, Sir?"*

Dick hesitated, remembering Mrs. Thompson's warning, and quite suddenly found himself gazing at the barrel of a large horse pistol. It was a fearsome-looking weapon, and the man behind it said persuasively:

*"I don't want to hurt you, Sir, but you must hand over your money."*

Dick felt for his money, then lunged forward and seized the horse pistol. It failed to explode, and its owner promptly let go and turned to flee; but, tripping over a stone, he *measured his length in the mud.*

*"And now, sir,"* said Dick grimly, as his assailant sat up, *"you will accompany me to the watch."*

The man groaned heavily.

*"I might have known this would be the end of it. My sentence is up in a month, and now this will mean another seven years. You're not a red coat, sir. If you let me go I'll be free in a month, and I'll work for you for a year without a wage, even if its shepherding sheep among the wild blacks in the unsettled country."*

Dick watched him warily, puzzled by his speech, and by the great horse pistol which was obviously a useless weapon.

*"If, as you say, your convict sentence has a month yet to run, how comes it that you roam the roads at night like a highwayman?"* he inquired.

The man on the ground groaned again.

*"I'm imprisoned in the Hyde Park Barracks, and the turnkey lets us out at night on payment of ten shillings down and half the money we take in the night. He hired me the pistol for five shillings."*

Dick was scandalised. *"Has not this come to the ears of his officers? How is it possible that such a thing should be allowed?"*

*"It is the practice of the barracks,"* his informant remarked philosophically, *"but I swear to you, sir, that this night is the first time I have followed it. Life became so in tolerably dull that a sudden madness seized me, and, hiring the turnkey's pistol, I sallied forth. The knave misled me about the pistol,"* he added ruefully.

*"Your speech is that of an educated man,"* Dick said suspiciously. *"How came you to be transported?"*

*"The tale is one that strains credulity, and would perhaps outwear your patience, and also these stones are hard, therefore I shall tell it in a sentence. I was tutor to the sons of an English nobleman, but a missing jewel of price being found in my possession, I was hauled before a magistrate, and transported to this colony."*

*"I know not whether your tale be true or false,"* returned Dick. *"But walk before me until we reach George-street, and you may then return to the Hyde Park Barracks."*

The erstwhile tutor rose from the mud and did as he was bidden, Dick following him closely. They passed from the dark lane into the lighted street, where occasional people still moved to and fro, and Dick perceived that the man before him, though muffled in a shabby great-coat, many sizes too large for him, looked a gentleman. His face bore traces of much suffering, but his grey eyes held a humorous

light, and there were patient lines about the somewhat grim month. A memory of a night of black and bitter misery returned to Dick with aching suddenness, and he said gently, "*The pistol is better in the gutter where I have left it, but here is money for the turnkey.*"

The man in the great-coat stared at him as though he could not understand his speech, then, flushing darkly, bowed and took the money.

*"I thank you, sir. May I know your name and the place where you could be found?"*

*"I am called Dick Carey, and I lodge at the cottage of Mrs. Thompson, on the bank of the Tank Stream."*

*"I shall not forget,"* the man said quietly, and slipped back into the shadows of the lane from which he had come.

Dick watched him go, remembering that old Dr. Hanrahan had told him that there would be time for remorse during the long years when he should carry a sword in his heart.

A man who had been standing in the doorway of a house on the opposite side of the street stared at him for a moment, then hastily crossing the street placed a hand upon his shoulder.

*"It's you at last, Ashley, What do you mean by loitering about when already we are late?"*

Dick began a protest, but, disregarding his remark, the stranger seized his arm and drew him across the street, pushing him into the half-open door of the house and then slamming it.

*"The soldiers are coming,"* he said, unceremoniously, *"and we don't want to be seen about the town to-night."*

Dick leant against the closed door in the darkness of the quiet house and tried to collect his thoughts, while the sound of marching feet grew rapidly nearer in the street, outside. The man had used his name and had apparently recognised him, but Dick was sure that he was a stranger. The air in the narrow passage was heavy with the smell of spirits, and the man's voice betrayed the fact that he had been drinking. The soldiers of the patrol were passing the house when Dick spoke.

*"Who are you, and what do you want with me?"*

There was a loud startled oath and the sound of flint feverishly struck on steel. The tinder flared up and Dick picked up a bent brass candlestick which stood on a shelf at his side and handed it to the other man. He lighted it none too steadily, and then holding it to Dick's face, peered at him in wonder.

*"If you aren't Frank Ashley, who in the devil's name are you?"* he demanded.

*"My name is Dick Carey,"* Dick returned smoothly.

*"Then why are you the living image of Frank Ashley, and why were you hanging about this house to-night?"*

*"I have but this day landed in Sydney, and I walked abroad to view the city. It is a city of surprises, and does not lack excitement, it would seem,"* Dick added, his spirits rising. Life had suddenly much of its old savour, and he determined to see the end of this adventure.

*"Come, Sir,"* he said, *"since this Frank Ashley whom I greatly resemble has failed you, may I not take his place?"*

The other man stared at him open-mouthed, but before he could answer, hurried foot-steps sounded on the pavement, and the door handle was vigorously turned. The door burst open, and with a muttered oath a man thrust into the passage.

Dick found himself gazing into his own face grown harder and brown.

*"Whom have you here, Jarrett?"* the newcomer demanded, returning Dick's stare with even greater interest.

*"He says his name is Dick Carey, and that he landed to-day,"* the first man said suspiciously. *"I took him for you a few minutes ago, and brought him here."*

A light of understanding dawned in Frank Ashley's eyes.

*"So,"* he said, studying Dick thoughtfully, *"I learned that my double had landed from the James this afternoon. Was your name once Ashley by any strange chance, Mr. Carey?"*

Dick threw caution to the wind. *"It was Dick Ashley before my misdeeds drove me to this colony, cousin."*

Lights danced madly in his cousin's eyes. *"Then, like my father, you were not born in the folds of the old woman's cloak?"* he said mockingly. *"He has often told me the tale."*

*"You are the son of my uncle, Frank Ashley, who fought with Cornwallis,"* Dick cried.

*"You are the son of my uncle, Dick Ashley, who fought with Washington,"* his cousin retorted.

The man called Jarrett, who had been listening impatiently, made a sudden movement.

*"There's no time for family meetings to-night. The sooner we are off, the better, if you still mean to collect your money, Ashley."*

*"Yes, you're right. We must leave you, cousin, but I doubt not, we shall meet again."*

But Dick was seized with a passionate desire for further acquaintance with this newly discovered relative. All his love of Ashley and the things of home was in his speech.

*"Let me go with you, to-night, Francis. Blood is thicker than water, and I care not at all where we go."*

His cousin stared at him in amazement. *"If you ride with us to-night, you may ride into the hangman's noose,"* he said roughly. *"What possessed you to come to New South Wales? You should be still at your mother's apron-strings, learning sense."*

*"I want to stay in your company,"* Dick protested. *"Then, in heaven's name, stay,"* Frank Ashley flung at him impatiently. *"Follow us and keep a still tongue."*

Jarrett led the way to the back of the house, grumbling under his breath at his new development, and Dick followed, wondering whether the night's adventure would take him, but still recklessly determined to cling to his cousin. There were a gaiety and a largeness about Frank Ashley that promised the night would not lack interest for his companions. Both he and Jarrett were dressed in the rough clothes of the overlander, and their coloured shirts and great riding boots, heavily spurred, with their broad felt hats and the pistols at their belts, lent them an outlandish appearance; an outlandishness

which their brown determined faces, their lithe muscular figures, and their daredevil manner did not lessen.

Dick studied them covertly until, having left the house, they stood in a small fenced yard which contained a huddle of roughly built sheds, one of which evidently served as stables. From it there came a sound of horses moving restlessly, the click of hoofs on a paved floor, and the rattle of harness sounding above the drip of the rain on the roofs.

Frank Ashley opened a door, gently speaking soothing words, and the horses came out quietly enough after him. There were three, and even in the dimness Dick thought that they were thoroughbred.

"I'll take your brother's mare for my cousin, Jarrett," Frank Ashley said casually as he tightened a girth. Jarrett grunted, evidently ill-pleased, but he made no protest, and, taking the reins that were offered him, Dick mounted.

They moved from the slippery stones of the yard into Pitt-street, the horses going quietly, ears pricked. After long months Dick knew once more the happiness of journeying with a good horse, and he rode in deep content. Happen what might, life could always hold many good things.

They rode on their way towards the heights behind the town, and were soon riding, Dick thought, towards the South Head, but his companions were silent, and he feared that they would send him about his business were he to question them.

An occasional horseman passed them on the lonely road, giving them a wide berth, and Dick wondered if perhaps they might prove the bushrangers whom travellers evidently suspected them to be; but deep in his mind was a feeling that this cousin was a man to be trusted. The houses gradually became more scattered, and lights showed at very long intervals.

His cousin fell back to his side as though he meant to give some explanation, then, evidently thinking better of it, merely said, "*We are coming to the house to which we ride. Follow me closely, and say nothing unless I speak to you. To-night you will see a wrong righted.*"

They rode to big gates, and, opening them, walked their horses up a wide gravelled drive towards a stone house on a height. Frank Ashley paused at a cluster of ornamental trees, and producing two large handkerchiefs, bade them tie them over their faces. It was a rough disguise, but it served, and after they had tied their horses to branches Dick and Jarrett followed their silent leader towards the dark house.

Frank Ashley led them to a side door, which opened easily, being unlocked, and made his way along a thickly carpeted passage until it opened into some room. The house was evidently known to him, for, scarcely hesitating, he lighted a lamp, and they saw that they stood in a wide entrance hall.

Dick looked about him in wonder. The hall was large and lofty, its walls panelled with a dark red wood which he did not recognise, but which he knew later to be the red cedar from the Five Islands. A wide staircase of the same wood wound to the darkness above, and the soft light of the silver lamp shone on richly coloured rugs and on pictures in heavy gilt frames. It was a house of wealth.

Frank Ashley noted their interest, and spoke for the first time since entering the house.



*"Note well how it profits a man to sell his soul," he said ironically, "and forswear the ways of honesty."*

*"These English officials know a trick that's worth more than taking cattle into the un-settled lands." Jarrett looked about him with admiration. "Where does he keep his money."*

*"That," returned the elder Ashley carelessly, "I have still to learn. Wait for me here, and if any come take care that they remain."* Climbing the stairs he disappeared from their sight.

While they still gazed after him, a door on the other side of the hall began slowly to open and a man appeared, clad in a nightgown and wearing a cotton nightcap and slippers. He made no sound, but Dick turned in time to see his peering face suddenly withdrawn, and, darting across the intervening space, hurled himself against the closing door. The night gowned figure fled with Dick in hot pursuit, while, Janett, hampered by heavy boots and long spurs, brought up the rear.

They were in the dining-room, and the fugitive, who was apparently the owner of the house, raced rapidly past table and chairs until he reached the mahogany sideboard, then, seizing a great brass bell, rang it vigorously, at the same time calling loudly to his servants. It seemed as though the clamour of the heavy bell had filled the whole house with sound, so that even when Dick had snatched it from him, and Jarrett had silenced his cries with loud oaths and dire threats, the echoes still persisted.

The old man who had rung the bell shrank back against the sideboard, watching them. *"Begone from this house," he snarled, "before my servants come, or you shall hang for this night's work."*

*"Your servants are all drunk on rum of my providing."* Frank Ashley stood in the doorway, a lamp in his hand, and the old man looked at him with recognition and fear in his narrow, light eyes. The lamplight illumined a shrunken figure and thin predatory features with a scanty grey beard.

*"So it is you, young Ashley. What do you here at midnight in company with felons? Sir Richard Bourke gives short shrift to law breakers."*

*"I have come for my father's money, and if you refuse me to-night you do so at your peril, Sir Registrar."*

*"Have I not told you that it will be yours in a few short months? The law which I administer does not permit me to hand over the money and goods of those who die intestate until the dues are settled."*

Frank Ashley laughed. *"I've learnt the lesson which all Sydney learns sooner or later from some rascally English official," he retorted grimly, "and I have profited by it. To-night you have money in this house which you received from the sale of your farm at Parramatta. That money I'll take with me, but when I come back to Sydney you shall give me a strict account of my father's estate. The money I take will serve for the rent of my father's grant which you have let to one of Dr. McGregor's free emigrants, and for the seven months you have kept me without my own."*

The Registrar railed at him in helpless wrath. *"Was I not appointed to be the Registrar of this colony by Sir George Murray, and was it not agreed that it should be my privilege to invest the moneys of those*

*who died intestate for my own benefit until a certain time has elapsed? Get you from my house. Not a penny shall you have."*

Jarrett laughed hoarsely and tapped his pistol. *"Dead men tell no tales, Mr. Registrar."*

*"Come,"* Frank Ashley said sternly, *"hand over the money or it will be the worse for you. There are men in Sydney who would cut your throat at a word, and to-night I stop at nothing."*

He moved forward threateningly, and the Registrar quailed before the fierceness of his eyes. *"You shall have the money,"* he said hastily, but there was malice in his face. Dick thought that he plotted their destruction, but he said nothing, and his cousin followed the Registrar up the wide stairs, leaving them again in the hall. Presently he returned, a wallet in his hand.

*"Well,"* he said gaily, *"justice has been administered, and the Registrar is once more in bed. I have tied him securely to its posts. We must make haste."*

Dick went with them back to the garden, wondering whether all things in New South Wales were as strange as the administration of its English-made laws.

#### CHAPTER IV.

The rain had ceased and stars began to appear in the summer sky as Jarrett and the two Ashleys rode away from the house of the Registrar. The riding lights of ships could be seen in the coves, but Sydney was now in darkness. They rode rapidly towards the town, and, leaning towards Dick, Frank Ashley spoke of the future.

*"It would seem that, as you said, blood is thicker than water, cousin. I should not have taken you with me to-night, but since you came I think you will be wise to leave Sydney with us. I am too well known in the town, and your likeness to me will be reported to the Registrar. What did you mean to do in this country?"*

*"I have bought land from the Reverend Dr. McGregor. It is near a place called Berrima, and I intended to farm it."*

*"Then ride with us to your farm,"* returned his cousin promptly. *"Jarrett and I are pushing on for the unsettled lands beyond the Murrumbidgee, and we shall pass through Berrima."*

*"But I don't know where the land is, nor have I yet the title deed,"* Dick protested in some doubt.

*"Dr. McGregor is an honest man, and it will be easy to find your farm, for Berrima is well within the settled lands. You will be safer with us on the road to-morrow than in this town. The Registrar has the ear of Sir Richard Bourke, else had he not grown rich on the property of the intestate."*

*"Last year my father died while I was with Jaques Martin at his station in new country on the Hume River, and, on returning from the back country, I found that the Registrar had seized my lands and goods, swearing that, since my father had died intestate, it was his privilege to do so. So, after months passed and I found the law would give me no redress, and that I was rendered penniless, I waited my opportunity, and with your help and Jarrett's to-night I have enough money to buy cattle and to form a station. Once I'm free of this town*

*it will be a long time before its streets know me again. Ride on with us to-night, Dick," he said persuasively, "and I'll tell you of Australia Felix, the new land of promise on the banks of the Hume. Miles of park land where the Governor's writ no longer runs, and a man makes his own law and squats where he pleases."*

*"I'll ride with you to Berrima and send a message back to Dr. McGregor,"* Dick Ashley agreed. All the Doctor's counsels were forgotten, and he was already thinking more of a station in the unsettled lands than of a farm within the Governor's jurisdiction.

He rode on at his cousin's side, thinking contentedly that he had given Mrs. Thompson money and that his belongings would be safe with her until he returned. With youthful generosity, he trusted his cousin, never doubting the truth of his story. Of Jarrett he was not altogether sure. He had some money with him, and his letter of credit to the bank was safely in his pocket; he would buy things for his needs on his way, since they would travel a coaching road and pass through towns.

Jarrett and Frank Ashley rode ahead, slackening speed only to spare their horses when the road grew unusually rough or climbed steep hills, until at length, skirting the town, they came to a well-made road which wound away from the sea. It was a turnpike road, and some distance from the city they halted until Frank Ashley had paid the toll. Occasionally the road crossed bridges, the timbers echoing hollowly under their horses' hoofs, and the waters of a wide river or of some arm of the sea shining beneath them. They rode over hill and dale between lines of tall trees, whose straight trunks and twisted branches gleamed whitely against dark foliage wherever the moonlight touched them; or across cleared land where low colonial houses slumbered and cattle waited for the dawn.

The night breeze carried a scent that was strange to Dick and curiously exhilarating. It was new and clean, seeming to promise that life was well begun once more and old sins could be expiated. In all his life he had never lacked friends, and, riding swiftly behind his cousin, he instinctively knew that he had found in this new country a friend who would not fail him. He would learn from Frank Ashley, and soon Elizabeth, who was as the light of the brightest stars so far above him, would come to him as she had promised. He rode on repeating her words under his breath, a wealth of love and gratitude in his heart.

*"I will come to you across the world! I will come to you across the world!"*

At sunrise they passed through Parramatta, the county seat, and walked their horses through its long main street leading from the Governor's residence to the river wharf. Flags floated over the big house, and Jarrett looked at it apprehensively. He knew that Sir Richard Bourke was in residence, and he had learned to fear the law and the officials who administered it. His obvious uneasiness was not allayed until they had turned into the Dog Trap-road, which led to Liverpool, and Parramatta, with its soldiers and its stocks, its gaols, and reformatories, was a blur in the distance.

*"We'll push on to Connell's Inn without stopping,"* he said, looking nervously over his shoulder for signs of pursuit. *"If Black Jackie has*

*the horses there for us, we can go on to Leigh's, and once out of Cumberland they can whistle for us. We've both plenty of friends in Camden and Argyle."*

Frank Ashley laughed. *"There's not much law in the Bargo country. We can take to the Brush with the horse thieves."*

He began to sing in a voice that was clear and pleasant, though untrained, the reins hanging loosely from his horse's neck as they climbed a long hill. Obviously he was as untroubled as the birds soaring in the bright sky. There was appreciation of bird and blue sky, of sunshine and of the leaf shadows on the red road, in his careless glance about him.

Let the to-morrows take care of themselves. He was riding the open road, once more bound for the wide unsettled lands that he loved, and yesterday, with its troubles born of the town-made laws, was for the time forgotten.

On top of the hill he stopped to point out a distant village to his cousin.

*"There lies Liverpool, and farther on is Campbelltown. My blackboy should be at Connell's, a shanty on the road near Campbelltown, with fresh horses, and our packs. We'll push on until we reach Leigh's Inn in the Bargo Brush. We can rest there for the night, and to-morrow we'll find you your farm at Berrima."*

Dick listened anxiously, hoping for some suggestion that he should accompany his cousin and Jarrett into the unsettled lands, but Prank began to sing once more, and Jarrett had relapsed into a glum silence, torn between an intense longing to quench an ever-present thirst at every roadside public house and a still more intense fear of the soldiers and police, a fear which had its birth in the years when he had himself worn leg irons, and writhed in agony beneath the lashing whip of a brutal overseer.

His part in the adventure of the previous night had been a singular tribute to Francis Ashley's personality. In the comparatively short period of his acquaintance with Jarrett, Francis had inspired a feeling that was little short of adoration. Beneath his surly speech and apparent unwillingness to obey his leader's suggestions, Jarrett concealed steadfast loyalty. Francis accepted his devotion as he accepted that of many others, making no effort to retain it, but conscious that it was there, a thing upon which he could rely at all times.

There was a simplicity about Jarrett that appealed to him. The man was stupid and rough, with a coarseness that repelled, but his eyes held all the honesty of the English labourer who is one with English soil, and a curious wistfulness as though he struggled with his own stupidity and lack of understanding.

When a lad, Jarrett had been transported for poaching in his squire's preserves, and his initial experiences at Botany Bay had been terrifying ones. In his drinking bouts it took strong men to hold him when the nightmare visions of his days with the clearing gangs in the tangled forest that clothed the shores of Sydney Cove, returned to torture him with their memories of cruel toll, of starvation, and of the lash. As an assigned servant he had learnt the methods of the pastoralist with sheep and cattle, and had saved his wages after his

sentence had expired, buying cattle and travelling with them beyond the bounds of settlement. He had prospered and was now a man of some substance, accepted by the more easy-going members of a pastoralist society which contained many emancipists, barely tolerated by those who considered themselves entitled by birth and education, or by great possessions, to constitute a landed gentry such as existed in the older countries across the sea. Jarrett's craving for rum constantly proved his undoing. In the early days of the colony, rum had been its currency, and rum was still a potent and a soul-destroying factor in the life of the community. Jarrett began to linger, falling behind each time the familiar sign appeared on the roadside, and his speech as he overtook them grew suspiciously thick.

Dick watched him uneasily, but his cousin ignored his frequent lapses, and himself pulled up at a small shanty which stood beside a bridge some distance from the clustering houses of Campbelltown.

The countryside was now about its daily business, and traffic moved on the long Southern-road. They had passed teamsters, early astart, as they left Parramatta, and had drawn to the roadside to let a mail coach pass near Liverpool, but Connell's Inn dozed in the sunshine, and no horses save their own waited before the long white-washed cottage with the shingled roof.

Someone watched them from a window, its curtains held aside by a half-seen hand, and at Jarrett's cry of "*House*," an aboriginal came from the stables which formed the fourth side of a yard at the back of the building.

Jarrett climbed unsteadily from his saddle, swearing thankfully, and Frank Ashley nodded to the aboriginal boy who took their horses, with teeth gleaming in a good tempered black.

*"You plenty good fellow, Black Jackie. Are all the horses ready?"*

*"All ready, Boss."*

They followed him to the stables, where three thoroughbreds stood in their stalls, saddles and harness hanging on trees above them.

A little bald, old man, with squinting eyes and a broken nose, crossed from the inn and followed them into the stables, casting curious glances at Dick.

*"You'll find them all correct, Mr. Ashley,"* he said as Frank patted the shining coats.

*"They've been fed and watered and they'll carry you far and fast. Your slickers and packs are inside, and the women have food ready."*

*"Thank you, Connell, It has been well done,"* Frank said. *"We'll eat and then go on. But we have little time to spare, and we need another horse."*

The little man's eyes glittered cunningly.

*"I have a horse in a paddock that's not far, Mr. Ashley. A chestnut with a blaze. She'd - carry ye to the devil and back, but she'll cost money."*

*"She'll cost us our necks if we're caught with her, Connell. The crier was crying her in George-street yesterday, and the sooner you get someone to take her into the Brush for you the better We'll take the bay mare that you drive in your gig, and leave her at Leigh's if he can give us a better."*

*"You always have your Joke, Mr. Ashley," Connell said, looking at him sideways. "I'll swap the bay mare for the horse you rode here."*

*"You'll keep that horse until I send for it, and the other two until Tom Barrett's brother claims them. Jackie! you have that feller horse in the paddock saddled quickly."*

He walked to the house with Connell, who was not a whit disturbed, and a comely woman in a neat red cotton frock greeted him warmly, scolding him for his late appearance.

*"Eh, Mr. Frank, your breakfast's spoiled. They said you'd be here at daylight, and we've waited for you all the morning and half the night."*

Frank Ashley kissed her apple cheeks heartily. *"And now there are two of us, Clara, so you are well repaid for your waiting. Here is my cousin, Dick Carey."*

*"Have done, Mr. Frank,"* Clara turned to stare at Dick, her eyes opening in wonder.

*"You couldn't tell one from the other unless you looked. Welcome to this house, sir,"* she said in a breath, and ushered them all into a somewhat untidy room, whose main adornment was a long table on which a meal was set.

They wasted no time, and Clara waited on them while they ate, her tongue going incessantly as she bustled in and out.

*"Clara and Connell were once assigned servants of my father,"* Frank Ashley later explained to Dick, as they left the Inn, Black Jackie bringing up the rear on Connell's bay mare. *"They are none too honest, and are hand in glove with all the horse and cattle thieves in the Bargo Brush. All the traffic from the south comes through the Bargo, and it's a lucky man who gets through unscathed. We'll need to watch the horses to-night if we stay at Leigh's."*

*"Is there no law in this country at all?"* Dick demanded in wonder.

*"Oh, there's plenty of 'law,'"* returned his cousin dryly, and fell to singing once more.

They climbed the edge of the southern table-land where it rose from the coastal plain in a long steep scarp, journeying on in heat and dust until they came to the high places of the Bargo country. On all sides now a thick scrub of twisted, soft-wooded trees closed upon them. Intersected here and there by deep creeks and impenetrable gullies, its tea tree thickets full of tall gums and tangled vines, it stretched for miles from the swamps of the Upper Nepean. It was the haunt of the outlaws of the southern districts, for, concealed within its gloomy depths, they could defy the soldiers who were occasionally sent to take them. If the pursuit were unduly pressed, cattle thieves and runaway convicts could make their way into the almost inaccessible fastness of the Shoalhaven gullies, where policemen seldom followed. He was indeed a poor citizen of the Bargo Brush who could not obtain a blood horse or a beast or two when occasion needed. The drovers who travelled stock up and down the overland routes had already learnt to dread the Bargo, where cattle stampeded, and horses mysteriously shed their hobbles, disappearing in the night.

The lengthening shadows added to the gloom as they penetrated farther into the forbidding country, in which towns and signs of settlement were few and far between. But there were teams and

horsemen on the road, and at length they came to a creek of clear water, on whose banks was a stone quarry, from which convicts hewed stone, to be broken on the roads by the chained gangs.

Fires gleamed among the trees, and the men were gathered about the Iron cooking pots.

Dick Carey was saddle weary and stiff, but his companions rode as though fatigue were a thing unknown to them, splashing through the water at the crossing-place with scarcely a pause to water their horses. Some distance from the ford a tall gum tree grew beside the road, with stones roughly piled against the blackened butt, which Jarrett examined with evident satisfaction.

*"There are no police at Leigh's. We'll be safe there to-night."*

*"But what of our horses?"* Frank asked, looking from Jarrett to the pile of stones.

Jarrett grinned. *"Black Jackie will have to watch them all night, and they'd better not go into the paddock behind the house."*

The elder Ashley nodded thoughtfully.

*"We'll camp with the horses and eat and drink at the inn, but Jackie must watch. I'll take no chances to-night."*

He called the black boy and gave him orders, while Black Jackie listened, grinning widely; he had travelled through the Bargo with horses and cattle before.

It was quite dark when they approached Leigh's Inn, but lanterns flickered here and there about the yards and outbuildings, and there were lights in all the narrow windows.

They drew rein before the Inn amid an uproar of whinnying horses and barking dogs, while sounds of many voices floated to them from the open doors.

*"Plenty of company,"* grunted Jarrett, *"the Bungonia coach is in."*

A man came out to them carrying a lantern, and greeted Jarrett as an old friend.

*"There's plenty for ye to eat, but devil a bed,"* he said, his gaze wandering over men and horses. *"I've not seen so much company here for months. There are three teams and a mob of cattle camped on the road, and the Bungonia coach is just in, packed with the gentry, all wanting private rooms, and heaven knows what else. As if I hadn't already given the best rooms to Mr. Andrew and his Scotchmen. And the women with no time to wash the bed linen the last fortnight. If ye've blankets ye can sleep on the floor, and the horses can go into the paddock. There's no room in the stables."*

A bell jangled discordantly within the house, swung with much vigour, and, summoning a stable hand, the innkeeper left them with a parting injunction to hasten before the dinner cooled.

They left their horses in Black Jackie's charge, determining to camp for the night in the bush some distance from the overcrowded Inn, but as they turned towards the house Frank Ashley felt the black boy touch his arm.

*"That feller come along with us along waterholes, boss?"* he whispered, pointing to Dick's retreating back.

*"I don't know. You hold your tongue about the waterholes, Black Jackie, and don't drink any rum at this place, or I'll leave you behind."*

*"I no more tell, boss, but that very lucky feller, you bring him along waterholes,"* persisted Jackie. *"He bungarley feller."*

## CHAPTER V.

In the bare, low-ceilinged dining-room of Leigh's Inn, a very representative gathering sat at meat, suffering the coarse and ill-cooked food and the indifferent service with the patience of men who knew that all complaints would be worse than useless. It was well known that the farther one travelled from Sydney the better grew the grass and the worse became the accommodation for the traveller.

The innkeeper of New South Wales, having learnt that a fortune could be rapidly acquired by the sale of rum, usually gave his whole attention to the pursuit of the wealth that flowed up and down the roads in ever-increasing streams, neglecting any other aspect of his business, and scorning to be hampered by scruples or traditions of his trade.

Leigh's Inn was no exception to the general rule, and spirits flowed freely, wines and brandy for the gentry, rum from casks, in whose depths swished large figs of black tobacco, for the drovers and teamsters, doctored whisky for the shepherd or sheep-shearer with his year's wage in his wallet.

There were two long tables at which the company dined, the landed gentry at one and the labourers at the other. Two slatternly women waited upon the tables, but there were none among the guests of the house. Nor did there appear to be any hesitation as to which table a guest should select, for he either owned land and sat with those who did, or he toiled for the landowner and so sat with his fellows.

The talk was continuous and loud at both tables, and the subjects much the same; for was not every man present interested almost to the exclusion of all else in the land and the things pertaining to the flocks and herds that grazed upon its surface?

The land question was already becoming the burning question of the country, although it had not yet developed into the bitter struggle of later years, when the small men strove for a foothold in the ranks of the great squatters, who steadfastly refused to surrender an acre of the country acquired before the first advance of settlement. Yet already the first overlanders had travelled to the new and unauthorised settlements in the south, and Sir Richard Bourke had granted licences of occupation in the unsettled lands, and appointed the brother of Wake, the explorer, to be Commissioner of Crown Lands in the newly formed district of Murrumbidgee, thereby giving great satisfaction to many honest squatters. For, before this, a curious position had existed in the colony, the English Government, through its representatives, having refused to sanction any settlement beyond the bounds of the nine-teen incorporated districts. Adventurous settlers who sought new pastures for their rapidly increasing stock found themselves not only refused all legal protection, but regarded as outlaws who menaced the law and order of the colony.



The southern settlement was, in the year 1837, astir with tales of Australia Felix, the land of promise, discovered by Hamilton Hume and recently traversed by the Surveyor General, that land to whose wide and well grassed plains were being sent all the cattle and sheep that the settlers on the tablelands could muster. The rumour of wealth was in the air, and men travelled to form great stations, undeterred by threat of hostile blacks and of drought and hardship.

All the talk at the upper table was of Australia Felix and of its possibilities. Jean Martin, who sat at its head, beside him a boy of nineteen, had sent his brother Jaques the year before, to form the Wanaaring Station at the crossing-place of the Hume River, and he spoke of the water that was the key to all settlement.

*"The river and its tributaries are fed with the melted snow, and will not dry, but in the west, between the Murrumbidgee and the Hume, are only billabongs, not suited for permanent settlement. Already they are shrunken, and soon a man who travels to the south must carry water for a hundred miles, and his cattle will not live between the rivers. But on the banks of the Hume all the cattle and sheep of the colony could find pasture. My brother Jaques has grown wheat at the Crossing Place, and Louis is travelling from Bungonia with more of our cattle. Am I not right, Frank?"* He turned with a quirk, courteous gesture to Frank Ashley, who had been with Jaques Martin at Wanaaring, and who sat near him. Listening eagerly to speech that was strange to ears accustomed to the talk of the planter, but not of the pastoralist, Dick watched Jean's bright, dark eyes and quick French gestures with pleasure. He recognised a type very familiar in the Southern States of his own country, and in French Canada.

Jean Martin was the eldest son of that refugee nobleman Jean Jaques Martin, Comte d'Orthey, who had sought to rehabilitate the shattered fortunes of his family in the new land under the English flag. The old Comte d'Orthey had disappeared in the trackless gullies of the Shoalhaven some years earlier, and his widow and sons now dwelt on his grant of Cookbundoon near Bungonia.

Captain Cameron, Jean's brother-in-law, had recently died at his estate of Macquarie Fields, adjoining Cookbundoon, and Jean and his young nephew were on their way to Sydney to settle matters that concerned the Cameron estate. They had travelled to Leigh's Inn on the Bungonia coach with Lieutenant Harrison, magistrate of their district, and ex-naval martinet, who journeyed to confer with Sir Richard Bourke on the eve of the Governor's departure from the colony.

Opposite the naval officer sat two men who were covertly watched by everyone in the room, and to whom Dick found his own fascinated gaze continually returning. One of the two was a bluff colonial gentleman, shrewd eyed and firm lipped, but his companion was a Scotch Laird, wearing his national dress, and waited upon by a giant Scotchman, who stood behind his master's chair and ministered to his wants. He looked more a soldier than a lackey, and the haughtiness that could be read in his chief's bearing, showed equally in his own. The servant spoke not at all, and the Chief seldom, though he listened intently, but his companion joined eagerly in the conversation, showing keen interest in the subjects discussed.

*"You say that there is no permanent water between the Murrumbidgee and the Hume to the west," he said, addressing Jean Martin. "Yet I have heard of rivers running into the Murrumbidgee farther out on that bank, and it is against reason for a river to travel great distances without receiving tributary streams."*

*"The streams running in are only billabongs that cease to flow in a dry time. When Wake went down the Murrumbidgee he found them flowing, but two years ago Gillies found their dry beds, and the country a waste of drifting sand. In the wet season the kangaroo grass waves as high as a man's head over those plains, and myriads of cattle could be left to fatten there; but already the creeks and waterholes are dry and the grass withered, so that all stock must be kept to the banks of the rivers having a permanent flow. There are none such in that country to the west save those south of the Hume."*

*"Tell me," Frank Ashley interrupted suddenly. "Have the blacks from the interior come in to the Hume?"*

*"I don't know." Jean Martin looked at him curiously, "but there is very little water now between the rivers, and it is difficult travelling with stock."*

*"The Foresters are taking stock and looking for new country over the Hume early next year," the big man said, "and I'm thinking of doing the same. I want winter pasture for my cattle from Glenrock. The Yass plains are drying, and I have overmuch stock there. Hamilton Hume told me that the plains across the Hume were the best pasture lands he had ever seen, and well watered."*

From the back of the Inn there came a sudden burst of confused sound, and half the company rose instantly and made for the doors, the coachman of the Bungonia mail being easily first.

*"Best keep an eye on the horses," he muttered sagely, and was followed by most of the guests, who quite evidently harboured the same dark suspicions.*

Outside the inn, in the centre of a ring of jeering onlookers, themselves in various stages of intoxication, the aboriginal boy capered and danced. Black Jackie had been drinking rum!

He danced as dance the grey brolgas of the plains, but his steps were stumbling and unsteady, and he cried meaningless sentences in the language of his tribe.

*"Who gave my black boy rum?" Frank Ashley pushed through the circle of onlookers, his face a thunder cloud.*

*"Why wouldn't we be giving him rum?" an Irish voice plaintively inquired, and the crowd laughed.*

Black Jackie recognised his master and greeted him in English.

*"We go along waterholes, Boss," he cried thickly. "We go along Buthawa water that never dries up."*

*"Yes," Frank said evenly. "We go along camp now." He led the unresisting Jackie to the spot where their horses were tied, and Dick followed. Frank was evidently troubled.*

*"We'll go straight to a camping place," he said urgently. "Jarrett is drinking, and will stay in the house all night unless they kick him out. We'll have to keep an eye on Jackie now as well as on the horses. I don't like the look of the crowd hanging about, I've seen some of them*

*before. If Tom Andrew drinks to-night I think his Scotch nobleman will find that Scotchmen are not the only people who know how to lift cattle. Those are Andrew's cattle camped farther up the road."*

Dick was again aware, as he had been at intervals, of the continuous bellowing of cattle, but he was more interested in the Scotchmen.

*"The Scotchmen!"* Frank repeated vaguely. *"Oh, that's Rothesay, the Scotch Laird who's looking for country on which to settle with his clan. He hopes to find good land, permanently watered, in Maneroo or Murrumbidgee, and has chartered a ship to bring his clansmen to New South Wales. They say he has good Scotch cattle."*

Frank Ashley walked swiftly ahead, leading the horses and firmly propelling Black Jackie, who stumbled along muttering of water that never dried.

They presently found a camping place in timber which fringed the cleared paddocks belonging to the inn and, having hobbled the horses, they lighted a smoky fire to drive away mosquitoes.

*"What's Jackie talking about?"* Dick asked curiously. He was longing to know his cousin's plans and more and more anxious to travel with him to Australia Felix. He hoped desperately that Frank might need his help.

Frank spoke as if in answer to Dick's prayer. *"He's talking about waterholes,"* he said angrily, *"and if anyone else hears him it will probably mean trouble for me. If you are prepared to throw in your lot with me, I'll tell you the story. After all we are the only two of our family in this country, and Black Jackie says you are lucky. Were you born in the shadow of the old woman of our house?"*

*"Yes,"* Dick admitted unwillingly, *"but I may not bring you luck. I'll tell you my story first."*

He told his bitter story faithfully, concealing nothing, and as he told it he lived once more through that night of misery which had ended in the coming of Elizabeth to him.

*"Will she come to you here, do you think?"* *"She will come,"* Dick returned fervently. *"You do not know Elizabeth. She is truth and strength and beauty."*

*"Ladies, lovely ladies,"* Frank sighed, *"there are hardly any women in this country outside Cumberland. I should have married pretty Irish Jane Barry myself, but she took that long Englishman John Wyatt while I was away on the Hume. She wanted someone who always kept his temper, she was so tired of her father's rages."*

*"I must make a home for Elizabeth,"* Dick insisted anxiously. *"Let me go with you, Frank, to form a station; I want to grow wealthy."*

*"If we can keep Black Jackie away from other men and rum we'll form a station that will make our fortunes and be the envy of all settlers."* Frank leant forward talking earnestly, and the excitement that possessed him was gradually reflected in his cousin's face.

*"To form a station, Dick, you must have permanent water. It is more precious than gold and in this country the settlers all look for streams with a permanent flow, or for those which have great waterholes on their beds, so that in times of drought, when the country is parched and dry, there is still water for the stock. My father was a clever man, and often talked to me of these things. He*

*said that the settlement would increase very quickly, and that those who first settled, making the land safe for the less adventurous or for those who emigrated later would have no legal claim to their lands, which would be taken from them by the Government as soon as they became of value. He had seen it happen in America and knew that the same thing must happen here. He said that we must find country where other settlers could not readily follow us, and so far removed from centres of government as to accumulate wealth before we could be dispossessed, or forced to buy at a price which must cripple our resources"*

*"Along the river banks there will always be much settlement, and already people are disputing about the boundaries of runs in Argyle and Maneroo, but my father once heard a drunken aboriginal boy speak of three waterholes which never dried, even in the worst droughts, and which lay in a sacred place of the blacks far to the south and west. No one else believed the tale, but he thought it possible that there might be waterholes, fed by an underground river, and questioned blacks of all the tribes he knew. None of the tribes about the settlement had ever heard of the secret water, but Hamilton Hume, whom he happened to meet, and who had travelled from Goulburn to the farthest south, told him of the vast plains between the Murrumbidgee and the Hume. My father thought that the waterholes would lie in those plains."*

*"Two years ago William Wyse took a mob of cattle to the crossing place of the Hume, and formed Mungabareena Station for Charles Gillies. We then decided to go south ourselves, hoping to hear of the three waterholes, but a horse fell with my father, who badly injured his leg. However, last year I went with Jacques Martin when he formed the Wanaaring run, opposite Mungabareena. Mungabareena is a native word meaning the meeting place of tribes, and when the blacks came up the river for the season of the bugong moths, I questioned them about the water. They are generally quite willing to lead one to any water, and when I could gather no information from them I began to think that either the tale we had heard had no foundation of fact or that the blacks of the Murrumbidgee and Hume knew nothing of such waterholes. But one day Black Jackie came to me, saying that he knew what I wanted and would lead me to a sacred place, where the tribes of all that country camped in times of drought. From his description I knew it must be the place I sought but before I could explore the plains a messenger brought word that my father was dying, and I came back to Sydney, bringing Jackie with me."*

*"I'm going to find the three waterholes," Frank continued "and as far as I can tell no one else knows of them. If you come with me, Dick, and we find them we'll form three stations about the water, and take up a licence for so much country that it will not be worthwhile for any other man to follow us. The three waterholes are the only permanent water in that part between the Murrumbidgee and the Hume, and they are surrounded by miles of rich pasture lands. I haven't told Jarrett of them, but I owe him much, and the third station must be his."*

Dicks eyes were gleaming "It sounds wonderful," he said eagerly "Why is the existence of the water a secret?"

*"I don't really know. I can't get any reason from Black Jackie; but there must be some- thing strange about that water. He says we can go there when the creeks are dry, but not when the waters run. He doesn't seem afraid of the tribes that live about the waterholes, either. The tribes about the Hume will kill any blackfellow of another tribe found in their hunting grounds. However, we'll travel to the Murrumbidgee as quickly as we can then leave Jarratt behind on his run and push on with Black Jackie for the three waterholes. If anyone asks where we are going, you must say that we hope to reach new country on the bank of the Hume below Oolong, where Hawdon is settling. That is the tale I have told Jarrett .Since this drought set in everyone tries to steal a march upon his neighbour. There are few who can be trusted in the unfenced country when water is in question "*

They sat talking of the three waterholes and of Australia Felix until a late hour. Frank Ashley never wearied of his theme, and his tale seemed a part of the flickering camp fire and of the black shadow of the surrounding bush, so that in the smoke of the fire they saw visions of their cattle roaming a thousand plains about the waterholes. When the crack of dry branches breaking beneath approaching footsteps suddenly sounded from the direction of the Inn, Dick started as though he had been roused from a spell with which the spirits of the bushland had bound him.

## CHAPTER VI

In the small hot rooms of the inn, where oil lamps flared men drank and talked or indulged in noisy horseplay and coarse jests for the lack of any other entertainment. Charles Cameron watched his elders at cards and listened to their planning of great estates which should be handed to their sons and their sons's sons for many generations. He dreamt of forming such a station himself being of on acquisitive race and fired with the tales of his uncles Martin.

Across a narrow passage in the bigger and noisier public room Jarrett consumed bad whisky and grew steadily more intoxicated in company which contained many fellow emancipists. Here foregathered the rougher elements of the company, men who in dress and bearing formed a marked contrast to the gentlemen who gossiped and drank in semi-privacy. For the gentlemen wore broadcloth and linen that was the bane of laundresses but the company with whom Jarrett consorted was perforce content with moleskin trousers tucked into cowhide boots broad hats and coarse coloured shirts none too clean. Among these men the smock of the English labourer could still be seen and a shaven face was a rarity for without the towns, in spite of the efforts of Dr. McGregor and Mrs Chisholm no middle class as yet existed.

A man lounged against the wall watching Jarrett who now and again appeared un- easily and somewhat defiantly conscious of his scrutiny. He was a man whose age it would have been impossible to guess, so heavily marked was his face by the fierce passions which had wrought havoc in a nature impatient of all restraint, yet grimly schooled by the convict system of the day. He had the air of an animal brooding over a future revenge. His sullen deeply-set eyes

and heavy jaw held danger signals for the observant, he seemed a man to be avoided even in this land of many doubtful characters.

He had withdrawn slightly from his fellows and steadily watched Jarrett, evidently concerned with some thought of his own, for he appeared unconscious of remarks addressed to him by a neighbour. There was something threatening in this steady surveillance, and, as though against his will Jarrett at length moved across the room to join him.

*"So you haven't forgotten your old pals of the chain gang since you've been hobnobbing with the gentry."* There was an ugly sneer in his voice and Jarrett retorted savagely

*"You never were a pal of mine Tom Ryan. You who murdered the sergeant!"*

*"You have forgotten. It was Dick Felton who murdered the sergeant. He was hanged for it. Bygones are bygones, Jarrett. We are both free men now."*

*"I would like to know how you got your freedom when you were serving a life sentence."*

Ryan grinned evilly. *"I got it for service rendered to the Government."* He stared triumphantly into the other's face, and then spoke with an attempt at conciliation.

*"I saw you come in with Mr Ashley and his cousin. You've gone far in the last few years I hear."*

*"Aye, I've a nice mob of cattle and I've good pasture for them"* Jarrett boasted. *"In a few years I'll have money to throw away to such as you. There's money to be had in this country by men who can learn their way about."*

*"Aye, I've picked up some,"* agreed Ryan, *"and I'm ready to make more. I'm travelling into the new lands across the Murrumbidgee to form a station. You're going into that part yourself aren't you?"*

*"Ashley's going on to the Hume. My run is north of the Murrumbidgee."* Jarrett's gaze wandered to the bar, and he attempted to depart, but Ryan held his arm.

*"I'll travel with you to the Murrumbidgee. It's safer in parties and I have good horses,"* he said persuasively

Jarrett twisted himself free *"You'd best find Ashley if you want to travel with us."* He moved away and after a few minutes' reflection Ryan left the room to seek Frank Ashley. He had been one of the crowd who had watched Black Jackie's antics and had seen Frank Ashley take the boy away across the inn paddocks. He turned in the same direction, the dimly formulated idea suggested by the words of the aboriginal boy gradually crystallising. He himself was a product of towns, ignorant of the ways of the land, but his shrewd mind perceived that, given suitable country, and the permanent water that was indispensable to success, squatting could be easily learnt.

The men who travelled with Jarrett were overlanders well versed in the ways of the unsettled bush country. There would be safety in their company and they travelled in quest of the things he himself desired.

He suspected them of possessing secret knowledge of good country.

*"The Buthawa water, the Buthawa water,"* he repeated Jackie's words again and again, fixing them in his tenacious memory as he crossed

the paddock, the twigs crackling beneath his feet. He hoped the name might prove the key to wealth and broad lands.

He slouched into the light of the fire, and Dick Carey thought that he had seldom seen a more sinister face, while his cousin, noting the scarred hands and the peculiar gait, drew his own conclusions.

*"Good-night, Mr. Ashley. Jarrett sent me to look for you. He's an old friend of mine."*

Ryan waited for an invitation to sit, but, as it was not forthcoming, he made his request standing before them.

*"I'm travelling over the Murrumbidgee looking for pasture for cattle or sheep. I hear you are going that way, and I'd like to join your party. I'm well provided, and I'd make myself useful."*

Frank Ashley firmly refused his request. *"We travel in great haste, and so want no companions."*

Ryan argued with him unavailingly, but at length angrily departed, and the two cousins made their preparations for the night, agreeing to keep alternate watches over their horses and to watch Jackie, who betrayed a desire to return to the inn.

Dick woke in the night with the roar of stampeding cattle in his ears. For a moment he thought that he still swayed in his hard cot on the ship James as she ploughed through heavy seas, but Frank Ashley's voice brought complete wakefulness.

*"They've stampeded Andrew's cattle into the Brush, and someone frightened the horses. Jackie went after him, and hasn't come back. There'll be the devil to pay in the morning."*

They stood listening to the sounds. The night was full of the rush and roar of the stampede, so that it seemed a great storm raged about them; yet a sea breeze, blowing across the coastal plain to the tablelands, gently fanned the air to coolness. The bellowing of maddened cattle echoed through the bush and thundered in their ears for long minutes, and as the sound receded they heard men shouting in the direction of the Inn and the rapid beat of horses' hoofs.

The disturbance gradually died away until the crashing of a stray beast in the bushes, or the restless movements of their hobbled horses, alone disturbed the peace of the night; but Black Jackie failed to return.

He was seated beside Ryan's camp fire, half a mile away, lured thither by the promise of rum. The rum had not as yet materialised, and Black Jackie, who had his own reasons for not wishing to divulge the secret so persistently sought by Ryan, evaded the ex-convict's searching questions with ingenious politeness, debating within himself the possibility of slipping back to the protection of his master's presence.

He half rose, but Ryan, who had been enraged by Frank Ashley's refusal to allow him to join his party, and who had waylaid the black boy in the hope of gaining information, was too quick for him. He seized Black Jackie with a grip that could not be broken.

*"You tell me where you take your boss." "I no more tell," gasped Jackie, unhappily.*

Ryan bent the boy's arm cruelly. *"You tell."* *"I no more tell!"* Jackie's eyes seemed starting from his head, but there was no yielding in his voice.

Ryan bent his arm still further. *"You tell or I break your arm and then your legs. I'll put a fire stick to your eyes,"* he said savagely.

*"I no more tell,"* wailed Black Jackie, and then gave way as he saw the cruel intention in Ryan's murderous face.

*"We go along waterholes."*

Ryan let him go, satisfied, and Jackie sped into the darkness.

The boy's confession had set at rest Ryan's lingering doubts. He knew that Jackie would lie if questioned further, but he also knew that he had only to trail Frank Ashley and his companions to find the country which should make his fortune. He turned in, well content.

## CHAPTER VII.

Frank and Dick Ashley walked to the Inn for breakfast, leaving a quite sober Jackie with their horses. They found Jarrett sleeping off the effect of his night's drinking, and the inn almost deserted. The coach had left early with all travellers for Sydney, and the rest of the guests were not to be seen.

*"There's trouble, gentleman,"* the innkeeper surveyed them mournfully from a doorway. *"Mr. Andrews' cattle stampeded in the night, and the Scotch lord's horses were taken from the paddock at the back of the house. They collected all the men they could to help them, and a black boy to track, and rode off at daylight, to scour the Brush."*

*"They'd be more likely to get their cattle if they posted the offer of a reward on the blackened gum,"* Frank said, and the innkeeper looked at them queerly.

*"There'll be ten shillings for your stable lad if he has Jarrett ready to travel with us in an hour."*

They sat down to their breakfast, and the innkeeper left them, but he carried Frank Ashley's message to the stable-lad, for within the allotted hour Jarrett climbed to his saddle, and accompanied them. He was still stupid with drink, but able to sit his horse, and they rode on, well pleased to have escaped trouble in the Brush.

They travelled in haste, leaving the Brush behind and riding through the cleared and cultivated lands about the village of Berrima, where soldiers lounged outside the doors, and convict guards watched a chained-gang breaking stone upon the road. To Dick it seemed a horrible thing that white men were here driven like cattle, but his companions scarcely seemed aware of it, they were used to such sights. They pressed on in spite of Jarrett's protests.

*"We must ride ahead of the Governor's Posts,"* Frank Ashley argued carelessly, *"and we don't want to be dogged by your friend Ryan."*

In these rich pastures, there were houses and farms at which Dick looked with regret. They were so like comfortable English farms, with their green hedges and English trees, but he made no attempt to find his own, and Frank Ashley hurried the party onward until the cultivated farms gave place once more to the dry bush land.



Late that night, they reached Tom Andrews station of Innisfree. They camped on the bank of a swiftly flowing creek above a gap where the waters fell from a great height into the granite-strewn depths of a gully that wound into the blue maze of the Shoalhaven country. Across the creek, at no great distance, they could see the lights of the home- stead and hear a dog bark frantically, but no one came to their camp.

Beyond the homestead clearing the forest grew on all sides, and granite boulders out- cropped among the trees. The dull sound of the waterfall was an undertone of the night as they talked beside their fire, and all night they heard cascades of stones falling in the gullies, where wallabies leapt from rock to rock and the creatures of the bush made merry. Black Jackie woke them before day- light to tell them that Ryan had camped farther up the same creek.

They pushed on, leaving on their left the main road which led to the coast through Bungonia, where dwelt Martins and Camerons, Halles, Harrisons, and Carrs, and followed the rougher track to Goulburn, the newer settlement on the wind-swept, treeless plains. They crossed the plains in the teeth of a roaring gale, and now on the road with them travelled the cattle and sheep that were being sent to the new southern pasture lands. Every night, when they reached the rapidly drying water, camp fires gleamed redly among the trees, and every morning Black Jackie told them that Ryan had camped near them.

From Goulburn, where the pioneer Foresters mustered bleating flocks, already showing signs of the careful Macarthur breeding, to the rich plains of Yass, where the land hungry settlers sought a further outlet for their rapidly increasing flocks and herds, the road was a long succession of teams, laden with the precious station supplies, the teamsters swinging their long whips and driving their horses with a skill acquired during months spent on the roads. They saw horses and sheep, cattle and horses, at rare intervals a family travelling in a covered waggon, and always men riding. Every raw settlement had its flat track, where each man raced his horse against that of his neighbour, but there was no other amusement. Civilisation as Dick had known it was left behind, and neither church nor school could be seen near the Inns which marked the stages in a traveller's journey. It was a wild and sparsely settled country through which they passed.

The track climbed monotonously up and down burnt hills, between rows of tall dark gums, and water came to be a thing most ardently desired. They filled their canvas water-bags wherever a stream crossed the road, and their horses drank thirstily from the muddied and bitter waters.

Dick had grown brown and hardened when they came one night to the Yass River, and knew themselves safe from fear of the soldiers and police of the counties of Argyle and King. There was little danger of the Governor's writ following farther into the unfenced country. They camped within a mile of the small settlement on the edge of the Yass plains, and Jackie told them that once more the exconvict Ryan camped near them.

*"That fellow boom-boo,"* he said, using a tribal word in disgust, and Frank Ashley agreed heartily.

*"He's certainly boom-boo, Jackie. No good at all. However, he'll probably follow you to your run to-morrow, Jarrett, and leave us alone."*

*"I'm not going to my run to-morrow," Jarrett said defiantly. "I'm going to Hanley's pub."*

*"Change your mind and go home sober," Frank advised. "You'll be more likely to save some of your cattle if you avoid Hanley's."*

His protest was unavailing, and the next day they left Jarrett at the weatherboard inn and prepared for the last stage of their journey to the unknown country of the waterholes.

Frank purchased necessary things in Yass, while Dick waited with Black Jackie and the horses on the edge of the small, straggling town. The country beyond Yass was rough and broken, the ranges running in to the Murrumbidgee, but they followed a track to Jugiong and on to Gundagai, where they meant to cross the river and trust themselves entirely to Jackie's guidance.

Already squatters had taken up most of the country on the banks of the Murrumbidgee, but they travelled past the scattered homesteads without stopping, until they came to Willie Ploma, the station of the large opossums. The owner was in Sydney, but his deputy recognised Frank Ashley and made them heartily welcome. His name was Keogh, and he was the biggest man Dick had ever seen. In spite of the heat, he wore an opossum skin waistcoat, of which he was inordinately proud; he had sewn it himself, and it was adorned with buttons from the stones of the native Quandong plum.

He shook his head gloomily when they told him they intended travelling to the banks of the Hume.

*"On this side there's no water between the rivers, gentlemen. The Major's line is still plain to follow, but you'll leave your bones to bleach if you go that way this month. Major Mitchell went through in a wet season, and the wheels of his dray cut deep tracks. Now a man would travel all the way without seeing water, and the dust would blind him. You'd best go back up the river and keep to the eastern route."*

He argued with them, sitting on the edge of the narrow verandah, his back against a post. The last light of the hot red sunset still lingered in the sky, and the dusty ground sloped away from their feet to the bank of the shrunken river.

The willows, which were cuttings from a tree that was itself a cutting from the great willow growing beside the grave of Napoleon, gleamed incongruously in places against the dark foliage of the river oaks. The old world and the new, Dick thought, watching opossums come from the trees; but they and the willows were the new, disturbing the peace of the old. The very spirit of age lived here in the dry bush land.

Black Jackie slipped cautiously round a corner, apprehension in his face. *"That fellow Ryan down at the hut."* Frank Ashley swore impatiently and Keogh looked surprised.

*"It's a man who has followed us from the Bargo," Frank explained. "I think he means to wait until we find a run and then steal it."*

*"Since the water began to dry the country's full of run-stealers," agreed Keogh. "Best give this man the slip."*

*"Couldn't you keep him here for us, Keogh?"* But Keogh sturdily refused. *"Not while the boss is away, I'll not give the new Commissioner an excuse to take away the licences while I am in charge."*

They argued with him unavailingly, and at length Frank said thoughtfully, *"All right; we will slip away before daylight, and trust to luck that Ryan doesn't track us."*

But later, when he pleaded weariness and retired to his room, Dick heard him give the whistle which summoned Black Jackie to his side, and scarcely an hour had elapsed after the household retired before he woke to find his cousin beside his bed.

Frank Ashley stood in a patch of moonlight, fully dressed, holding Dick's clothes, but when Dick would have spoken he placed a hand on his lips.

He stood over Dick while the latter dressed in silence, making impatient gestures when Dick failed to hurry, and Dick followed him across the room, wondering how they could leave without rousing the household, as Frank evidently intended.

But Frank was taking few risks. He had bribed the Irishman who was the station cook, and a miracle took place before Dick's eyes, the man leading them through his kitchen and across the yard while not a dog barked. They sniffed at his heels or sat upon their kennels, but the only sound was the eerie whistling of the curlews or the Jingle of harness where Jackie waited with the horses in the shadow of a group of trees.

It was not until they were out of sight of the house that Frank could be persuaded to explain his plans, but when they entered a timber belt which effectively screened them from the eyes of anyone who might have watched their movements across the moonlit plain he told Dick of what he had done.

*"It was no use arguing with Keogh. He's too afraid of the law even here, where there's none. I found Ryan had camped away from the hut by himself. He was suspicious of his company. Black Jackie and I gagged him and tied him to a tree while the cook kept the dogs quiet. He is an old lag and has them trained. Keogh told me someone had been moonlighting cattle on the run, and I guessed it was the cook. I've seen him in Yass."*

They had left the river and were traversing undulating country where natural plains alternated with lightly timbered parklike lands, and weathered granite outcropped here and there through the red soil. The kangaroo grass was withered, but it grew as high as a man's waist, and neither of the two men doubted that the great waterholes of their dreams lay hidden somewhere ahead. They moved onward, small black shapes travelling slowly into the undiscovered country beyond the Major's line.

## CHAPTER VIII.

For two nights the two cousins had travelled across dry and endless plains, sparing their horses during the midday heat, and trusting blindly to Black Jackie's guidance. Frank Ashley rode tirelessly, wholly given to the dream which at last seemed to be upon the eve of fulfillment.

Dick had grown to know his moods. The gay and careless manner which usually characterised him, and which made men seek his companionship, was laid aside as easily as any of the extra gear which might have hindered his purpose. He was the trained overlander, husbanding his strength and sure of himself, quiet and resourceful, gentle with men and horses, never failing to interpret the signs of the track.

Even Dick, who could scarcely endure longer the monotony of the country spread before his fevered sight, was living in a dream of wide waters and of waving grass. Nothing remained in life save this purpose of finding the secret water and of forming their stations. For this all things must be endured to the end.

On the third day, when the last of their water was almost gone, and they were forced to continue to travel in daylight, they came to a great plain, almost treeless. They rode in a sun-filled world, where earth and sky alike reflected the pitiless glare. The hot air quivered before their eyes, and heat took to itself shapes in mirage to mock them, but no living thing save themselves and their horses moved on the empty plain.

It was forsaken of bird and beast. Its trees withering and its grasses dead, and the travellers knew that unless the country of the waterholes lay within its bounds they must perish miserably on that scorched waste. They pitted their water bags and the last of their strength against the omniscient enemy sun.

At night they rested the horses for a few hours, although thirst was now an unspeakable torment, and their skins were cracked and dry; but Black Jackie said contentedly that before the next sunset they could camp at the Buthawa waterhole, and both men believed that he spoke the truth.

The next day he led them steadily and slowly across the plain, hour after weary hour, as they plodded on beside their horses, beset with thirst, until the dark line of the horizon incredibly became a forest belt, and a flock of pink-breasted grey parrots flew overhead.

Frank pointed to them, laughing soundlessly with cracked lips, and Black Jackie called, "*Galahs. Plenty belong Buthawa water.*" Their horses began to move with a pitiful eagerness.

They stumbled on to the timber line and found the dry bed of a billabong, which Jackie said would lead to the biggest of the three waterholes, the Buthawa water that never dried. Everywhere now they saw signs of the water. Stray kangaroos fed among the trees, where in places the kangaroo grass still showed green at the roots, and the trees were full of strange birds. They rounded a turn of the billabongs deepening bed, and water gleamed at its mouth. They drank from it, their faces pressed between the rustling green reeds, the horses knee-deep beside them in the ooze. The quiet water lapping the reeds was life and the fulfilment of their hearts' desire. It held a mystic promise. They never again looked at the water without some queer feeling of enchantment, even when all glamour had laded from it, and its secrets were no longer hidden.

At length Frank began to struggle up the steep bank, and Dick followed him, while Jackie still drank deeply. They reached the top, and turning found that their hopes were realised. Before them lay a

wide and quiet water, reed-fringed, the trees on its farther bank a dark and misty line in the distance. The colours of the sunset glowed from its surface, and its clear depths were jewelled with the reflections of the first stars. Myriads of birds fed among the gums in the surrounding forest; while flights of wild duck wheeled above them, to settle again on the water, where the black swans also sailed.

*"I have been an overlander since I was a lad,"* Frank said at last in awe, *"but - have never in a dry season seen a water like this. Our fortunes are made if the blacks don't kill us before we get our licences. We will only have to watch our cattle fatten and increase on these plains. I wish my father could see this water."*

They sat on a fallen tree and looked at the water in an ecstasy, as yet untroubled by any fear of the danger that they both knew was an immediate one, since flickering points of firelight among the trees told of the presence of many blacks.

Black Jackie appeared from the shadows, a young kangaroo on his shoulder and a string of fish dangling from one hand.

*"The Buthawa tribe give plenty tucker. Boss,"* he said, grinning, and dropping his booty, began to collect bark and sticks for the fire.

Frank produced flint and steel, vainly trying to obtain some information from Jackie about the numbers of the tribes as he lighted the dry wood. Jackie could only count to three, but he told them the names of the tribes that were camped about the waterhole, giving their positions. Frank interrupted incredulously.

*"You say the Geelamatong are here! How can they be so far from their hunting grounds? You must be dreaming, Jackie."*

*"The Geelamatong sit down beside the Kiewa, Boss. All tribes make corroboree,"* Jackie persisted.

*"You hear them sing, Boss!"* He stood listening, and suddenly the sounds of men's voices chanting in unison floated across the water, at first faintly, then ever deepening as though scores of voices joined from many directions and a wind caught the sounds, sweeping them towards the water. The chant swelled until the air was filled with lilting happy song, and Jackie threw back his head and sang also, keeping time to the monotonous beating that formed an eerie accompaniment to the song

*Wein-brar-bra wee wee,*

*Bungambinyah therlonga-la Jung-ar mekel bumery-ah*

*Wein brar-bra, wein brar-bra. Wein brar-bra, wein brar-bra, Wein brar-bra-ar-ar-ar-a-a-*

Jackie ceased to sing and began his meal of slightly scorched fish, but the song still sounded from the camp-fires.

*Wein brar-bra-ar-ar-ar-a-a-*

It rose and died away, and rose again, while they sat listening.

*"They can sing to their hearts' content,"* Frank said with relief. *"It is the peace song, the song of happy days. We can sleep without fear while they sing that song at night."*

*"By all I know of the blacks, half a dozen of these tribes should never be within each other's hunting grounds unless they are raiding. Jackie should have been killed at sight by any member of a strange tribe, but we've evidently discovered a tribal meeting place."*

They fell asleep beside their dying fire, lulled by the peace song of the tribes, and not troubling to keep watch; but nothing disturbed their rest throughout the long night. The moon rose, changing the water-hole to a silver sheet, and noiseless feet passed their camp; but even Jackie never stirred, for he knew that the spears of the tribes rested.

The sun was high when Dick woke in the shade cast by the shining leaves of the box tree under which they had slept. At first he thought, that he was alone, his cousin was so still. But Frank had returned from a close inspection of their surroundings, and he sat on a log staring intently at the great waterhole, enthralled by the miracle of its presence in the midst of that drought-stricken plain. It stirred his imagination even as the mere rumour of its existence had fired that of his father. Together they had planned its discovery and possession, and now it was his by right of hardship patiently endured and vision steadily pursued.

But in this moment of his triumph he knew almost fear of the placid water. He was haunted by memories of his father and bitter regrets that he alone should reap the reward of his father's planning; but his determination to possess the water strengthened.

He told what he had seen as they breakfasted.

*"The water must keep a constant level, and beyond the reeds at this end the bottom shelves suddenly, giving a great depth. It is full of fish, and the duck are in thousands."*

Dick looked across the water longingly, already troubled with the land-hunger that possessed all colonists. He thought that he would bring Elizabeth Gordon to a dwelling beside the water.

*"How soon shall we go back for the licences?"*

*"We will make a rough survey of the country and find the other two waterholes. We must have a map of sorts to show the Commissioner, and we are trapped here until it rains."*

*"But we got through from the Murrumbidgee. We could surely carry more water."*

*"If you climb the sandy rise behind that clump of pine you'll see smoke,"* Frank said. *"The blacks have fired the grass. They do it to keep the pastures clear for the game, I think that is why there is so little undergrowth on these plains."*

*"Then we are lucky to be here, I suppose,"* Dick stretched himself contentedly. *"Will all the blacks be as friendly as the Buthawa tribe?"*

*"We will visit them this morning,"* Frank lighted his pipe, then strolled to look at the hobbled horses. He came back leading them.

*"They need a rest, but it wouldn't be safe to leave them, and they'll impress the Warrigal blacks."*

They saddled their horses, and Jackie in the lead, rode to visit the tribal camps, heading first for the permanent camp of the Buthawa tribe. To the south of the lake they found a track worn by the passing of feet. Blacks had doubtless used the track throughout the years, but the red dust showed little impress save the absence of grass. It passed through thickets of acacia scrub and of pine, past great trees, until finally it crossed a sandy rise, from whose height Dick could see

clouds of smoke rolling to the south and the dull red glare of grass fire.

At the foot of the slope on the farther side, in a grassy hollow, through which a creek flowed to the waterhole, dwelt the people of the Buthawa water, the hosts of all the visiting tribes.

It was a large encampment, numbering perhaps 60 or 70 mia mias, but a peaceful silence brooded over the scene, for the majority of the blacks still slept under their bark shelters. A gin ran from the stream towards the huts, calling loudly, and soft brown piccaninnies fled to shelter, but the visitors were almost into the hollow before the warriors of the tribe came yawning from their rest.

They gathered round the horsemen, showing much curiosity, but no fear, since Jackie had already visited them, and their own spies had warned them of the approach of white men to the secret water. They showed a child-like interest in men and horses, but Jackie was forced to interpret, for Frank and Dick Ashley were the first white men that any of the tribe had seen, and they spoke a dialect that Frank found a difficulty in understanding, although it resembled that of the Wiradjuri, who hunted about the great rivers.

They made polite and friendly gestures, proffering gifts to their visitors and hospitable entertainment, while happy children crept from the background, where the women also stayed. There was no war paint, and the heavy spears and the shields were laid aside. Only the light hunting and fishing spears were in evidence. Frank asked the direction of the two smaller waterholes. They pointed first to the west and then to the north-west, but either could not or would not say why the great waterhole kept its level. Again and again they said that it had never dried.

Leaving the gentle people of the Buthawa tribe, they rode to the camp of the warlike Geelamatong, the swift-footed warriors from the Maneroo heights who terrorised all the tribes between the Hume and the Murrumbidgee, making flying night raids wherever they found they were least expected.

Here again, however, all was friendliness and peace. The great, war spears were laid aside, and savage warriors had become genial hosts, giving a kindly welcome to expected guests

It was the same everywhere Dick was de-lighted, and lost all fear, but Frank grew more and more puzzled, since there were representatives of half a dozen warring tribes camped in peace beside the waterholes, and he could make little sense of Jackie's explanations.

They spent the day exploring the neighbourhood of the water, and returned to camp still more enthralled with their discovery. They had found the beds of three great billabongs leading from the shores of the lake, and the timber belts about it were extensive and teeming with game.

That night there was much yabba at the camp fires and before the fires of the Geelamatong, Gouri, the fat one, mimicked the white men. He bent to an imaginary stirrup and clutched an imaginary rein, while the fierce warriors of the Geelamatong laughed and applauded like children at a pantomime.

And again the voices of the tribesmen swelled across the water in the rippling chorus of the peace song, while the women beat monotonously on the folded opossum skins.

Day followed day, and the weeks slipped imperceptibly into months, but the drought held and the smoke of the fires rolled in the distance, and still the two Ashleys camped on the edge of the Buthawa Lake.

Frank had insisted that their camp should be moved far from the Geelamatong to a space where lightning had felled a tall pine, and where a protective clump of trees might give them shelter from a flight of spears, but they had little fear of attack.

They had carefully explored the surrounding country, finding the other waterholes to be small and deserted although showing no signs of shrinkage. Frank spent his days making a careful map, on parchment specially bought for the purpose, of the country for which they intended to seek a licence. He would ride away over the dusty plain, while Dick hunted and fished with the blacks, learning the names of bird and beast. The animals gathered at the waterhole presented the same bewildering disregard of place distinctions as did the aborigines. The great red Bringenbrong kangaroo bounded across the open spaces beside his small grey brother, and gay-coloured mountain parrots flocked to the tall gums with the soft pink-breasted galahs of the west. Drought had forced the broilgas of the plain to dance beside the waterholes, and had sent even the hill dingo to the place where instinct told him game would be plentiful.

At night there were songs and corroborees. Dick watched the ancient dances, and the warriors imitated bird and beast, or the simple incidents of their daily life, while the women beat an accompaniment. The children continued their games, now when the white men approached, playing the currum currum undisturbed, the boys hurling their spears at its racing shield, and the women would talk to them, as they wove their dilli bags or dug for yams, greeting them with kindness as did their men folk.

Food was brought to their camp regularly, and one day the medicine man of the Buthawa tribe had visited them with a rich gift. He talked to Jackie, and Jackie was uneasy. The whites of his eyes showed continually as he translated.

*"He brings this for the little old one who sits down in this camp."*

Dick laughed but Frank shook his head doubtfully, accepting the gift, and Jackie began to follow Dick, watching him with deep set speculative eyes. At night he slept as close to Dick as they would permit, saying that he was afraid of *"that one"* who sat down in the camp.

He was obviously afraid when they questioned him, and they ceased to bother him, but Frank Ashley brooded much over the tale of the little old woman of Ashley as he rode on his long expeditions. There must be some- thing in it when the blacks knew that her protecting shadow was cast over his cousin even here beside the water.

The secret of the water eluded them. They could find no solution to the problem of its constant depth, but they both agreed that it was fed by underground springs.

Frank was growing nervous, he longed to go in quest of his licence, but, although heavy black clouds often gathered no rain fell, and he



dared not risk the long Journey to the settlements on the Hume until the drought broke. He began to almost fear the loss of the waterhole. He felt sometimes as though some malignant influence were actively engaged in thwarting his cherished plans. Then gradually an uncanny change took place in the temper of the blacks. They ceased to visit each others' camps, and even Dick found that he was not always welcome though no one ever actually failed in courtesy to him. The women and children began to show signs of nervousness, and in one or two of the camps war spears appeared. The Wiradjuri and Kiewa tribes moved their camps to places more remote from the waterhole, and there was secret activity at the camp of the Buthawa tribe.

Then one night a few drops of rain fell and thunder muttered overhead, Jackie crept to Frank Ashley his teeth chattering with fear, and besought him to leave immediately.

*"This a bad place, now, Boss. We take Yarraman and go"*

*"I think the drought is breaking," Frank said to Dick, "and there is certainly trouble of some kind brewing. We'll go to-morrow night. I have an idea we won't be allowed to leave in daylight, so we shan't try."*

The next morning was fine, with a wintry clearness in the air, and the camps seemed as usual, but Jackie was obviously terrified of some approaching danger. He begged them to let him fill the water bottles and lead them across the plains, and they could only pacify him by a promise that they would leave as soon as darkness fell.

They spent the morning resting and overhauling their gear, and no one came near them, but in the afternoon Frank decided to reconnoitre before leaving, and Dick remained in the clearing while his cousin watched the activities of the tribes.

Dick waited until sunset with as much patience as he could muster, while Jackie, who had refused to leave him, watched the horses in dejected silence, rising uneasily whenever they threatened to wander from sight.

The evening was unusually quiet, as though another storm approached. An eerie hush hung over the water, and the surrounding trees were full of little secret movements. A grey kangaroo hopped from the timber beside them, then vanished silently, as though startled at finding itself in that place at that time.

Suddenly the silence was broken, and Dick rose, listening intently, while Jackie crept to his side. For many nights there had been no song sung at the camp fires, but now, in the distance, voices were singing. The sound grew, but this ominous and threatening note, carrying a warning of death and terror, was not the song of peace and happiness. The words were now like the clashing of spears on the wooden shields, now like the whispering of the boomerang in its flight. The song rolled in deep notes from the camp fires of the Buthawa tribe.

*Bergan-ye-lar, ye-lar yan lay gunning yea Bergan ye-lar boon mar,*

*A murrum-un-helar gunning yea. Bergan ye-lar boon-mar*

*Boon-mar, boon-mar-ar-ar-ar Bergan ye-lar boon-mar-ar-ar Bergan ye-lar-ye-lar-ye-lay.*

The sound swelled across the great waterhole like a rising tide of hatred and defiance, and while they listened, with fear clutching at

their very heartstrings, Frank Ashley sped across the clearing to the fallen pine.

*"That's the war song. We must be gone,"* he said urgently. *"The spears are out in all the camps, and they are putting on the war paint. Jackie and I will saddle while you fill these with water. Make haste."* He handed Dick three of the skin bags made by aborigines for carrying water, and catching a horse began to buckle the girth with rapid, sure fingers, while Dick ran toward the water.

There was much movement in the reeds where Dick first approached the waterhole, and he was forced to make a detour, keeping well within the shelter of the trees until it seemed safe to creep down the steep bank. At length he filled the skins and returned from the reed bed to the clump of pines as quickly as he could. But the war spears rested no longer, and in that short interval death had visited the camp. Dick cried out in grief and horror at the thing that he saw. Black Jackie lay dead, transfixed with many spears, and Frank Ashley lay against the great trunk of the fallen pine, blood welling from a terrible wound.

Dick knelt beside him to stay the flow from the wound, crying his love and anguish in broken and grief-stricken speech, forgetful of all else.

Death was coming speedily to Frank Ashley, but the spirit that had brought him so far into the unsettled lands was still strong within him.

*"The Geelamatong going back to Maneroo - steer south by east, and go the Martins,"* he gasped, *"or John Wyatt at Mullengandra - his partner, David Macfarlane - trust no other man."* He had reserved his strength to the last to give his message. His voice failed, and he slipped forward, dying in his cousin's arms.

The notes of the war-song rolled like thunder, drowning all other sound, but Dick still stayed beside his dead cousin, in an agony of grief. He knew now how much he had grown to love Frank Ashley during their long quest for the three waterholes, and once more he tasted the bitterness of death.

The silent trees and the indifferent stars brought sudden torturing recollection of that other night when he had knelt beside Alick Stewart in the forest near his home. He had loved Alick Stewart also. But the bush, with its inexorable demand for strength and endurance, had tempered his spirit. He rose shuddering, tormented past all endurance, and mechanically repeated his cousin's words. He would bury his cousin in the clearing and seek the Commissioner.

His uncle had planned the quest of the waterholes, and his cousin had found them, pursuing a dream. Well! the wheel should come full circle. He would possess them. No stranger should reap where an Ashley had sown.

He dug a shallow grave with the tomahawk, and took the leather wallet containing their compass and the surveys of their stations from his dead cousin's belt. He heaped earth, over the still face, forcing himself to control his agony of pity and of loss, and think only of his purpose.

Five days later he left his horse dead upon the plain and staggered in a delirium of exhaustion towards John Wyatt, of Mullengandra, who

rode from a timber belt to meet him. He had steered by the compass, travelling as best he could in the direction given him and drenched with the rain of the breaking drought. But he had little recollection of his wanderings.

#### CHAPTER IX.

*"Surely it would have been your mother who came in my dream, Mr. Carey,"* little Mrs. John Wyatt, of the Irish eyes and the wild rose skin, looked at him very kindly.

*"What was she like?"* Dick asked.

*"She was little and old, and she wore a long cloak very like those of the peasant women at home in Ireland, but not at all the same."*

*"I don't remember my mother, Mrs. Wyatt. It would surely have been your mother. Mothers do sometimes try to come back to the world to help their children. John told me to go to sleep, for it was only a dream; but yesterday when the blackfellow came, saying that there was a white man on the plain to the west, he took his horse and rode to find you."*

*"I owe you my life,"* Dick said gratefully,

*"There now,"* returned the soft Irish voice soothingly, *"shouldn't every one do all he can for everyone else in this wild country of drought and distance? Do you rest on the couch until my husband comes home, and I'll see to the dinner."*

Dick lay on the home-made couch, with its covering of opossum skins, neatly sewn together, and dreamily studied the living room of Mullengandra, the high home of the eagle.

The light of the setting sun entered through cracks in the walls, where roughly squared green timbers had shrunk apart, the long slanting rays filling the room with a soft golden glow. The sunlight dimmed the leaping flames of big logs burning in a fireplace of plastered mud and stones built into the wall at the eastern end, and fell upon the rudely constructed furniture, softening its harsh outlines. For Mullengandra station had been recently formed, and its log cabin still lacked all comfort, being difficult of access for teams.

Peace brooded over the house, until even the rifle slung on hooks beside the hurricane lantern over the mantel seemed to lose its significance, suggesting merely the flight of the wild duck from the waterholes or parrots rising in clouds from the grass.

Dick fell asleep again listening to the low voice of Mrs. Wyatt giving instructions to her two gins, and to the crackling fire, but his dreams were troubled, and he woke with a start to find that the table in the centre of the room was set for a meal, and that a lamp had been lighted. Dick sat up, uneasily conscious that someone had moved softly in the room, then stared blankly at the man who watched him, half turning from an open door. It was the ex-convict Ryan, whom Frank Ashley had tied to a tree the night they had left Willie Ploma.

While Dick stared in dismay, a quiet English voice spoke from somewhere beyond the arc of lamplight.

*"What are you doing there, Ryan?"*

Ryan turned instantly, all malice fading from his face.

*"I thought I saw someone I knew as I passed the door, and I stopped for a moment."* He walked sullenly away, and the tall fair Englishman who had found Dick stumbling across the plain stepped into the room.

He was followed by his wife, who bade them sit down to the meal she had herself prepared, and Dick tasted kangaroo tail soup and a savoury stew of parrots, while his host gave him the news which had travelled across the bush tracks from the settlements.

Sir Richard Bourke had sailed for England, and his successor, Sir George Gipps, had been sworn in as Governor of the colony. He was a military officer, and rumour had it that he had little love for the squatters, and might seek to undo the work of his predecessor.

*"I do not think he can take away the licences, but he may make it difficult to obtain them. You would be wise to secure Sour licence as soon as possible, Mr. Carey, if you have discovered suitable country. The Commissioner is now with the Martins at Wanaaring, and my partner, David Macfarlane, rode that way yesterday to obtain new licences."*

*"My cousin and I found permanent water."* Dick remembered Frank's instructions, given when dying. He raised a hand to draw out Frank's carefully traced plans, but the pocket which had held the wallet was empty. Black dismay seized him. Surely he could not have lost them. The pocket was deep and the paper had fitted tightly.

*"What is it?"* Mrs. Wyatt asked, anxiously watching his distress.

*"Frank's plans must have dropped out of my pocket, as I stumbled across the plains."* His face grew suddenly hard, and he half rose.

*"Ryan was in this room when I woke. He has stolen them."* His voice rose passionately *"If he has stolen them, he'll give them back, or I'll kill him."*

He told them the story of the three waterholes as briefly as he could, and when he spoke of Frank Ashley's death, Mrs. Wyatt cried out in pity.

*"Poor Frank Ashley. He was so young and gay-hearted. John, he was always a good friend of ours. We must help his cousin."*

Her husband nodded. *"I'm sorry for Ashley. There are men in the colony who could have been more easily spared. I will try to get your plans from Ryan. I met him at the Crossing Place some time ago, and engaged him as a drover for a mob of cattle I was sending here, but he is of bad character and untrustworthy. We will go to his camp."*

They went from the lighted room, treading upon the small, crackling, dry sticks and bark which littered the ground almost to the house doors, while Mrs. Wyatt stood, anxiously listening for sounds of the altercation that must ensue.

The flame of the drovers' fire burnt steadily some distance away among the trees, but when the two men approached it, only one figure was seated beside it, and it was not that of Ryan.

"Where is Ryan, Carter?"

"I haven't seen him since he went to the house for flour, Sir." Carter, who had a stolid English face and a slowness of speech, rose and pulled his forelock as he had learnt to do in England before he had been trans-ported. *"He went to the house for flour, Sir, at sunset, and*

*hasn't come back; but I heard the horses galloping. I thought you'd sent him to do something, Sir."*

John Wyatt uttered an angry exclamation. He has ridden to find Wake. He turned and walked with long swift strides towards the dark outlines of the stockyard where the night horses were kept.

They found the stockyard empty and the sliprails down.

*"I'll send a black boy to drive in the horses and you must ride to-night to find Wake before he gives Ryan a licence. David Macfarlane would travel slowly, and you may find him at the Crossing Place; but I will give you letters to the Commissioner and to Jean Martin."*

Dick followed him back to the house and a gin having been sent with a message for the black boys, Mrs. Wyatt gave him clear directions of the track he should follow to the Crossing Place on the Hume, while her husband wrote letters, deliberately and without haste, in the fine copperplate hand taught in English schools.

Dick listened to a description of landmarks with a steadily growing determination that the country of the three waterholes should not pass into Ryan's keeping. He saw again the quiet waters and the well-grassed plains, and he knew that he would be false to Frank Ashley should he fail to gain possession of them. He resolved fiercely to strain every nerve lest the cousin who had given him true friendship should have died without accomplishing the thing he had striven so to do. That friendship, and the toil and travail of their Journey, should live in the station of the waterholes, and Dick swore that the stations they had planned to form should be Frank Ashley's lasting memorial.

The black boy rode to the door, leading a saddled horse, and Dick thanked his host, and rode away, promising to send word of what should happen at the end of his journey.

It was a dark night, but the black boy rode fast over the forest track, and Dick followed him with difficulty. They came to the river bank, and for the first time Dick saw the waters of the great river into whose tributary streams flowed all the western water and much of the southern. It was the father of waters of the new continent, and, though shrunken by drought, it still flowed strongly between banks on which grew great river gums that had braved the centuries, and a profusion of acacia scrub.

On both sides of the river Dick could see the glare of many camp fires, while the forest ways resounded with the bellowing of cattle and the bleating of sheep. As far as Dick could see, it seemed that the river banks formed one vast encampment for the mobs of cattle and sheep about which the drovers kept ceaseless vigil. For, this year, the mania for speculation in stock still raged, and the great mobs of stock travelling between Sydney and the rapidly growing settlements of Port Philip and Adelaide nearly all converged upon the banks of the Hume. The overland tracks were strewn with the bones of cattle and sheep, and sometimes with the bones of their drovers. The stork grew too weak to travel, or bogged in the mud of the empty waterholes, or were speared by the blacks. The drovers perished miserably from thirst or from a spear thrust. Yet still the great mobs made their inevitable way into the new pasture lands, travelled slowly by intrepid men wherever settlers discovered water, and following the long rivers across the continent.

Dick saw the camps with amazement and a queer excitement. Suddenly all his experiences of the last months were thin threads in the growing pattern of a new life woven of the camp fires and the drifting stock on the vast background of the bush.

Life would flow on, and all this would vanish as the smoke of the aboriginal fires; but now they built the foundations of a coming civilisation and their work was full of meaning and a great romance.

The black boy stopped and pointed to a fire beside which tents were pitched, some distance from the track. A man who had watched their approach rose from his seat beside the fire and came to them, greeting the black boy.

*"You have come from Mullengandra, I think,"* he said, with grave courtesy. *"I recognise your boy and the horses. I am David Macfarlane, a partner of John Wyatt."*

*"Then I have a message for you,"* Dick said thankfully, and handed him his partner's letter. He followed the tall clean-shaven Scot into the firelight, where several men sat about on logs, while the black boy waited with the horses.

Dick was introduced to a group of famous overlanders, Captain John Hartley, who had been a master mariner, and John Burns, whose brother held the contract for the overland mail and with Hartley had formed the first cattle station at Port Phillip. With them also were William Carter and William Bennett, and on the river flat behind them camped many thousands of sheep, watched by the assigned servants.

David Macfarlane read his partner's letter, holding it in the light of a blazing log, and then said kindly, *"I am grieved to hear of young Ashley's death. He was one of my own pupils, and a good lad; but life in this colony holds many uncertainties, and a man must suffer with a good heart what God wills. John Wyatt writes that you have been robbed of the plans of your run, and would find the Commissioner before the man Ryan steals it. Mr. Wake stayed last night at Mungabareena, but after issuing licences to-day he crossed the river, and should be to-night at Wanaaring with the Martins."*

*"If Ryan has already crossed the river, he cannot get his licence until tomorrow, but I think that he would camp on the bank tonight, since to cross in darkness is very dangerous. You cannot do better than to camp with my friends tonight and cross at daylight. I will then go with you to see the Commissioner."*

Dick stifled his impatience, having already learnt to trust the slow and sure ways of the men of the bush, and being deeply sensible of the kindness shown him.

He sat until a late hour listening to the talk of the grave and bearded elders who travelled the overland tracks. Captain Hartley told them tales of the sea, and deplored his own lack of education to David Macfarlane, who was a Presbyterian divine and an M.A. of Edinburgh University.

*"I have been a mere adventurer, cast upon the world since I was thirteen years of age, and for want of education my progress was slow,"* he said sententiously, taking a blackened pipe from his lips and shaking his head sadly at his fellow Scot. *"I Joined John Swain and Joseph Burns in taking cattle from the Murrumbidgee to Port*

*Phillip, and we were the first men to do so. We travelled through good pasture lands, and now I have altogether deserted the sea and am returning with these friends to form stations in the Goulburn river country. We have ten thousand sheep with us and all other necessary stock."*

*"Your mob is so large that it may tempt the hunters," David Macfarlane said doubtfully. "The Foresters' sheep have travelled on to- wards the Ovens and Goulburn, and the Commissioner told me to-day that he had word the blacks were becoming troublesome. We have had no trouble ourselves on that side, but the Goolamatong tribe is raiding."*

*"We have ten assigned men, and we are all armed."* Burns said briefly, and rose to visit the stock.

Dick made his bed on a sheet of bark, and slept soundly until Captain Hartley roused him long before dawn. David Macfarlane had risen, and after they had made a rapid breakfast, was as good as his word, and rode with him to find Wake.

They swam their horses across the river when the first faint light showed over the tree tops, and rode rapidly across the river flats, where in places wheat had been grown, to the Wanaaring homestead.

Wanaaring consisted of the usual groups of wooden buildings, roofed with bark, but a small piece of ground had been enclosed for a garden, and shady trees grew about it. There was a chorus of bird song about the house and a brightness of flowers. A black boy took their horses, and Jean Martin left the breakfast table and came from the house to welcome them. He turned from David Macfarlane to Dick.

*"You are Frank Ashley's cousin, you were with him last time I saw him. It was at Leigh's Inn in the Bargo Brush."*

*"Frank Ashley is dead,"* David Macfarlane said sadly, and told him Dick's story of the three waterholes while they stood in the garden where the night dew still gleamed.

*"A pity, a thousand pities,"* Jean Martin lamented. *"Jaques will be disconsolate. But concerning this licence! The thief is here, and we shall take your plans from him. He attempted to cross the river before daylight, and his horse was swept away. My blacksmith rescued him, using a flat-bottomed boat, and I was about to give him a horse. I wondered that he should be too impatient to wait until he recovered from his immersion."*

*"But is not the Commissioner here?"* Dick cried.

*"He hastened away yesterday to settle some dispute in country farther out."*

*"Then let us take the plans and hasten after him,"* David Macfarlane suggested and Jean Martin led them to the back of the house.

They found Ryan in the kitchen, where the stockmen were already finishing the early breakfast that was the rule on all stations. Although he had been given dry clothing, Ryan looked wretched enough; but when he saw Dick Ashley enter the kitchen with Jean Martin, he rose in a sudden frenzy or rage, then fell back upon the wooden settle, trembling with weakness.

At a word from their master, the stockmen held him while one of their number searched him, taking Frank Ashley's wallet which Ryan had concealed within his shirt, tying it securely to a string about his neck. Dick took it, and for the first time since his cousin's death experienced a feeling almost of tranquillity. The waterholes were not lost. He thought of them as belonging to his dead cousin, and although Jean Martin urged them to remain at Wanaaring, Dick could not rest until he had found Wake and secured the licence for the Buthawa country.

His anxiety to follow the Commissioner was so obvious that at length Jean Martin said kindly, *"Wake has gone on towards the Broken River, but my brother Jaques is at Baranduda, where we have formed a heifer station. Frank Ashley was our friend and Jaques will give you fresh horses at Baranduda. You should find Wake's camp before sunset."*

They pressed on over creeks and through timber, changing their horses at Baranduda, the place of the water-rat, a hut where hawks wheeled high above them in the dry air. Jaques Martin welcomed them as hospitably as his brother Jean had done at Wanaaring, but they saw nothing of their enemy Ryan.

David Macfarlane, who was known as genong-mittong or the strong-footed, because in a country where all men rode, he occasionally walked short distances, followed the track with ease, talking of many colonial matters whenever they breathed their horses.

*"In England they planned this settlement, sending out the first convicts,"* he said. *"They plan and govern, but what shall grow from their scheming no one knows. The Governor rules the small settled districts, but the flocks and herds increase as though by some magic, pushing outward until the country beyond the bounds of settlement becomes one vast sheep walk. Sir Richard Bourke, wise in his time, granted the licences. Sir George Gipps, we hear, would reclaim all unsold land for the Crown. But who shall stay the march of the army you saw last night on the banks of the great river? Would the Martins, think you, tamely give up the fruits of their toil at Wanaaring? The pastoral tide has gained momentum and will not be stayed."*

And again he said, *"Yet I fear for the country, I travel from Sydney and see few churches or schools, but at every stopping-place there is the vile bush public-house, where men drink themselves senseless and are robbed or murdered. There are no churches built for the convicts beginning a new life, or schools for the children growing up in ignorance. There is scarcely any spiritual or intellectual growth in the colony. I taught in the college in Sydney and the settlers removed their sons at the age of fifteen or sixteen, placing them on stations with a flock of sheep as happened with your cousin. When you are married, lad, see that your children are taught those spiritual truths that you learnt in Church and school before you came to the colony."*

Dick thought, as he listened, that things could not grow altogether awry while men as grave and strong as his companion, or as gay and true as his dead cousin, rode the bush tracks in the van of settlement.

They found Wake's camp before sunset, coming unexpectedly upon a fast-running stream, whose clear waters were rippling music between



the rocks scattered in its bed. A blue crane flapped from the overhanging branches of a silvery gum as the horses drank thirstily, and beyond a tangle of acacia and vine on the farther bank a distant voice was suddenly audible.

The voice ceased, but when their horses had lifted their heads from the water, they rode in the direction from which it had come, and almost before they had crossed the stream it came again, and this time much more loudly.

It was a voice raised in anger, and although they could not at first distinguish the words, which poured in a torrent of impassioned eloquence, they followed the sound through the acacia thicket until they came to an open space where a camp had been made.

A tent had been pitched on a slope where giant blue gums soared to the skies from a bright carpet of flower-starred grass, and some distance away, a tarpaulin stretched over a light dray made a second shelter. Hobbled horses were grazing among the trees, and a chestnut mare, still saddled, whinnyed at their approach. A man who was cooking at an open fire, looked up at the sound, and fine kangaroo dogs, tied to saplings at the edge of the clearing, strained at their leashes, barking an excited warning.

The Commissioner sat on a fallen tree before his tent, enjoying the last sunshine, and listening attentively to the arguments of the choleric gentleman whose voice had guided them to the camp.

They were so intent upon their business that they had failed to look for the cause of the uproar. The gentleman's bitter oration came to a sudden climax.

*"I tell you again that I took up the country last year and this man is stealing my runs."*

The Commissioner nodded. He was a tall man with deeply set blue eyes and a deliberate manner.

*"I know that you hold Cunningdroo by right of first discovery, Mr. Jose, but the boundaries you claim for your run are yet to be determined. What country have you already stocked?"*

Passion almost choked Mr. Jose.

*"I claim the natural boundaries of the two rivers. The country is unfenced and the stock roams as you know."*

*"The Murrumbidgee and the Hume are 130 miles apart, and there is no possibility of your obtaining a licence for such a holding. It is against all reason."*

Wake rose, turning a deaf ear to the remonstrances that instantly poured from his companion's lips, and David Macfarlane seized the opportunity to attract his attention.

He was known to Mr. Jose, Dick observed, but the squatter whose thin, haughty face reminded Dick irresistibly of an angry bird, greeted him with scant ceremony and took his leave with a scarcely veiled threat that the Commissioner should later regret the day on which he crossed Jose of Cunningdroo. He was quite evidently of the opinion that Wake had failed in his duty, but Wake watched him go with the utmost composure, and then hospitably invited them to share the meal which his cook was preparing.

*"Mr. Jose thinks that his station of Cunningdroo, which is the native word for a little drop of water, should be watered by all the water from the Murrumbidgee to the Hume, but I think otherwise," he said dryly. "Have you come for yet another licence, Mr. Macfarlane?"*

David Macfarlane laughed and introduced Dick Ashley to Wake as Mr. Richard Carey, cousin of Francis Ashley, whom the Commissioner would doubtless have known.

The Commissioner stroked his chin thoughtfully, acknowledging the introduction.

*"Where is your cousin now, Mr. Carey?"* Dick told him the story of the waterholes, and gave him Frank's plans.

Wake studied them with a worried frown, then looked quickly from David Macfarlane to Dick, making a sudden decision.

*"Some weeks ago, Mr. Carey, I received a communication asking me to discover the whereabouts of Francis Ashley and send him, under escort, to Sydney, but there was no mention of a cousin in the despatch, and since Francis Ashley is dead, I see no reason why I should not give you the licence. The application is in order."*

Dick thanked him with a dazed feeling that he lived in a dream, and that it was Frank Ashley who thanked the Commissioner for his licence. He was suddenly very tired.

Dinner was served in the open on a table formed of planks roughly nailed to the stump of a tree, but Dick took no part in the conversation, answering at random when they spoke to him. David Macfarlane watched him solicitously.

Wake was proud of his camp. He showed them books and writing materials, and many useful contrivances that were easily transported from place to place. He had rifles and large supplies of ammunition, and he and his men were accustomed to live upon the game that abounded wherever they travelled. The rivers were full of fish, the grass was alive with quail, wild fowl swarmed in the trees, and kangaroos came in hundreds to drink at the streams.

They sat late over the camp-fire. Wake's men slept in the tarpaulin-covered cart, and the night was full of the whistle of the curlews. The stars were low and glowing, and the trees gleaming columns crested with blackness.

A dog whimpered uneasily in its sleep, and wakening grew curiously still. Suddenly all the dogs came silently to their feet. They were alert, their heads all pointing in the same direction, standing like statues in the shadows. A cracking of branches was followed by a crash of sound as they strained at their leashes.

The three men rose, Wake calling to his dogs, but their excitement increased and, as he seized his rifle, a man stumbled from the shadows and fell, lying without movement.

They ran across the clearing and Wake knelt beside him. The man's clothes were torn and blood was caked about the edges of a jagged spear wound in his shoulder. His face was drained of life, grimy, and scratched in his race for safety.

They carried him to the tent, working upon him for hours before he regained consciousness. He told them his tale in broken sentences while they listened breathlessly. He was one of the men who had

been sent on to the Broken River with the Foresters' sheep after they had turned aside with their cattle to seek the Oxley plains.

They had camped near an unfriendly tribe of blacks, who had speared some of their sheep, and when they at length resumed their march the blacks had prepared an ambush, lying in wait until the drovers were scattered. The men were armed with carbines, and fought fiercely, but the blacks had speared all. This man had escaped and fled across country until he stumbled upon Wake's camp. David Macfarlane and Wake had listened to many such tales. They wasted no time in lamentations.

Wake said, weighing his plan as he spoke: *"There is no chance of saving the men, but there are still the stock and the supply waggons to be considered. I know the track, and if we leave immediately we may be in time to secure them."*

They lost no time. Wake roused his men, and they decided to leave Dick in charge of the wounded man, and while the men saddled the horses Wake gave Dick a licence for the country of the three waterholes, briefly explaining procedure to him.

*"This is a depasturing licence only. It will secure the land from occupation for six months. Within that time you must secure a squatting licence by payment of £10 at the Treasury in Sydney. The squatting licence enables a man to occupy his land for one year, and must be renewed each June."*

A man came to the door of the tent, leading horses, and they rode away, leaving Dick to guard the wounded drover.

## CHAPTER X.

Cattle moved on the edge of the Buthawa plain, a black line of them, slowly stringing against the sunset sky. They were knee deep in the grass, which waved everywhere, making a red-tipped green sea of the plains about the three waterholes.

Dick Carey watched them from a sandy rise. Much water had flowed down the long inland rivers since he had obtained his licence for the country of the three waterholes from Commissioner Wake and brought his first mob of cattle across the rolling plains. The cattle had been branded with the R.J.D. of the partners, Robert Carr, John Wyatt, and David Macfarlane, but their progeny were branded with Dick's own brand of the four-leaved clover, and were known beyond Albury, the rapidly growing town at the old Crossing Place of the Hume. Dick watched them with satisfaction, fat beasts moving slowly and contentedly about the rich pasture lands. His holding was vast, I and, in this good season, well watered by the billabongs flowing into the great waterholes.

The smallest of the three waterholes lay behind him, and Dick turned from the contemplation of his cattle to visit the black-smith's shop which had lately been built beside the waterhole.

The country between the Hume and the Murrumbidgee was being rapidly settled, and stock routes passed through the stations of the three waterholes. One such passed near the rise where Dick had waited, and a public house of evil reputation, the Black Duck, afforded entertainment to travellers who preferred its doctored whisky to the hospitality of the distant homestead. The shanty had

been built three years earlier, but the bark on the roof of the smithy was scarcely dry. Dick wondered why the old Scotchman who had come in from Gippsland on a covered waggon, bringing his family, should have decided to settle beside the waterhole.

There was not enough traffic on the stock route to make the smithy profitable, and although the man would probably run a few head of stock upon the station, he could only hope to eke out a scanty livelihood. Dick knew that many settlers who built their homes on station boundaries acquired a mob of cattle as a matter of course, but this man seemed honest. Dick wished him well, as, indeed, he did most people. Life was a difficult business at best, and the man had a wife and children.

Dick rode past the unpainted shanty, and through a belt, of pine to the knoll where Macdonald had built his hut and smithy, above the level of a possible flood from the waterhole or from a billabong flowing from the north. Macdonald's wife came to the door of the hut, and looked at Dick almost as though she had waited for him to pass. She was a little woman, with a still face and clear, brown eyes, that were aware of many things of which she forbore to speak. Dick smiled at her, glad to see a woman, and at her call a small barefooted Macdonald came to hold his horse as he passed into the smithy.

The horse he had left to be shod was ready for him, and Dick looked at the new shoes critically.

*"Work well done, Macdonald,"* he said pleasantly, offering money to the smith, who waited silently beside the horse, while his son Jamie ceased to hammer the shoe he had been making.

The blacksmith examined the money in his hand with eyes that gleamed angrily beneath lowering brows.

*"And shouldna' the work be falthfu' work when it's done for ye by a Macdonald of Rothesay? The just due is three shillings and ye will give me that and no more."*

There was a curious quiet in the shop until Jamie began again to hammer a shoe.

Dick held out a hand for the money, giving the smith the three shillings for which he had asked.

He spoke courteously as to an equal. *"For- give me for not realising that my gift would be an impertinence, Mr. Macdonald. I trust that you will shoe many more of my horses."*

Shock-headed Jamie looked up scornfully I from the shoe he hammered as his father resumed his work.

*"Why shouldna' we have his siller when he flings it about wherever he goes?"* he queried.

*"Soon there'll be nane to fling,"* his father returned grimly.

Dick rode away, thinking of the scene at the smithy; of the giant Scotsman in his worn leather apron, standing in the big hut that he had made with his own hands, the leaping flame of his forge no fiercer than the pride and resentment in his eyes. Out of a jumble of recollection a sudden memory returned to Dick of a night spent at an Inn in the Bargo Brush. A tall, kilted, Highlander had stood behind his chieftain at dinner, and Dick knew that the grizzled and toil-worn blacksmith of the waterhole was the man who had accompanied his

chief from Scotland to prepare a new home for his clansmen. He wondered what history of effort and defeat lay behind the family at the smithy. Some day he would find out.

Ahead of him his homestead showed on rising ground beside the billabong which flowed into the great waterhole.

Some scruple had prevented him from building it within the bounds held sacred by the tribes, and the Buthawa tribe still camped in undisturbed security beside the water. They hunted and fished over the plains of the waterholes, and Dick interfered as little as possible with their customs. He killed beasts for them when food was scarce, and they rewarded him with immunity from their spears for his cattle, and service whenever he needed it. A black boy carried his mailbag to Albury, swimming the flooded billabongs in the wet seasons, or enduring the scorching heat of the waterless plains in time of drought, but never failing to return with the things entrusted to his care. At the low, wooden, homestead buildings, paddiaddigaddi, son of a chief of the Buthawa tribe, ruled a constantly changing staff of boys with a rod of iron, zealously guarding the interests of his master, taking his orders from none but Dick.

The house was clearly visible against the skyline, a landmark for many miles. While Dick approached it from the north, David Macfarlane drove his buggy up the long southern slope of the hill on which it stood, and a few miles to the east two men rode slowly over a track which led from the Murrumbidgee. They led a pack-horse and had travelled for days across the green plains.

Wherever the track climbed a rise, they could see the distant homestead and the timber belt about the Buthawa water. Occasionally they saw the moving shapes which they knew to be a horseman and a led horse. Once Jarrett, who had long sight, recognised the rider silhouetted on the crest of a rise.

*"That's Dick Carey,"* he said gruffly to the man who had travelled with him. Ryan nodded, his face inscrutable. In his heart he despised his companion, but he had stuck to him steadfastly since Jarrett had lost his station on the Murrumbidgee, and it was at his suggestion that, Jarrett now made this journey to the country of the waterholes.

When Dick first formed his stations, he had offered Jarrett the third waterhole with its plains, as Frank Ashley had planned to do, but Jarrett had refused it, preferring to remain on the Murrumbidgee. Now, as he travelled across the rich country, he bitterly regretted that he had not even troubled to inspect it when it might have been his for the asking. Never had he seen such a body of feed on any country, and fat stock roamed over the unfenced plains wherever he turned.

*"Carey will never give up an acre of this!"* he exclaimed bitterly, watching Dick across the plain; *"I've never seen a station like it."*

*"Oh, you needn't fear that. He'll give you the station. He's a gentleman, isn't he?"*

*"But he offered it to me when he took it up, and I wouldn't have it. He did the honest thing then."*

*"He's not one to go back,"* Ryan returned, and repeated his first remark with a dark look that gave some obscure meaning to the simple phrase, *"He's a gentleman, isn't he?"*

At the homestead David Macfarlane waited for his host, gazing from the house verandah across the beautiful, park-like country that extended for mile after mile before him in rolling plains, where scattered belts of dark timber told of waterhole or billabong. He thought that he had not seen such a season for grass since he came to the colony. There would be wonderful prosperity for the squatters if they could obtain a secure title to their lands, but everywhere the licences were now in danger. The country had recovered from the financial depression of the last years, but the Governor seemed bent on a policy which meant ruin to the squatters. It would be almost impossible to comply with his new squatting regulations, and commissioners and venial Government officials deprived them of their licences, harassing them in every possible way whenever they failed to fulfil their thousand minor obligations. It almost seemed that they would be driven from the pastures, which, through their efforts, had become the mainstay of the colony, since they could not hope to pay the pound an acre which the distant English Government now demanded as the price of possession.

Discontent and even open sedition were rife in the colony, and the trouble that had long been brewing was in this year of 1845 coming to a head. The message from the squatting club, in answer to which David Macfarlane journeyed to Sydney, forecasted a bitter struggle. The democratic leaders-Wentworth, Lowe, and Dr. Lang-had joined the powerful party of the squatters, which now embraced every political creed. Within its ranks were to be found all men who cherished any grievance against the Governor or his regulations. The old war cry, "*No taxation without representation,*" had been superseded by the squatting cry, "*Fixity of tenure,*" and the whole colony seemed to stand solidly behind the great squatters.

If, here and there, some small landowner, ousted by a powerful neighbour, raised his voice in protest, it was disregarded in the general outcry, and even the members of the elective council recently granted to the colony, lent their voices to the squatting interest, maliciously resisting the Governor on every minor point of administration, and finding an outlet for pent-up personal spite wherever possible.

On one side stood the Governor, always loyal to the distant home Government, farsighted enough to see that the granting of long leases to the squatters would create a land monopoly that future Governments could not break, but obstinately determined to enforce every prerogative of the Crown. Opposed to him were the colonists, still protesting loyalty to English institutions, but demanding fixity of tenure for the squatters, who were irritated beyond measure by the petty injustices and highhanded exactions of the Governor and his officials. All were determined to assert their rights, since transportation had at last ceased, and the colony been granted representative government.

When Dick, warned by Paddladdigaddi of his old friend's presence, came through the house to greet him, he had to speak twice before David Macfarlane roused himself from his preoccupation with the problem that was troubling all squatters. Dick's greeting was warm with the friendship that had grown between them since the older man had helped him to secure his licence. They were curiously unlike in

character, yet each admired in the other the qualities that he himself did not possess, and some secret bond of sympathy existed between the two. They saw it in each other's eyes.

David Macfarlane came often to the station of the Three Waterholes on his journeys between the great rivers, and Dick looked forward to his coming.

They waited on the verandah, watching the approach of Jarrett and Ryan, whose toiling figures seemed oddly to disturb the peace of the plains. David Macfarlane told Dick of the message from the Squatters' Club.

*"They ask all men of standing to travel to Sydney to be present at the ball which is to be given in honour of her Majesty on May 24. It is thought wise of the squatters to give this proof of their loyalty, since the time has come when a determined resistance must be made to the Governor's demands. Also it will give the squatters an opportunity to consider their course of action."* Dick nodded, his eyes on the approaching figures, both of whom he had now recognised.

*"You had better come with me, Dick."*

*"Yes, I'll come,"* Dick said, frowning thoughtfully.

It was dark when Jarrett and Ryan reached the homestead. Jarrett dined with his host, but Dick sent Ryan to the kitchen with his stockman.

Late that night Jarrett broached the subject of the station. He told them his story, while David Macfarlane watched him, sitting motionless in the shadows beyond the light cast by the flicker of a kerosene lamp, and Dick listened attentively, now and then asking a question.

It was not an uncommon story in that year; a tale of drought and losses, of petty fines unpaid, and taxes overdue, of cattle speared by the blacks, and trouble with the Commissioner, which culminated in the finding of a murdered black boy near the home stead.

*"He took away my licence,"* Jarrett said sullenly, *"and I came out to see whether you'd still let me have one of the waterholes."*

*"Did you shoot the black boy,"* Dick asked, and David Macfarlane stirred in his seat in the shadows.

*"It was my gun. They said I did it!"* Looking at his harassed face. Dick had a queer feeling that he spoke as though he were some stupid schoolboy repeating a lesson that he could not understand.

*"But you did not do it, Jarrett,"* he suggested gently. *"You were drunk, and you do not remember."*

Jarrett's tired eyes fastened upon his face with sudden relief.

*"Aye, that's it, Mr. Carey, I can't remember."*

David Macfarlane asked an abrupt question:

*"Was Ryan with you when this happened?"*

*"No, he was away on the other side of the run,"* Jarrett spoke indifferently. *"He knew nothing about it."*

Dick said quietly: *"I will give you the far waterhole, which Frank Ashley meant you to have, on one condition, Jarrett."*

*"I'll do anything I can, Mr. Carey."*

*"Then you must promise to have nothing to do with Ryan."*

Jarrett hesitated, but at last he said bitterly: *"I owe him nothing. It would be better if I'd never seen him. I'll promise that. He can go his own way, and I'll give him the horses."*

David Macfarlane took Dick to task the next day.

*"Man, it was foolish to give away the water-hole. Jarrett will lose it in a year. He can't keep away from the drink."*

*"It was his; I only held it until he asked for it."*

*"He refused it when you offered it first. He had no further claim to it."*

*"You are a magistrate, you had better draw up a transfer for us,"* Dick said, smiling at the older man's annoyance.

David Macfarlane drew up the deed reluctantly, and Jarrett, who could not write made a cross instead of his signature at the bottom of the neatly written document.

Ryan took the horses, and set out for Albury without making trouble, but as he left the homestead he cursed them with a dreadful bitterness that boded no good to any of them should he ever have an opportunity of doing them an injury.

Five days later David Macfarlane and Dick sat in the low four-wheeled buggy which was the favourite vehicle of the squatter, and gazed at a torrent of rushing water. The Murrumbidgee was almost at flood level, and there was no hope of a crossing for many miles.

David Macfarlane watched the river anxiously. Already the back waters were beginning to move, and the sky had a threatening look.

He had waited until Dick had established Jarrett at the third waterhole before leaving, but he wished to reach Sydney as soon as possible. The deep note of the river was a warning to ears well attuned to such warnings, and he knew that days might elapse before they could continue their Journey. He feared a flood. There was nothing to do but to wait and watch the river.

*"There's a shepherd's hut on rising ground a few miles away,"* he said to Dick. *"We'll spend the night there. It's going to rain."* A few drops spattered on the ground as he spoke, but before his two well-broken bay ponies had trotted over the track to the hut the rain had become a steady downpour.

The hut seemed deserted, and there was no answer to their hail. The shepherd, they thought, was away, but as they hastily unharnessed the tired ponies they heard a sound from the hut. They knew it to be the moaning of a man in pain. While David Macfarlane stayed to fasten the hobbles on his ponies, Dick went to investigate. Pushing open the door, he entered the single room to find a man lying on a rough couch. It was the shepherd.

He gazed at Dick with eyes glazed with pain, making no attempt to speak. He was an old man with unkempt hair and beard, and he lay in a curiously twisted position under his coarse blanket. Dick bent over him, asking him what was the matter, and the old man muttered to himself, taking no notice of him. David Macfarlane had entered the hut and he drew the covering from the shepherd's body while the old man cried out in pain at his touch.

The man's leg was crushed and torn from knee to ankle.



"His horse must have fallen on him," David Macfarlane said briefly, examining the crushed and torn flesh. The leg was a sickening sight.

"It's gangrene. We'll have to amputate your leg above the knee if you would live. Man, I have a little surgery. I may be able to save your life."

"Do what you will," the old man groaned, "the pain can be naught worse."

"Is there anything sharp enough to cut the bone?" Dick asked, sick with pity and horror.

"No, but I'm strong in the hands. You must hold him on the table, and I can break the leg against its edge. My knife will do the rest."

Dick shuddered, but the shepherd made no complaint, and they placed him on the table, his leg over its edge. Dick held him, and suddenly there sounded the crack of the breaking bone.

"He has fainted," David Macfarlane said, white of face, but still steady of hand, and proceeded to complete his gruesome surgery.

They watched the shepherd all night, while the rain poured steadily upon the bark roof of the hut, dripping here and there through cracks until they were forced to place vessels to catch the water. The shepherd lay in a stupor of pain and weakness, and they feared for his life, but in the morning he still lived.

Dick attempted to go to the river bank while David Macfarlane watched the old man, but already long tongues of water, thrusting out from the swollen stream, made the intervening stretch over which they had driven the night before impassable.

The Murrumbidgee would be out for days, and they must wait until the flood waters receded, whether the shepherd lived or died. David Macfarlane received the news philosophically.

"Well! Is it not true that not a sparrow falling to the ground escapes the Divine attention? Be sure we have been sent here

by His purpose. He sent the flood water to turn us from the crossing so that this simple shepherd might not perish." He spoke devoutly, and Dick refrained from argument, although he himself had no such conviction of Divine Providence.

## CHAPTER XI.

It was the night of May, 1845, appointed for the celebration of the birth of her most gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, and in Sydney all loyal subjects with any pretension to gentility attended the Birthnight Ball.

Carriages splashed noisily through the muddy streets, where water lay in wait in the hollows, or poured in an unceasing flood through some channel cut by the storms of the last fortnight, until each vehicle lurching slowly towards the lights of the new Government House became leviathan, churning its way through an angry sea.

Sydney had been thickly blanketed with low grey clouds for many days, and the square tower and turreted chimneys of the Governor's residence could scarcely be seen through the mist, even with the aid of partial illumination provided by the new gas company, but in the ballroom, where Sir George and Lady Gipps received their guests, there seemed to be only colour and light.

Their Excellencies stood within the entrance of the ballroom, receiving a constant stream of guests. Representatives of all classes of colonial society bowed before them, passing on to be lost in the stream of colour that eddied through the room, until the scene was a changing sea of gay silks and satins and military uniforms, in whose brightness the dark coats of civilian gallants were scarcely noticed.

The wives and daughters of townsmen and squatters flaunted gowns brought from London and Paris, across the wide and stormy Pacific Ocean. In the holds of many little ships, for the Birthnight Ball had been the subject most discussed by Sydney society for six months. A newspaper controversy had raged over the vexed question of attendance, while politician and squatter, soldier and merchant had argued hotly as to whether a non-attendance meant as a protest against the Governor's new squatting regulations could be construed as disloyalty to the Crown. Finally, weeks earlier, the fiat had gone forth from the squatting club in Bent-street that all who could do so should travel to Sydney and should prove, by their attendance at the Birthnight Ball, that they still honoured the Queen, however bitterly they might quarrel with her representative.

A distinguished gathering moved in the great ballroom, and the fiercest opponents of the Governor, in their bearing, sought to display at the same time a dutiful respect for the person of their Sovereign and an unflinching determination to resist the demands of his Excellency Sir George Gipps.

There was gunpowder in the air, and men turned their heads to watch the massive figure of the democratic leader. William Charles Wentworth, or listened uneasily when they heard the loud voice of Dr Lang.

Sir George Gipps, who had proved himself a match for the cleverest and most scrupulous of his adversaries, noted the presence of the popular leaders with indifference, but his wife's eyes were strained and her charming manner concealed a feeling almost of panic. She singled out her husband's personal enemies from the moving throng, watching them anxiously.

Robert Lowe, coldly courteous, and immaculately clad, half blind from albinism, listened to the critic Forster. She thought unhappily that perhaps Forster quoted verses from his satire, "The Devil and the Governor." His bitter verses haunted her.

Mr Benjamin Boyd talked to the squatters Campbells and Martins from Monaro and the south, Lawsons from the west, Whites from the north. All districts were represented to-night and all were in league against the beloved husband who stood beside her in resplendent uniform, speaking to the colonel of the Kings Own Regiment. She smiled graciously at the colonel. He at least was a military officer and opposed to sedition. All soldiers and Government officials were the friends of authority, and even Sir George

Gipps was beginning to realise that authority might need friends in a colony so remote from, the seat of all authority.

Gentle Lady Gipps was very tired to-night. There had been an official levee in the afternoon, and, although few influential people had, absented themselves those present had made little effort to conceal their hostility. There was a pause in the stream of guests, and she

turned thankfully to listen to the conversation of the friendly group about her.

On the other side of the room a tall officer alternately studying the grey mists floating in from the harbour without the window near which he lounged and the colonial youth and beauty who obviously failed to excite his interest, within, wondered discontentedly who the next arrival would be. He thought sarcastically that the stage was set. Their Excellencies standing in the entrance, a fiddler tuning a lone fiddle in the gallery, and in the background the expectant groups waiting upon the official pleasure. His lip curled. In a minute some colonial rustic would curtsy clumsily before him.

The Consul for the Hans Towns was announced and scarcely anyone turned a head.

He was a plain little Dutchman with an uninteresting wife. But the officer who waited alone deserted by friends whose patience he had sorely tried, bent forward in a sudden uncontrollable passion of excitement. From his position he could see the three guests who accompanied the Dutchman and he watched them with feverish intensity. In very truth he thought that he beheld a miracle since all the loveliness of the world, for this man was concentrated in the face of the girl who moved forward on the arm of the Consul for the Hans Towns. A slim and graceful figure she swayed lightly before their Excellencies, with the ease of one acquainted with Courts, the skirt of her panniered taffetas frock gleaming with great clusters of embroidery. She wore a frock that seemed all of pansies and her eyes in her pale face outshone the darkly tinted flowers on her skirt. Her face was illumined with some inner light as though it held a secret that must still prove a riddle to all save herself. It was a beautiful and a proud face with delicate determined features beneath a mass of fine dark hair.

There was eager whispering in corners of the ballroom "*The Americans who came in on the French yacht Marie Louise.*"

The Consul presented an old man and his daughter. They were strangers in the room, but with them had entered some new and troubling element, for, although the daughter was fair and gentle there was something fanatical in the face of the old man.

He looked at them with the gaze of an eagle, cruel, bright, and implacable, as though all laughter had been burnt from his face by the flame of some devouring purpose. Even the Governor looked after him with a frown as he passed on with the Consul, and, watching his face, Lady Gipps forgot her intention to detain his beautiful ward.

The Consul introduced them to his friends "*Miss Elizabeth Gordon, of America Her guardian, Mr Colin Stewart, and his daughter. Miss Janet, who have come to the colony on the yacht Marie Louise.*"

The music sounded, and people began to take places for the first dance. Miss Gordon turned from a group of disappointed gentlemen to the officer of the 99th Regiment whom she found at her side claiming her acquaintance. She scarcely seemed surprised, but, watching them go, Janet Stewart asked a question of Lieutenant Carson, of the King's Own.

*"Sir John Kent? He has been in the colony for three months, and even his colonel is tired of him. He is not here of his own will. Some scandal at Court, I hear, and the Queen requested his exchange to the colonies. He suffers his banishment with an ill grace, scarcely troubling to conceal his scorn for all colonists, but he's uncommonly lucky at cards."*

The Consul for the Hans Towns drew the American aside. *"The Commissioner of Police is here to-night. It would be well to question him discreetly concerning the man you seek before you approach the Governor. I have begged an audience, which his Excellency has been graciously pleased to grant for the morrow."*

The old man followed him across the room, talking earnestly, until the dancers hid them both from Janet Stewart's anxious eyes.

The music of the dance penetrated to the official apartments on the left of the hall, where the Governor's secretary sat at a wide table strewn with papers, but he scarcely lifted his head from his work. The fast French yacht Marie Louise, which had been chartered by an English merchant and had made a record trip, had that morning brought despatches from the Home Government, and the secretary frowned as he read them.

He was a slight man in dark clothes, an insignificant figure who would altogether escape the notice of many people, but whose face might hold the attention of the more observant. It was the face of a dreamer with whom life had gone awry, but who still dreamed, a tired and deeply lined face. He threw aside the despatch he had just read with a bitter laugh. Its stupidity would not be amusing to the Governor, to whose pet scheme for the conserving of food supplies my Lord Stanley definitely put an end. Gipps would read it tomorrow, dark eyes keen and scornful under his broad, intelligent forehead lower lip thrust out above the obstinate chin. It was a trick of his when moved, but he would say little.

His secretary thought regretfully of the tall brick boxes on Cockatoo Island in which the Governor had stored wheat as an experiment. The people called them Gipps's Bottles. Picking up the despatch, he re-read the last sentence *"The process is to be immediately discontinued, as it interferes with the direction of Divine Providence, and is detrimental to the interests of trade."* He rose, smothering an angry exclamation. There could be little progress in the colony under present conditions of government. After all there was much sense in old Doctor McGregor's ranting of separation; but the Governor would steadfastly strive to the end to reserve all authority for the Crown. He crossed to the door leading into the next room, then paused, holding it slightly ajar. He had meant to visit a house in the town, and was already late, but two people were ensconced in the next room, and he recognised the voice of Sir John Kent. Sir John spoke with a passion that caused the secretary, who knew him well, to stand amazed.

*"Elizabeth ! Elizabeth! Have I not loved you since the day we met? The wide sea has become a narrow stream between us. Did I not say that it must be so?"*

The answering voice held the secretary's attention.

*"I have crossed the widest sea to find you. Is that what you would say?"*

*"No tongue can say what I would say to you Elizabeth. But I know that only one thing could bring the old man here. Does his quest for young Ashley end in this colony? I have prayed that it might be so."*

The secretary, who had begun to make a noiseless progress away from the door stopped suddenly and listened, his face curiously intent.

*"My guardian has word that Dick Ashley has fled to this colony, and I trust that we may find him. Have you not heard of his presence?"* Elizabeth Gordon spoke coldly and clearly.

*"If he is here I will find him for you or do anything you ask, provided only that you smile upon my suit."* Sir John's voice was still eager, but his eyes grew suddenly watchful as though he had a doubt of her.

*"Let us return to the ballroom."* Elizabeth rose impatiently "I have not seen the leaders of the colony. You shall point them out to me."

They passed from the room and the waiting secretary saw for an instant the fold of a frock embroidered with many-coloured pansies, and a vision of dark hair and of deeply blue eyes in a beautiful face.

He waited in deep thought for some minutes, then, taking hat and coat from a closet, prepared to leave the official apartments; but for the second time he had delayed just long enough to intrude upon the privacy of two of his Excellency's guests.

In a deserted corridor he came upon a gentleman who discoursed with the Commissioner of Police. They sat upon an uncushioned seat of cedar wood, but the hardness of the seat had little to do with the discomfort that showed in the usually stolid face of the Commissioner. The voice of the stranger was even and cold, so that his hearers flinched almost as though the voice were a cutting weapon inflicting a wound. So might an avenging sword have spoken had it been granted speech.

*"For every golden year cut from my son's future, Richard Ashley shall suffer the torments of the lost soul that he shall be. I have sworn it day and night since they brought me my murdered son. There has not been one hour in which I have failed to swear it."*

The white-haired fanatical old man seemed more dreadful in his stillness than he would have been had he raged in the passion that consumed him. He walked away from them his lips tightly locked, his eyes staring at some vision of eternal punishment, and Mr. Mills turned in agitation to the secretary.

*"The man's mad, Mr. Johnstone, stark, staring mad!"*

The secretary shook his head. *"Not mad, I think, Mr. Mills, but hate flows through his veins like some poison, until his very life blood is charged with it"*

*"He wants me to give him a posse of police to scour the country for the murderer of his son, and the murder was committed in America almost ten years ago!"* The Commissioner was righteously indignant.

"As to that! I have enough on my hands already. It is impossible to apprehend the malefactors of this city with the inadequate powers granted to me. Yet I am continually criticised in the public Press, and the Governor fails to resent it!"

*"Ten years ago,"* the secretary murmured thoughtfully, *"then how does this old man know that the murderer came to the colony?"*

*"He has pursued him like a bloodhound," Mr. Mills returned admiringly. "First to England, then here. He has questioned the squatters to-night, but can hear nothing of him, although at first he thought he was hot on the scent. He knows the man came out here as an emigrant from England, but he has failed to learn the name he used."* He added impressively as the secretary moved away *"He'll find out what he wants to know sooner or later and then heaven help the man who murdered this Colin Stewart's son."*

The Commissioner returned to the distractions; of the ballroom, but his enjoyment was spoilt. Not even the recollection that he had caused the ticket-of-leave compositor of the offending newspaper to be impressed as a special policeman for that evening, thus preventing the appearance of the hostile paper on the morrow, could dispel the chilling sensation that remained from his interview with Colin Stewart. Meanwhile Colin Stewart accosted his ward, Elizabeth Gordon, as she listened to Sir John Kent's bitter criticisms of their fellow guests

*"I have news, Elizabeth. I will find Janet, and do you question especially the gentlemen who come from the district known as Australia Felix."*

Thus reminded of a duty, Elizabeth joined a group of eager gentlemen who talked near them, her eyes grown suddenly inscrutable to Sir John's keen gaze and his protests unheeded.

It was a group of squatters who had talked with their leader, Mr. Benjamin Boyd, of Boydtown, exulting in the news he gave them, since he also had received by the Marie Louise letters which told of an association formed in England to assist the cause of the squatters. Mr. Boyd held 388,000 acres of land, for which he paid £80 a year quit rent, and his arguments in favour of fixity of tenure were hot and insistent.

"Fixity of tenure must be secured, gentlemen," he concluded fiercely as Elizabeth approached. "Never doubt it."

Elizabeth had heard the end of his fiery speech as she approached, and she interrupted the flow of compliment with which she was greeted with a question.

*"What is meant by your phrase of 'fixity of tenure,' Mr. Boyd?"*

Colonel Breton of the King's Own Regiment answered dryly, his eyes on Elizabeth's face.

*"It means all things to all men, but chiefly it annoys his Excellency."*

Charles Campbell, courteous and kindly squatter from Manero, would have poured oil on the troubled waters, but young John Barry interrupted hotly:

"It means that a man shall reap where he has sown. It means that we shall no longer be robbed of our runs by Government officials or by jobbing land agents after we have travelled for weary months, beset by danger of death from thirst or from a spear thrust, to find the permanent water that alone makes squatting possible. Who fights the blacks, gentlemen, opening up the country for the cattle and sheep which are the mainstay of the colonists?"

*"Certainly not the King's Own Regiment, Sir,"* the Colonel said haughtily, offering his arm to Elizabeth, but Elizabeth looked past

him, smiling, and John Barry gave her his arm, triumph in his keen young face.

## CHAPTER XII.

The mist drifted steadily in from the sea, until the Governor's garden was filled with its soft wet folds. Robert Johnstone hastened away from the lighted house through a world of wraith and stillness, his light footsteps scarcely sounding on the gravelled paths. Ships bells were faint whispers from the harbour, and the trees and shrubs half-seen shadows about him.

Near the main gate a group of men waited in silence. They were ticket-of-leave men who had been impressed for special duty by the Commissioner of Police.

On duty within the grounds, they had drifted back to the main gate, where they waited drearily for the hour which should set them free. One of them recognised the Governor's secretary, and touched his sleeve as he passed.

*"Excuse my stopping your Honor, but there's been a mistake. I'm the compositor of the Australian newspaper, and unless I get back there will be no paper published to-morrow. Could your Honor give me leave to go."*

Robert Johnstone shook his head. He knew that there had been no mistake.

He passed the sentries at the gates, and hastened towards the Government Printing Offices. A strange excitement possessed him. In the days before he had become the Governor's secretary, he had created a puppet show for; himself, thereby saving his reason.

The world was his stage, and the actors presented a play that had neither beginning nor end, but Robert Johnstone interpreted the half revealed plot with an eager understanding.

To-night he had an overpowering desire to share the action.

All day Sydney had celebrated the Queen's birthday. All day the troops had paraded with colours flying; all day long the bands had played and the guns fired. The town was full of holiday makers. Late though it was they still passed and repassed beneath the flickering street lights. To the secretary each one suggested a new and bewildering train of thought. These people who crowded the town to-night had come from the ends of the world. Scarcely one of them who had not suffered hardship and peril, long stormy months at sea in little ships, lonely days and nights adventuring in the leagues of green-gold bush which lay behind the fringe of settlement. They created an atmosphere of purpose, a sense of activity, in the centre of which the dominating figure of Colin Stewart held Robert Johnstone's attention. He was still thinking of him when he came to the house that he sought.

It was a small, dingy looking house beside the Government Printing Offices, and at first sight seemed to be in total darkness, but as he approached a door opened and a woman stepped into the opening, holding a ship's lantern. She was a woman of middle age, plainly dressed and wearing her hair strained from her face, but the ugly Victorian fashion merely served to accentuate the rare strength and

perception revealed in her eyes and the lines of her firmly modelled mouth and chin.

When she saw the secretary she stepped back, still holding the light, and he followed with an apology for his lateness, but she was entirely concerned with the business in hand.

*"I'm glad that you have come, Mr. Johnstone. We are in need of assistance."*

The secretary bowed to the other occupants of the room.

*"I shall be glad to render any service that I can, Mrs. Jamieson."*

Caroline Jamieson studied him thoughtfully, motioning them to be seated. She placed the lamp upon a table with a deliberate movement, and when she spoke her speech had the same quality. It was characteristic of her that she weighed each sentence and avoided all exaggeration. She had the Judicial mind, and at the same time an inexhaustible patience and sympathy with the unfortunate immigrants; whose cause she championed.

A man and woman sat stiffly on their chairs, watching her with a terrible anxiety. They were sure of her good will, although she spoke to Robert Johnstone in the English tongue and they knew only the Gaelic. She was known to be the immigrants' friend. They were poorly dressed, the man wearing the fustian of the labourer, the woman holding with trembling work-worn hands the shawl which covered her thin shoulders.

Mrs. Jamieson told their story briefly and without heat, but her eyes flashed with the indignation that she refrained from expressing, and there could be felt in her manner an evident intention to obtain justice.

*"These two poor people belong to a party of Highland emigrants sent out by agents who promised them employment. They cannot speak English, and were turned adrift as soon as the Government bounty was collected by the agent. I had intended to send them by the Hunter River steamer to-morrow to a family who will give them employment, but to-night they learnt that their daughter, who was to have gone with them, has been detained on the ship Swallow. I sent for you, hoping that you might be able to obtain an order for her release from his Excellency, since the celebrations make it impossible for me to approach anyone in authority to-night."*

The secretary shook his head in dismay. *"At this late hour it would be impossible, Madam, impossible!"*

*"Then you must accompany us to the ship, Mrs. Jamieson returned as firmly."* Robert Johnstone looked from her to the two people who waited with the heart-breaking patience of the honourable poor, only their eyes betraying the misery and terror that tortured them.

*"But what is it you propose to do?"* he said

Mrs. Jamieson answered instantly, *"To visit the ship."*

*"To-night!"* Robert Johnstone was incredulous, but Mrs. Jamieson remained entirely composed.

*"To-morrow would be too late. A man who is accustomed to supply me with fish has promised to take me to the Swallow. We should leave immediately lest our delay exhaust his patience."*



The secretary considered the course she planned and was appalled, but he knew Mrs. Jamieson. This woman, who was in the habit of making long and perilous journeys to the outer settlements in order to secure employment for the helpless immigrants who crowded Sydney, would not be daunted by the prospect of a midnight adventure on the fog-bound harbour. Accustomed as she was to facing the ridicule of Sydney and the indignation of governing officials and employers, she would have little fear of an infuriated ship's captain and his crew. She would certainly carry out her plans whether he accompanied her or not.

He looked again at the two immigrants, and knew that he must conquer his reluctance and accompany them. Whatever happened he could not allow Mrs. Jamieson to undertake this thing unaided. Perhaps her shrewd mind read his thoughts, for she said suddenly, with a smile.

*"I perceive that although you have no liking for the enterprise, Mr. Johnstone, you will accompany us and lend your authority."*

*"I perceive that I have no choice, Mrs. Jamieson,"* the Governor's secretary laughed ruefully.

*"Then let us go, now,"* Mrs. Jamieson returned promptly.

They set out as the clock chimed midnight, the secretary leading, carrying the ship's lantern, and Mrs. Jamieson following with the man and woman, to whom she spoke comfortingly in their native Gaelic. The woman was weeping silently, but the man's rage and despair were such that Mrs. Jamieson had grave doubts of her ability to control him. She half thought of leaving him behind, but he was emphatic in his determination to go to the ship, and she decided that she might need him.

Robert Johnstone had a thorough knowledge of the twisted harbourside streets and led them unerringly to the stone steps where the fisherman's boat waited. The fog thickened until they could no longer see each other's faces, and even the rays of the lantern failed to penetrate the gloom. Their voices seemed to come in whispers when they spoke, and it was a relief when they felt the stone quay beneath their feet, and knew that they were indeed beside the water. They could hear it unquiet sighing against the stone as they listened. They were not far from Government House, and notes of distant music mingled with the soft, mysterious sound of the water.

*"Are you there, Farrell?"* Mrs. Jamieson called, and it was as though spirits conversed when the boatman answered her.

*"I'm still waiting for you, M'am. I thought I heard you come."*

*"His Excellency's secretary is with us,"* Mrs. Jamieson returned diplomatically, and there was a whispered conversation in the boat, followed by a scuffling sound as the boatman who had spoken to them climbed to the wharf, lantern in hand.

They groped their way through the fog to the steps, where the boatman swung his light and a second man steadied the boat, helping them to their places with a hand that was wet and clammy.

*"You can find the Swallow in this fog, Farrell?"* Mrs. Jamieson asked, as the boat moved slowly and hesitatingly into the thickness.

*"Aye, M'am. She lies close in, not far from the Marie Louise. I saw her when I brought passengers to the Marie Louise this morning. She's getting ready to put to sea."*

The boat slipped into the mist and they sat in silence. They might have been floating in infinite space, voyaging from a lost world, but Robert Johnstone was merely conscious of the acute discomfort of his position and a fear lest he should prove incapable of dealing with the situation that was about to confront him. He no longer desired to share in the pageant staged for him by all men and women whose lives held purposes. Far better to stand aside and watch as he had sworn to do when he became the Governor's secretary. He thought with secret mirth that no knight errant had ever set out on a chivalrous mission so unchivalrously. He wondered what Mrs. Jamieson was thinking. This boat hold most curious contrasts within its small dimensions, the mother whose heart was torn with grief and terror, the father aflame with an inarticulate anger and passionate resentment, Mrs. Jamieson outwardly calm, but inwardly moved by some instinctive hatred of injustice, the boatsman stolidly rowing in the fog, an enigma to whose thoughts he had no clue.

He was suddenly aware of a shadow gliding from the mist ahead of them, and in an instant they had collided with a second boat, rocking violently. Angry voices hailed them in no uncertain tones, and when Farrell would have backed away a man leapt into their boat, shouting to his companions to hold fast to them. He fell upon the boatman and his voice rose triumphantly, *"Ha, Farrell, I have you at last. You'll boast no longer that you can outwit any excise officer on the waterfront."*

Farrell answered with a mixture of malice and humility, *"You're wrong, Mr. Cunning-ham. I'm an honest fisherman, and don't make such boasts. Someone has miscalled me to you."*

The officer jeered. *"Honest fisherman! Honest smuggler! No honest fisherman is abroad on the harbour to-night. Take care they throw nothing overboard, men. How many of you are there?"* He peered into the fog, trying to count the blurred figures in the boat.

Robert Johnstone spoke from his seat in the stern, *"You are mistaken, Cunningham, Mrs. Jamieson and I are taking two immigrants to the Swallow to claim their daughter. We have engaged this fisherman's boat for the night."*

*"Sir, I beg your pardon, and yours, Mrs. Jamieson,"* the officer stuttered in his consternation, but he still grasped the fisherman's arm. *"This boatman is a noted smuggler, M'am. Only last week he escaped us in the mist. I'll have you yet, Farrell,"* he said grimly, giving him a rough shake as he let him go.

Mrs. Jamieson accepted his apologies and waited tranquilly while he returned to the excise boat, whose occupants drifted out of sight, still casting aspersions upon the character of her boatman.

She listened in silence, wisely determining to remonstrate with Farrell at some more propitious time, and with a muttered curse upon all excise men the boatman rowed swiftly towards the tall black shape of a ship which loomed ahead of them.

They hailed her loudly. *"Swallow! Ahoy there, Swallow!"*

The tall Highlander leapt to his feet, a torrent of Gaelic pouring from his lips.

Farrell pulled him roughly into his seat, but a sudden idea seized Robert Johnstone, and he called excitedly into the darkness.

*"Cunningham, Excise-officer Cunningham." "Here, sir, coming sir."* The excise officer's voice came faintly to them, and presently they heard the splash of oars as his boat returned.

The excise boat slid into place beside them and the Governor's secretary regarded it thankfully.

*"We shall need the service of an officer of her Majesty to execute the business of the Governor, Mr. Cunningham. We can doubtless count upon you and your men?"*

*"I am an officer of the Crown,"* Mr. Cunningham observed stiffly, his baleful gaze fixed upon Farrell, who returned it with an equal dislike.

*"And as such I feel sure that when Mrs. Jamieson has explained her need for your services, Mr. Cunningham, you will willingly render them,"* the secretary agreed smoothly.

*"Everyone knows of Mrs. Jamieson's goodness to the poor,"* Cunningham said gruffly, and Mrs. Jamieson hastily told him what they wanted of him.

Mr. Cunningham wasted no time. A rope ladder dangled from the stern of the Swallow, where a dinghy trailed, and he and his men scaled it with ease. Robert Johnstone climbed the swaying ladder, clinging to the slippery rope with difficulty as the excise officer's shout shattered the silence above him.

*"In the Queen's name. I call upon you in the name of Her Majesty."*

He listened with satisfaction, proceeding to the deck when the ensuing disturbance had somewhat abated.

There were lanterns burning on the deck, and in the dim light a man confronted the excise men, behind him a group of bewildered sailors.

Robert Johnstone addressed the excise officer. *"Does the captain refuse to deliver the girl to her parents?"*

The captain turned and stormed at him. "If I were ready to put to sea or you didn't wear the Queen's uniform I'd throw you over the rail, every mother's son of you." He swore vigorously.

The secretary spoke sternly. *"I am the secretary of his Excellency Sir George Gipps. If you do not immediately deliver the girl to this officer of the Crown it will be the worse for you. Men have been hanged in Sydney for less than this. When the fog lifts you may see the gallows upon Church Hill. Come, captain,"* he ended persuasively, *"there's yet time to withdraw your head from the noose."*

The mate, who had been listening, crossed the deck and spoke to the captain.

*"Curse you, take the girl,"* the captain said violently.

He strode to the companion-way, and presently appeared dragging the sobbing, frightened girl. She was little more than a child, and he pushed her towards the secretary, who thankfully urged her towards the ship's ladder. At the foot of the ladder her mother waited, and the child threw her arms about her with a wild cry of thankfulness. Mrs.

Jamieson's level accents mingled with the anxious voice of the mother and the rapid angry Gaelic of the father.

They thanked Mr. Cunningham, but the matter of their boatman still rankled with him. He gave him a last warning as the boats drew away from one another.

*"I have my eye on you, Farrell. Continue your smuggling and I'll have you yet."*

Farrell landed them in safety on the wharf from which he had taken them, refusing to accept the money which Mrs. Jamieson would have given him. He said gruffly that he was glad to oblige Mrs. Jamieson at any time and no one mentioned his smuggling activities.

They returned to the house beside the Government Printing Offices, Mrs. Jamieson talking to Robert Johnstone of her plans for settling small families of immigrants upon farms of their own. She hoped that his Excellency would give his approval, but the secretary knew that her scheme would probably obtain little support from Sir George Gipps.

He left her standing at the door of her house with her immigrant family, and it seemed to him that her lantern was a star seen through the fog that enveloped the town.

### CHAPTER XIII.

The host of the Royal Hotel bowed to the guests who sat at the breakfast table of his own private parlour, bringing the grace and charm of rank and wealth to an inn more accustomed to humble manners and the harsher voices of the lowly born. He savoured the pleasure of the professional innkeeper in the entertainment of strangers of quality, while himself attending to their wants assuring them that the fare though plain, was good and hoping that it might meet with their approval.

*"Your fare is of the best,"* Colin Stewart assured him courteously. Had the pile of delicate garfish caught in the shining harbour waters been the coarse porridge of the labourer he would still have said the same. He had a fine consideration for those of inferior station.

His daughter Janet smiled at the innkeeper from her place at the end of the table, where she poured the Bohea tea into shallow cups patterned with red Chinese dragons. Her grey eyes were shadowed with the anxiety that now seldom left her but her fair hair was touched with the golden sunlight from the eastern window behind her and her face was calm.

Her father's ward sat upon his right hand, and it was to her that he turned when the innkeeper left the room. Janet watched them wistfully. She had long since accustomed herself to the knowledge that her father preferred to share his confidence with Elizabeth Gordon. It had not always been so. In the first bitterness of his grief for the loss of his only son he had turned to her for sympathy and had found in her a feeling akin to his own. In their veins ran the fierce Highland blood of ancestors nourished in the clan traditions that demanded an eye for eye a tooth for tooth. The blood of his son cried from the ground to Colin Stewart for vengeance as it would have cried to some Stewart cradled on the mist-haunted mountains of Appin steeled by the high clear wind of Scotland and in the first

passion of her grief Janet Stewart had never doubted that his longing for revenge was just and fitting. She could not quite remember when the first change of feeling had occurred but she could quite clearly remember the incident which had caused her faint misgivings to crystallise into a cold certainty and terror.

It had happened some time after the death of James Gordon when Elizabeth had come to them as her father's ward. By lavish offers of reward and unceasing effort Colin Stewart had obtained information which could leave little doubt as to the slayer of his son. In spite of fierce opposition from Henry Ashley he had succeeded in obtaining a warrant for the arrest of Henry's brother Richard, but search as he would he could find no trace of the missing lad. Nor could he find any motive for the murder unless as he suspected his son had been a favoured suitor for the hand of the daughter of his old friend James Gordon. He watched Elizabeth suspiciously but in her gentle compassion for himself and Janet he could detect no sign which might signify some special knowledge. His passion for revenge had become an obsession excluding all other interests until any sign of opposition from those about him called forth an outburst of rage which terrified them and which Janet especially dreaded. She had herself warned Elizabeth who at first protested against the bitter denunciations of Dick Ashley that her father must not be crossed in any way, but in watching the growth of her father's obsession she had herself grown dimly to perceive whither they were drifting. Then had occurred the incident which made her long to abandon the quest for revenge a quest which poisoned every happening of their daily life clouding all natural feelings and loving memories with its evil shadow. She reproached herself bitterly for ever having lent herself to her father's plans, encouraging in him a passion that she at length perceived must prove his undoing.

She and Elizabeth had waited for him late one night when the household was in bed sitting with their sewing before the crackling fire. When at last he came there was an excitement in his manner that could mean but one thing - he had news of Dick Ashley.

Sitting in this Sydney tavern for a moment Janet closed her eyes and saw a picture from another year in another land. The old man standing in a doorway shaking with excitement his white hair disarranged and his eyes feverishly bright his voice high and shrill pouring forth a torrent of rapid words to two girls who shrank from him in terror, telling them they must prepare to sail for England within the week for God had delivered their enemy into their hands.

She saw Elizabeth Gordon rise, crying a horrified protest to the old man, saw herself kneeling at his side in anguish and fear, and the hurried sending of a servant for old Dr. Hanrahan. The vision faded. She was here in this quiet room and her father had never had another seizure, but never again would Colin Stewart's will be crossed by that of his daughter or of his ward. Janet submitted quietly to his every desire watching over him with a tender solicitude but her father sensed a change in her just as he had perceived that Elizabeth now readily lent herself to the search for Dick Ashley and interested herself more and more in his plans.

This morning he talked eagerly of the news he had gathered at the Birthnight Ball, while Elizabeth listened attentively cool and un-

troubled in her frilled pink gown, donned because the rain had ceased and the sun shone as warmly as though it were a summers day in the England she had left five months earlier. Colin Stewart talked on, neglecting the breakfast set before him.

Almost everyone of the gentlemen who call themselves squatters could tell me of one Francis Ashley, when I questioned them last night, Elizabeth. He was born in this colony and from the description given me I know that he is the son of Richard Ashley, the elder. By judicious inquiry I found that he had last been seen travelling towards the pastoral district known as Australia Felix, and by great good fortune I met a gentleman who not only had seen him with a cousin who resembled him but who also remembered the name of this cousin."

"I also discovered this," Elizabeth said quickly. "The cousin is known as Richard Carey. Did you discover where he now resides?"

The old man nodded coldly his voice triumphant.

"He has become a squatter and so can expect no help from the Governor. He has delivered himself into my hands. This morning I interviewed the Governor, and I should need only to present my warrant in order to obtain the assistance necessary for the apprehension of Richard Ashley. Sir George Gipps will be glad to avail himself of on opportunity of seizing the Ashley lands for the English Crown. All will be as I would have it."

"Eat your breakfast, father." Janet said gently and although her father made an impatient gesture he resumed his meal.

Janet brought him his hat and coat soon after breakfast and he thanked her with detached kindness. A fever consumed him excluding all natural feeling, but outwardly he had grown to make pretence that he lived the life of an ordinary man. To Janet it was a sorry and heart breaking pretence.

Upstairs Elizabeth studied herself as well as she could in the small square mirror which swung on its stand on her dressing table. She had a bonnet and a rose parasol to match her pink gown. Elizabeth's gown betrayed a delicate fastidiousness and an indifference to cost for which Janet often scolded her. She descended the narrow stairs to the hall of the inn and leaving Janet who wished to wait her father's return made her way towards the public gardens apparently unaware of the interest that her progress excited. In Sydney a pretty woman always commanded attention. But Elizabeth had so much trouble in avoiding the muddier parts of the streets that she failed to perceive that she passed acquaintances made on the previous night somewhat to their discomfort.

The gardens were green and glistening in the sunlight and the earth soft and wet beneath her feet as she followed a winding path to the harbour side.

Elizabeth looked about her for companionship, but it was early and not even a gardener dug in his borders. Across the sparkling blue water she could see the Marie Louise the 400 ton yacht which had brought them to Sydney. On the deck of the Marie Louise red-capped French sailors strained upon a rope. She heard their shrill cries "*Ensembles, ensembles.*"

Their voices rang across the intervening water. Elizabeth strolled nearer to watch them unconsciously twirling her gay parasol and an excise officer, who had chosen this bright morning to stroll along the water front cast a keen glance in her direction and slipped unobtrusively behind the rocky mound near which he had paused to observe the shipping. His precaution was justified, he thought, since a boat rowed by a red capped sailor had left the Frenchman, and the vessel happened to be particularly under suspicion. Her Majesty's excise officer had reason to believe that the captain of the Marie Louise intended to land contraband and join in the smuggling that was the favourite occupation of more than a few visiting sea captains. Watching the boat, Excise-officer Cunningham was puzzled. The lady of the exquisite clothes who waited alone on the shore below him, had undoubtedly signalled to the Marie Louise with her parasol and the response had been too prompt for the signal to have been unexpected. The Marie Louise had brought passengers and this might be a passenger wishing to go aboard but strange things happened on the harbour. Scratching his head, Mr. Cunningham determined to watch events and reserve his judgment.

Meanwhile, quite unaware of his proximity, Elizabeth waited placidly for the boat from the Marie Louise. Apparently the gardens were deserted, as Lenoir had said they would be at this hour. She watched with approval the nimble little brown man who had been her devoted slave throughout the voyage, skilfully manoeuvre his boat between the rocks and draw it up upon the sand.

Lenoir would assuredly be trustworthy. She greeted him in French, and the little sailor replied, his abnormally long arms and knotted hands always moving. *"But certainly he was pleased to see his M'selle. It was an age since she had left the Marie Louise. The ship was desolate."*

He listened attentively as Elizabeth began to speak, his quick brown eyes roving from her face to the sea or the gardens and back to her face, but no word or tone of her voice escaping him.

*"And Lenoir, when I need the boat you promise to be ready and to do this thing,"* Elizabeth said at last, and Lenoir nodded his head emphatically.

"It is nothing, M'selle, nothing," he assured her. "I shall not fail you. Do not fear it."

"And you will get news of the man?" Elizabeth persisted.

*"But certainly, M'selle. Have no fear. I will ask in the taverns. A few sous spent for rum and tongues are loosed. I, Lenoir, who you observe, have much cunning. I shall hear all things and I shall tell nothing while saying much - but this is too much money, M'selle! I require but a few sous for the rum!"*

However, a thrifty upbringing proved too much for his gallantry, and, hastily pocketing the notes lest Elizabeth should heed his protests, he climbed into his own boat and rowed back to the Marie Louise.

Elizabeth waited for a moment in thought, then walked swiftly towards the gates. Colin Stewart would soon return to the inn and she must be there to hear the result of his interview with Sir George Gipps. Moreover, Sir John Kent might call early to satisfy himself

that the ladies were not indisposed after the gaiety of the previous night, and she did not desire that he should find her absent.

The boat from the Marie Louise moved across the little slapping waves, propelled by the oars of Lenoir, who sang as he rowed, happily unconscious of the scrutiny to which he was subjected. His nodding red cap was a conspicuous object, attracting attention to the boat even from a window of the Governor's study, where his Excellency sat at a round mahogany table listening courteously to the American who had come to him bearing a warrant for the arrest one of her Majesty's subjects, and who had asked his assistance against an unknown squatter.

Colin Stewart sat with his back to the open window, through which Sir George Gipps could see the red cap of Lenoir and the slender spars and graceful lines of the Marie Louise outlined against the sailing clouds and the blue water.

The American spoke with the unhesitating precision of one who had rehearsed his tale many times, yet he still told it as though it had happened yesterday, so that his words created living images.

*"You have this American warrant for the arrest of Richard Ashley?"* Sir George said at last, and with shaking hands Colin Stewart unfolded the wrappings from a package. He handed the heavy parchment, sealed with a great seal, to his Excellency.

It rustled faintly between the Governor's fingers, and its dry and wordless whisper spoke more loudly to the three men than the voice of some shouting multitude. To Colin Stewart it was the voice of avenging God, and to Sir George Gipps that of all government, but in its rustling Robert Johnstone heard the faint stir of the invisible machinery of another world. Watching Colin Stewart's face, preoccupied with a theory of his own, as the Governor read the warrant for the arrest of one Richard Ashley, the secretary perceived a strand of an unseen web woven about the lives of men, who, blinded by their own passions, lent themselves to the power that fashioned it, giving a virtue or a vice, a weakness or a strength, until a purpose was accomplished and a tool discarded. Why else did men so often bring about their own destruction, as must this old man who had become an edged tool in the hands of a power stronger than himself? The secretary wondered that a man could be so possessed, but Colin Stewart had eyes only for the Governor. He lent forward in his heavy chair, thin old hands clenched on its arms, so intent that it seemed the very urgency of his desire must compel the Governor to do his will.

The room became ominously still, and when the Governor looked up, asking a sudden question, his voice seemed to disperse a gathering oppression, bringing relief to Robert Johnstone. To Colin Stewart the question was disturbing.

"You have witnesses to identify this man if he can be found in the colony?"

*"Your Excellency! I myself have known him since his childhood, as also have my ward. Elizabeth Gordon and my daughter Janet. He is here, your Excellency,"* he added with impatience. *"I have certain knowledge that he is here."*



Sir George tapped the edge of the table, his fingers mirrored in the polish of its surface. "There was some correspondence." He frowned thoughtfully at his silent secretary. *"Do you remember, Mr. Johnstone? Something to do with the case of the Registrar-General. I think the name Ashley was mentioned in connection with that case."*

*"The registrar claimed that he had been robbed of a large sum of money by one Francis Ashley, whose father had died intestate, but the truth of this assertion was doubted, your Excellency, since it was found when the accounts were examined that he had converted the moneys of the Ashley estate to his own use."*

*"Your Excellency, if I can find this Francis Ashley, I shall also find his cousin, who is the murderer of my son."*

*"Inquiries were made at the time, your Excellency, but no news of the man was forthcoming."*

Colin Stewart's eyes were fixed upon the Governor's face, gleaming fiercely. *"He went to Australia Felix to form a great station, your Excellency. I have it from the squatters."*

*"When you shall bring me the wanted man with your warrant, Mr. Stewart, I shall send him overseas. Until then I can give you no further help."* The Governor spoke coldly, but Colin Stewart could not conceal his relief. In his heart he had feared lest the autocratic Governor of this colony should fail to respect an American warrant, but reassured on this point, he eagerly turned once more to his plans, mastered by the vision of his dead son crying to him for the vengeance that he had failed to exact. The Governor was troubled, but the American warrant was in order, and he knew that he had little choice in the matter. He must respect the warrant.

*"Send to the Commissioners for information," he said impatiently to the waiting secretary, "but I will not order the arrest of a subject of her Majesty until a man has been identified as this Richard Ashley."*

Colin Stewart accepted his ruling with composure. He was no longer agitated, but the secretary noticed that his hands still trembled slightly at intervals, and he made his farewell speech hastily, as though he were impatient to leave them.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

Colin Stewart grew impatient. The flood water from the Murrumbidgee had closed the southern roads to traffic for many days. Every creek and billabong from Yass to Albury had helped to create a barrier between the old man and the man he sought.

No teams had succeeded in reaching Sydney from the far south since the flood water had receded, and news came slowly. It seemed to Colin Stewart as though the waters had conspired against him.

One night the members of the racing club gave a dinner at the Royal Hotel to all friends of the turf. Sir John Kent attended it and the next morning Colin Stewart received a message from him. He read it eagerly, then sought his daughter.

Sir John Kent wishes us to drive with him to the Homebush races, Janet. He heard last night that a party of squatters, known to have associated with the Ashleys, would be present."

Janet looked at his drawn face and assented, as she always would to any plan that he made, but this morning she was more than usually distressed by his appearance. Since his interview with Sir George Gipps he had grown more and more restless as though he knew now that the end of his quest was at hand, and feared some interference with his plans, distrusting even his family.

For years it had seemed to Janet that they pursued a ghost. She had grown to regard Richard Ashley almost as some chimera of her father's overwrought mind. Indeed, she had not thought much of him within the last years, all her concern had been for her father. Once more, however, Richard Ashley had become a terrible reality.

She knew that he was in the colony, and the thought of his capture haunted her day and night. She could not sleep for dread of it.

At 1 o'clock Sir John drove his four-in-hand to the door of the Royal Hotel, creating a sensation in the street where people gathered to see him. His equipage was well known. He escorted the ladies from the hotel with ceremony. No one watching his alert figure, clad in all the glory of white smalls and japanned boots, leap lightly to the box seat and swing his spirited team down George street, could have guessed that he had left the uproarious meeting of the friends of the turf in the small hours of that morning, but the waiters winked at one another as he left the hotel.

They swept down Brickfield Hill, past the Haymarket, and a long line of ill assorted shops and dwellings, past the nursery gardens, driving between the last of Governor Bourke's boundary stores into the open country along the Parramatta-road until they reached the vineyards about Homebush racecourse. There was a press of traffic about the gates and they drew to the side to let the Governor's carriage pass. Lady Gipps smiled kindly at Elizabeth and Janet. She had been very gracious to them since the Birthnight Ball, and had suggested that they should become her guests while Colin Stewart sought his enemy, but neither of them would leave the old man.

Homebush racecourse was considered by Sydney racegoers to be the Australian Newmarket, and there was much grumbling about the exorbitant tolls exacted at the gate. Elizabeth studied the placards at the gates while they waited, "*five shillings for a carriage with two horses, three shillings for any vehicle with one horse, and two shillings for every horse not in harness.*" They were all represented in the crush about them, the carriages and sociables, phaetons, and dogcarts of the wealthy, crowded with their brightly dressed womenfolk, and the buggies and sulkies, even carts, of the tradesfolk who frequented the races. Most of the officers rode their own thoroughbred horses, passing in and out of the throng, seeking the ladies of their acquaintance and adding to the general confusion about the gates. Sir John's was the only four-in-hand, and Elizabeth wondered whether they would have to make another placard for him. Janet shook her head disapprovingly at her.

Within the gates, a crowd had already gathered to watch the first race, and they made their way to the members' enclosure beside the saddling paddock with some difficulty. The spreading beflounced skirts of the ladies did not lend themselves to a hasty progress, and outside the members' enclosure the ground was crowded with booths, where ham and fowls, drinks and sandwiches, were indiscriminately

sold by loud-voiced vendors. It was a noisy and colourful assembly, and on all sides there was a feeling of gaiety and hearty goodwill. The squatters: had forgotten their ever-mounting taxes and the threat to their lands; they were one with the Governor in the interest of the races. There were no long faces on the course.

The crowd was cheering the winner of the first race when Sir John Kent at last succeeded in conducting his guests to the enclosure, and Lieutenant Carson, who had been eagerly awaiting for Janet Stewart to appear, was being commiserated on the failure of his horse, Lottery.

*"He lost the start,"* he said philosophically, and then, seeing Janet, hastened to her side.

They became the centre of a chattering group, exchanging items of gossip that interested Sydney.

*"Captain Dark had played his new mandolin at a social gathering the night before, and Lieutenant Swift had claimed it as one he had recently lost. He had left it to have the dint removed, and the fellow had stolen it. Captain Dark must have bought it at a pawnshop."*

*"The dramatic romance of 'Marmion' at the Victorian Theatre had certainly been well received, but Mr. Griffiths' acting had lacked that desperate energy so essential to the character of Marmion."*

Someone mentioned Leichhardt, the explorer, who was still missing, and Mr. Cameron told them that a search party of volunteers was forming at Moreton Bay.

*"There had been a riot at the water fountain in O'Connell-street the night before. It was disgraceful to allow the larrikins to congregate at a place where the maids must go for water."*

Young John Barry joined them, a handsome lad, wiry and graceful in his riding kit. He meant to ride his own horse in the race for the Bungarrabee Purse given by Captains Apperley and Dallas. The race would be the event of the day, and he had not seen a horse as good as his own in any of the stalls,

He told Elizabeth about him in confidence. *"I bought him for ten pounds at Stubbs' auction sale, but he's a thoroughbred if ever I saw one. I wish I knew his pedigree, but the fellow couldn't give it."*

A bell rang, and he hurried back to the saddling paddock.

Sir John Kent found a place from which Elizabeth could watch the race, and handed her his glasses.

*"I shouldn't be surprised if that young pup won this race,"* he said disdainfully. *"He has the best horse here."*

Elizabeth laughed. *"The young pup can ride, Sir John."* Sir John assented grudgingly and they watched the five horses at the barrier.

Excitement became intense and a man beside them suddenly uttered a loud exclamation and slapped a startled friend upon the shoulder.

*"The horse that young Barry rides! I knew I'd seen that head before. D'you remember poor Frank Ashley's Sunlight?"*

The second man only grunted but his friend grew still more emphatic. *"That horse was sired by Frank Ashley's Sunlight wherever Osborne got him. I'm going to make a bet he'll win this race."*

Sir John looked at Elizabeth, but she stared at the field, apparently with eyes only for the galloping horses, and when the race ended and

the roar of the crowd rose, *"Daystar! Daystar wins!"* she turned away as though she had lost all interest even in John Barry's win.

Sir John entertained a party at tea. His guests picnicked, sitting on cushions taken from the carriages or in the vehicles themselves while his man-servant handed tea and elaborate cakes, and officers and squatters waited upon the ladies. Colin Stewart was not there and Janet looked worried. Sir John had been as good as his word and had introduced him to Louis Martin, whom he had himself met for the first time at the race club dinner.

Janet had heard scraps of their talk and she was afraid. Mr. Martin had known Frank Ashley and had seen his cousin Dick Carey recently somewhere near the flooded river, of which they had heard so much. Her father was about to offer a reward of one thousand pounds in English money to the man who should bring about Dick Carey's capture. Janet shivered and Lieutenant Carson offered to bring her shawl. She saw that Elizabeth was watching her and forced herself to listen more attentively to what they said.

They were teasing John Barry about his horse. He would not tell them where he had bought it and said that he did not know Daystar's breeding, but Mr. Cameron laughed at him, *"Go back to Yackandandah, Jack, and ask your father. He'll tell you what horse was Daystar's sire."*

*"I once saw a man called Ashley race a horse like that at Yass,"* an officer said, but his remark was lost in the confusion that followed the ringing of the bell for the next race.

Late in the afternoon they drove back to Sydney, the horses hard to hold on their homeward road. At intervals they talked of the races, but Daystar was not once mentioned, and curiously enough Sir John omitted to tell Colin Stewart that the horse had been bred by one of the Ashleys.

It might almost have seemed that he had forgotten, had not his curiosity led him in the early hours of the next morning to the office of Mr. Stubbs, the auctioneer, who had sold the horse.

Sir John Kent was known to Mr. Stubbs as a good customer. He had no hesitation in giving him the information he desired.

*"It's a somewhat curious story, Sir John, and Mr. Barry is a little uneasy, although it seems to me that he has nothing to fear."*

*"Then the horse was stolen?"* Sir John suggested carelessly.

*"Oh, no, Sir John, nothing like that. Most certainly not."* Mr. Stubbs was shocked.

*"Then, who was the owner before young Barry got him?"*

*"He was sent to me by a man called Slade, who deals in horses, but when Mr. Barry began to make inquiries he discovered that this man Slade had been disposing of horses for another man, who wished to remain unknown."*

*"And this other man?"* persisted Sir John.

*"He keeps a public house on the Liverpool road. His name is Connell. He bred the horse himself, but he has absolutely refused to disclose its pedigree, although Mr. Barry offered him a large sum of money to do so."*

"Then I should think that Mr. Barry has reason to feel uneasy," Sir John said dryly.

"I think not. I think not, Sir John. This inn is close to the Bargo Brush, where horse thieves are known to congregate, and Connell is probably in touch with them; but he undoubtedly breeds his own horses. I saw one or two of his foals when I visited him in company with Mr. Barry."

Sir John left the office of Mr. Stubbs, meditating a visit to Connell's Inn. If the fellow had such good horses it would be worth while going, even though he didn't want to leave Sydney at present. He stood on the corner of King and George streets, thinking deeply and idly watching the traffic. A sailor passed him wearing the red cap of the French yacht Marie Louise. On the other side of the street he stopped to speak to a lady, and Sir John suddenly stiffened. The sailor came back with his companion, passing Sir John once more, but he talked so volubly and Elizabeth Gordon was so interested in his discourse that Sir John made no attempt to attract their attention. They passed on and under the intensely interested gaze of Sir John Kent, Elizabeth left Lenoir and passed into the office from which Sir John had himself come a few minutes earlier.

That night Janet Stewart rose from her prayers at the foot of the great four-posted bed.

"Elizabeth, you have not said your prayers these many nights. Will you not say them?"

"How can I pray for strength to do wrong?" Elizabeth said bitterly. "My prayers would be mockery."

"Then pray that we may be forgiven," Janet cried in pain. "Alick was young and loving and guiltless of sin, and yet from my father's love for him flows this tide of hatred, engulfing us all and poisoning life. Pray for us all, Elizabeth, even for Richard Ashley."

"Even for Richard Ashley," Elizabeth repeated under her breath and knelt at the window staring into the moonlit street.

## CHAPTER XV.

A chained gang was breaking stone on the road outside Connell's Inn, convicts from the Parramatta Gaol wearily swinging the heavy picks at the end of a long day's toil. Intermittently they sang in harsh voices, keeping time to the monotonous strokes of their picks

*Happy land, happy land.*

*Breaking stones and shovelling sand.*

It was late and the setting sun was hidden by gathering clouds. Across the clearing on one side of the road a line of trees was blackly massed against the sky, while near them the inn seemed to watch them from small unlighted windows like an old man from deep set eyes. Its unpainted shutters were not fastened and it looked lonely and hopeless, as though it also had been abandoned in a strange and sombre land and shared with them some heart-breaking knowledge of old wrong.

Away in the distance a rider moved on the road. The guards idly watched his approach waiting for the moment when the chained gang should cease its labour. A stable lad walked into the road to stare at

the travellers, then returned, shouting an unintelligible warning to someone within.

Walking his tired horse towards the inn, Robert Johnstone wondered whether the impulse that he obeyed in coming to Connell's would indeed lead to a meeting ordained many years earlier, or disprove his favourite theory that no slightest act failed to find its consequent throughout the years, since a man's life formed part of an unfinished mosaic, his every act fitting smoothly into a growing pattern, at the intricacy of which the secretary never ceased to marvel.

Near the inn he drew to the side of the road to let the chained gang pass. A guard recognised the Governor's secretary and saluted.

*"Peace come to you, brothers,"* Robert Johnstone said under his breath, and his face grew old and strained as he watched them pass.

Now there were lights in the windows of the inn and the stable lad waited to take his horse.

*"Is the man here, Dan?"*

*"In the room to the right of the passage, your honour. He rode in this afternoon."*

A bent little man shuffled forward from the open doorway. His squinting eyes took in every detail of horse and man without appearing to look at them.

*"We expected you earlier, Mr Johnstone, but no harm done. The man you want stays here."*

*"I was detained on the Governor's business when your message came. You have said nothing to him?"*

*"Nothing your honour. They sent last night from Leighs to tell us he was on the road, and I sent word on to you by the coach as you bade me."*

*"It's supper time,"* the secretary said thoughtfully. *"Carry my compliments to Mr Carey, and request him to join me in a private room. You have done well, Connell."*

When the secretary faced his guest across the supper table that night he knew that he had made no mistake. The man he saw was brown and hard as any bushman, with the lean hardness that came from days spent in the saddle, long solitary riding under the blazing sun of summer or in the teeth of the cold winter gales, but his eyes were clearly brown and kind as Robert Johnstone remembered them, and he still possessed the sensitive courtesy which had endeared him to a stranger eight years ago.

As the meal progressed the secretary decided that the lad had grown into a man to be trusted, and Robert Johnstone was no mean judge of men. This was a man who would be slow to anger and generous in judgment, one clean-hearted and self-reliant. He had meant merely to repay a debt, but this man who had accepted the invitation of a stranger, as he thought to banish the tedium of a lonely evening in sharing a meal inspired something more than liking. Reviewing the starved and friendless years of his youth Robert Johnstone had a quaint fancy. In his heart he would consider this man as his friend and comrade. The idea kindled a sudden warmth of feeling, and Dick Carey wondered at the light in his eyes. The man's eyes wore sparkling with mirth, and his conversation seemed suddenly to

become more intimate. His words covered some meaning, and Dick listened with a puzzled feeling that, after all, something lay behind this chance meeting.

He had sensed something unusual in old Connell's bearing when he delivered Mr. Johnstone's invitation to join him at supper, but the vague suspicion had fled when he saw his host. Now the feeling returned more strongly, and he studied the man warily. There was something strange about the fellow, but he had certainly not seen him before.

Robert Johnstone lifted his glass, drinking to the friend of his own invention. He was entranced by his own thought. He introduced the subject of the birthday festivities, and Dick regretted that the Gundagai flood had prevented his attendance at the ball.

*"It was indeed a very gay affair,"* the secretary agreed smoothly, *"and was rendered more noteworthy by its introduction to the colony of the beautiful Elizabeth Gordon, who is now the toast of Sydney. But you have cut your hand?"* he cried in consternation, looking at the snapped stem of Dick's wine glass. Dick never took his eyes from Robert Johnstone's face.

*"You spoke of Miss Elizabeth Gordon,"* he said, and his voice was a passionate demand.

*"Yes,"* the secretary met his gaze with steady eyes. *"The beautiful ward of the American Colin Stewart, who has come to the colony to seek one Richard Ashley, whom he accuses of the murder of his son."*

The silence lengthened until the muffled ticking of the great octagonal clock on the wall of the passage outside the room seemed to be slowly measuring an eternity of pain, a tide of retribution from which there could be no escape.

*"You came here to tell me this did you not?"* Dick said at last and the other nodded.

*"I came to warn you I have watched for your coming since the night of the Birthnight Ball."*

*"Tell me of Elizabeth Gordon,"* Dick said insistently and the secretary told him, repeating what he had overheard and what had become common gossip in the town. He ended urgently. *"There is no doubt that they have the American warrant and his Excellency has promised that when they bring you to him and present the warrant he will send you back to America in irons."*

*"You are the Governor's secretary, yet you tell me this!"*

The secretary smiled, but his smile was bitter.

*"To-night I am repaying a service. I was not always the Governor's secretary. My mother was a friend of Lady Gipps and when my sentence expired I was given a clerkship in the service of his Excellency. Do you not remember a night of storm when you gave money to a convict who had turned highwayman?"*

Dick laughed.

*"To-day I rode from the bush where a man has no past and all my past is here to meet me. The years have stood still. It is eight years since you menaced me with your pistol and I gave you a coin, yet you sit here doing me this service. It is ten years since I fought a duel*

*with Alick Stewart, and his father brings a warrant for my arrest as though it had happened yesterday. What is it that has bridged time?"*

The secretary had a sudden swift vision of Colin Stewart's face.

"A man's hate has taken no account of time. It has followed you through the years and across the seas."

Dick stared at him, his face sombre. *"I killed Alick Stewart in fair fight, but there is only my word to prove it!"*

*"If the proof were there Colin Stewart would kill you himself,"* Robert Johnstone said with conviction. *"You must not come to Sydney or be taken. He is offering rewards for news of you. They talk of it in the public houses. I have arranged with the captain of the Seamew, which sails within two days, to give you a passage to New Zealand. Connell will conceal you until you can be smuggled on board. It seems to me to be your only chance of safety."*

He flushed slightly, meeting the wonder in Dick's eyes.

*"It was very easy to arrange, and I wished to thwart them. There was a chain of coincidence which I desired to break."*

Dick continued to regard him, and he added almost defiantly, *"I wished to do you a service."*

*"Thank you. You have done me a great service,"* Dick said simply; *"but I shall go to Sydney to meet Colin Stewart."*

The secretary stared at him aghast.

*"You are walking into a trap from which there is no escape. This Colin Stewart is no better than a madman."*

*"He is the father of the lad whom I shot,"* Dick returned grimly, *"and if he is mad, his madness is only one of the many consequences of my folly. My deed has embittered many lives. I thought I could slay the memory of that bitterness, but to-night I know that I welcome its resurrection. I would sooner pay my debts than be forever troubled by them."*

*"A man can pay more than the just due,"* Robert Johnstone returned slowly. *"Think well to-night, and in the morning I will have your answer."*

When the household had retired, Dick pushed back the heavy bolt of the cedar door at the front of the inn and turned the great Iron key. It turned with a sudden clang that roused Connell from his sleep; but he only listened for a moment until he heard Dick's footsteps retreating into the blackness outside the house. Whatever happened, he would be well paid. The Governor's secretary had paid him already for his trouble, and to-morrow he would send word to the American or to the English officer who had visited him a week earlier. But it must be done secretly. He could not afford to risk the possible displeasure of the Governor. He reflected callously that it was a good thing that Clara was dead. She could never do enough for young Frank Ashley, and she might have made trouble when his cousin was in danger.

Outside the inn Paddiaddigaddi slipped to Dick's side like a half-seen ghost. Dick felt he was there, a shade in the blackness. *"Go back. Paddiaddigaddi. I go for a walk with my ghosts."*

Paddiaddigaddi shuddered and fled in terror. Remorselessly Dick set himself to unravel the twisted skein of cause and effect. To-night he would be his own judge, tearing the scales from his own eyes and



stripping himself of illusion. But suddenly he could think only of Elizabeth Gordon.

Elizabeth standing in his mother's room at Ashley on the Cape Fear, Elizabeth, small and valiant, and cruelly pathetic in her passion of self-sacrifice. Dick groaned in spirit. "I was unworthy to touch the hem of your gown, Elizabeth. If you were false to me later, how could it have been otherwise?"

That night I betrayed you, I was a coward and a fool."

She was in the colony with him. Elizabeth of the true face and the spirit that soared to the stars. Her presence made a warmth in the night. It illumined the blackness. He would go to Colin Stewart and tell him the truth, and after that he must fight for his life. Well, he knew now what life could hold for a man. Ahead would be the sunlit plains of his station, a field worthy of a strong man's endeavour. The past years had been hard, but they held an exquisite savour. The country of the sister waterholes had enchained him. Sometimes in the bad seasons Dick had hated the dry wastes of the plains, but he knew now with terrible certainty that he would never leave them. He was bound to a way of life from which he could escape, but would not, since the lure of the next good season always danced like a mirage in the distance when the land was drought-stricken. Not since the civilisations were young had men found such an adventure or such freedom. They entered the unfenced country to find sometimes a paradise of waving green grasses and bright acacias, with clear streams where the wild fowl swarmed; sometimes a desert, burnt and stark.

They were gods, knowing realities, but the price they must always pay for the freedom of the unfenced country was their last reserve of strength and endurance. Sooner or later it was exacted from strong and weak. The princes of the unfenced country must toil like slaves to win their kingdom.

At sunrise Robert Johnstone found Dick still watching the golden eastern sky between the tall saplings, and knew without speech that his warning would not be heeded. He smiled at Dick, and meeting his answering smile, felt with sudden exultation that he had won a friendship that he thirstily desired. Henceforth there should be nothing that he would not do, no sacrifice that he would not make, for the sake of friendship.

He said: *"Then you have decided to meet Colin Stewart."*

*"Yes, I'll go to-day. I should have stayed and taken the consequences in the first place. I must pay the price of folly and cowardice since I cannot undo the thing I did."*

The secretary sighed.

*"Yet Colin Stewart's son might possibly have succumbed to a fever or broken his neck in the hunting field had you not fought."*

*"If this had happened and that had not," Dick said defiantly, "or had I done this and had I not done that. There's nothing that weakens a man more. Ten years ago I killed Alick Stewart and fled to this country. Now this is my country, and I'll fight to the last ditch to stay here, but I will not fly from Colin Stewart. He shall hang me if he can."*

## CHAPTER XVI.

Connell led a bright chestnut mare from her stall in his stables.

*"You'd be wise to take her, Mr. Carey."*

Dick looked at her closely. *"Where did you get her?"*

*"I bred her myself,"* Connell returned triumphantly, *"and if I could give you her pedigree I'd ask as much again for her. She's broken to the dogcart that you see in the shed beyond, and you'd drive to Sydney in comfort with her; you and Mr. Johnstone there."*

Dick put a hand on her, and she backed nervously, the whites of her eyes showing. He examined her points, liking the look of her.

*"Take her for a spin,"* Connell wheedled. *"You'd like her paces."*

He pulled out the high dogcart and harnessed the mare. Dick drove her out of the yard while Robert Johnstone watched, admiring the ease with which he handled her.

Connell hurried to the road, his eyes gleaming. Had Connell ever thought upon heaven it would have been to him a place where he could deal eternally in horses. He bred most of his own, breaking and schooling them devotedly, but he could never resist an opportunity for a sale. Now he followed the progress of his high-stepping mare with anxious eyes, fondly approving her action as Dick swung skilfully up and down the road before the inn.

He would never cease to regret that he had parted with her if he succeeded in selling her to Dick at his price, but he would do his best to sell her. It was some comfort to know that she would be handled by a man who could appreciate her. Connell knew a horseman when he saw one, and next to a good horse he loved a man who understood horses. Connell's world consisted of the devotees of the horse and all other people. Dick bought the mare, wondering how Connell came to own her. He disbelieved his account of her breeding, since she was so obviously thoroughbred, and he made Robert Johnstone witness a deed of sale. Connell signed it laboriously, mourning his mare as a mother the loss of a favourite child.

He brought the special brandy that he reserved for such occasions, and they drank it in solemn silence. Robert Johnstone realised with inward mirth that the procedure which he witnessed, very closely approximated that preceding a funeral he had recently attended.

The melancholy silence endured until the sound of wheels outside the windows reminded Connell of his duties as host. He hastened out, but returned almost immediately, bringing with him a man at whom Robert Johnstone stared for a moment as though he had been unpleasantly startled.

The newcomer was short and dark, a restless figure with arms much too long for the sleeves of his ill-fitting Jacket. All his clothes had evidently been purchased from a Sydney shop seller, but with him there came into the room some unmistakable suggestion of the sea.

He looked at them with bright dark eyes which at length fastened shrewdly upon Dick.

*"It is Mistaire Carey? Yes."*

When Dick said that he was called Richard Carey the little man spoke in French.

*"I have a letter for you, Monsieur, from one who is your friend, but before I deliver it you must tell me where you were born, speaking in the French language."*

Robert Johnstone said, also in French, *"I speak the French language, my friend."*

The man was disconcerted, looking at Dick in some consternation. Dick told him what he had asked, motioning Robert Johnstone to remain in the room, and, as though satisfied, the French sailor took a packet from his coat and handed it to Dick.

Dick broke the seal and drew a slip of paper from the wrapping. He read and reread it while Robert Johnstone gazed through the window and Connell watched him stealthily.

The letter was delicately printed, short, and greatly to the point.

*"C.S. is in Sydney with a warrant for the arrest of R.A. The captain of the yacht Marie Louise awaits R.A. The sailor who bears this message is to be trusted, and will conduct R.A. to the Marie Louise in safety. In this way only can R.A. find security. As a friend I do implore him to hasten to the Marie Louise."*

Dick fingered the paper thoughtfully, a sudden fire in his eyes. The paper that he held signified a happiness that he had grown to believe could exist only in dreams. He folded it carefully and spoke to the sailor.

*"You will carry my answer to the man who sent you?"* His brows lifted in a question, but the man merely nodded warily, and Dick asked Connell for pen and ink.

When he had gone to bring them, the French sailor spoke earnestly. *"It is necessary that you accompany me immediately. Monsieur, I have the vehicle at the door."*

Dick shook his head.

*"I am not going to the Marie Louise. I will write my answer."*

He took the writing material which Connell brought him and wrote rapidly. Finally he sealed the letter and handed it to the messenger, giving him money and asking him his name.

*"I am named Andre Lenoir, Monsieur, of the ship Marie Louise."*

*"Deliver this safely and speedily then, Lenoir."*

*"But yes, Monsieur. A thousand thanks."*

Lenoir left the room, delighted to have been so lavishly rewarded, but with an uncomfortable conviction that he had incurred the displeasure of the mistress whom he adored.

Some hours later Dick and Robert Johnstone drove the chestnut mare through Parramatta, having come in from the Great Southern-road to the Woolpack Inn, where they intended to spend the night.

The innkeeper received them hospitably at the door of his red-brick inn, and from long habit Dick gave his name as Carey before he remembered that he had intended to resume his own.

*"Why then, Mr. Carey, you are the gentleman whom Sir John Kent is expecting. He called here twice this morning and he is now in the private parlour, waiting till you come."*

*"It must be someone else of that name whom the gentleman expects,"* Dick returned indifferently, but Robert Johnstone touched his arm.

*"Sir John Kent is an English officer who is known to me."*

Dick stared at him in surprise, then turned to the innkeeper. *"Where is your parlour?"*

*"This way, sir."* Dick followed him, while Robert Johnstone went to his room. The latter had no desire to meet Sir John Kent, although he would dearly have liked to know what had brought him to the Woolpack. He wondered grimly whether Sir John was about to deliver a second letter.

Sir John Kent had come entirely on his own behalf, and, as he covertly studied Dick while introducing himself, found his worst fears realised. The fellow was good-looking and a gentleman. The vague suspicion which had first tormented Sir John on the night of the Birthnight Ball, and which had since become a settled conviction, received a maddening confirmation as he talked with Dick. He said with an air of exceeding frankness, *"It is difficult to explain my presence to you, Mr. Carey. In truth, I am here upon an impulse."*

*"A good impulse, then, I trust,"* Dick returned smilingly.

*"As an English officer, I cannot endure to see one who is now a subject of her Majesty handed over to this rebel American with his rebel warrant. It would shame the Flag, and so thinks every English officer in Sydney. I speak for my brother officers. But perhaps you do not take my meaning?"* he looked searchingly at Dick.

*"You speak of Colin Stewart, with whose son I fought a duel ten years ago, and who is now in Sydney with a warrant for my arrest, but I do not yet understand why you are here,"* Dick said bluntly.

*"I am here to help you, Mr. Carey. Some English officers whose spokesman I am, have determined to prevent the American warrant being enforced. Briefly, we have now made arrangements which will enable you to travel secretly to-night to the settlement at Moreton Bay, where you may remain in safety until Colin Stewart has left Sydney."*

He paused as though in triumph, but he had already perceived that his suggestion had fallen upon deaf ears.

Dick laughed. *"I appreciate your concern for the English flag, Sir John, and that of your brother officers, but I am travelling to Sydney to meet Colin Stewart. I prefer to fight him in the law Courts."*

*"You will drink with me before you go?"* He rang for the innkeeper, and they drank, talking amicably.

Sir John learnt what he had meant to discover. This man was no fool, but an enemy who should be given no quarter. He made no further effort to persuade Dick to escape. The sooner he fell into the hands of Colin Stewart the better. He took his leave and rode back to Sydney in haste, hoping to be the first to warn Colin Stewart that Richard Ashley stayed at the Woolpack Inn at Parramatta.

The Kissing Point-road wound over hill and dale, pleasantly shaded by towering gums that grew thickly in that fertile district, but Sir John considered neither the green bush at the roadside nor the blue water gleaming at the foot of the hills where the Parramatta River wound its way to the harbour. He was seized with a bitter understanding of Elizabeth Gordon. It was as though he read the secret that had lain hidden behind her eyes and he was shaken with despair at the knowledge. Since the night on which he had parted

from her in London, months before, every instinct had warned him that for him there was danger in her anxiety to accompany Colin Stewart, in his search for Richard Ashley. Her solicitude for Colin Stewart, so admirably assumed, was a blind only. For years she had lived a lie. It had grown to encase her as a sheath through which none had penetrated until his passion had rent it asunder. He ground his teeth at the thought, raging aloud so that his horse started into a gallop, only to be dragged back until it reared.

*"You will pay me for this, Elizabeth. You would have used me too, as you have used everyone, even Janet Stewart."*

He laughed grimly.

*"Ah, but you shall use me, Elizabeth. You shall use me as you have used them, but with a difference. You shall pay me my price, my beautiful American."*

It was growing dark when he passed through the last toll-bar and entered Sydney. He rode to his private rooms near the Barracks, exhausted by the strength of his passion. His man servant looked at him furtively as he took his horse.

*"There's a lady waiting for you, sir. She did not give her name."*

*"Then do not mention it,"* Sir John said shortly, and strode into the house. The meaning in the man's voice had angered him.

There was no light in the sitting-room and for a moment he thought that she had gone. He stood staring into the unlighted room until Elizabeth Gordon rose from the chair in which she had waited and came forward, the silk of her skirts rustling softly as she moved.

*"I have come to ask a favour of you, Sir John."* He was silent for some minutes, and she could not see his face in the shadows, but she felt with terror that he had been shaken by some spasm of mirth.

When he lighted the lamp, however, she saw that she must have been mistaken. His face was grave and dark, with some feeling that might have been pity for her. He drew forward a chair so that she must sit where the light fell upon her face, and spoke with frank brotherliness.

*"What is it that you need, Elizabeth?"*

Had he not known as surely as though she herself had told him that the entire purpose of her life was to save Richard Ashley, he would have been deceived by her voice and by her manner. She spoke without hesitation, looking at him with a troubled and appealing gaze.

*"Richard Ashley is on his way to Sydney. He stays to-night at the Woolpack Inn at Parramatta. Now that he is here I know that he must not be taken. My guardian is ill. We dare not risk another shock for him. This morning Janet was forced to send for a doctor to bleed him. Were he to see Richard Ashley I am convinced that it would kill him."*

*"He is certainly ill,"* Sir John agreed, *"but I should think that the strain under which he labours would cease to trouble him if Richard Ashley were punished."*

Elizabeth shook her head. *"There would be the shock of his capture and the long voyage to America, always worrying lest he escape, It cannot be contemplated. Even Janet lives in dread of this."*

They looked at one another, and Elizabeth knew in sudden chill despair that he had read her innermost heart.

*"What is your plan?"* Sir John asked softly. *"I would have you seize Richard Ashley to-night. The Marie Louise sails at dawn, and for a price the captain would take him overseas."*

*"It might be possible,"* Sir John's eyes gleamed. *"I will do this for you, Elizabeth, if I have your promise to marry me within a month after Richard Ashley has sailed from the colony. But it is no easy thing that you ask."*

"If you place Richard Ashley on board the Marie Louise to-night I will marry you within a month," Elisabeth said steadily, and Sir John smiled bitterly.

*"There is a sailor from the Marie Louise who can be trusted, his name is Lenoir. The crew can also be bribed,"* Elizabeth added quietly.

Sir John thought quickly, his brain on fire. *"Write me a letter,"* he said at last, *"bidding Richard Ashley come to you in Sydney to-night. It matters not what you say so that he comes I can do the rest."* They looked at one another for a long moment, then he pushed forward a table and stood, not looking at her as she wrote. When at length she handed him the letter her face was white and he made a movement as though he would have seized her in his arms, but she pushed him from her with a desperate gesture, her eyes tortured as those of some trapped animal.

*"You are right. I have not yet fulfilled my part of our bargain."* Sir John said calmly. He prepared to accompany her into the street, but she refused his escort, reminding him he had little time to spare.

When she had gone Sir John bent and passionately kissed the place where her hand had rested as she wrote.

Elizabeth hurried back to the Royal Hotel, her head held high, but in her heart only a terrible loathing of herself. Life was relentless, a wheel that one set in motion but could not stay. She dared not think of the thing that she had done to-night. When at last she reached her room she took Dick Ashley's letter from her dress and burnt it quickly at the candle flame as though she feared it.

Sir John's man found Lenoir in a sailors' haunt on the Rocks, and towards midnight a messenger came to the Woolpack Inn at Parramatta, inquiring for Mr. Richard Carey.

Mr. Carey, he was told, was not within. It was a gala night in Parramatta, and all the townfolk had gathered in a paddock, where three successful candidates for the vacant seats in the Parramatta District Council gave a public feast to celebrate their recent victory.

It was a famous victory and royally celebrated. In the afternoon there had been rural sports, and the more energetically inclined of the townfolk had jumped in sacks or trundled wheelbarrows blindfolded, climbed greasy poles or bobbed for money in bowls of treacle and flour, and to-night a bullock weighing upwards of 800lb, which had roasted slowly for hours, had been distributed, and three hogsheads of beer broached. There was bread for the hungry, and huge crowds had gathered to see the fireworks, since it was rumoured that they would be unusually good. The Governor was in residence,

too, and it was hoped that he might be present, although everyone now knew that his health was failing.

Sir John Kent's messenger waited at the Woolpack as he had been instructed to do should he find Mr. Carey absent. Dick and Robert Johnstone found him there when they returned, tired of the jostling crowds, who still celebrated noisily on all sides.

Dick took Elizabeth's letter from him, not listening to his muttered explanation, but Robert Johnstone studied him closely.

Dick opened the letter with an eagerness that mounted in his head like wine. He read it twice, scarcely able to believe that she could have responded to his letter with such an appeal. "I must see you before you are taken by Colin Stewart's men. Come to-night to the Royal Hotel. I shall watch for you until you come. Elizabeth."

It might have been the boy Richard Ashley who had danced attendance upon Elizabeth Gordon at Belmont, on the Cape Fear River, who turned impetuously to Robert Johnstone as to a friend of long standing.

*"I am summoned to Sydney and must go immediately. Will you come with me?"*

Robert Johnstone looked dubiously from Dick to the messenger. *"Would it not be safer to wait until daylight? The toll-bars are closed at midnight."*

*"They'll open to the touch of gold,"* Dick said joyously. *"Do you wait until morning. I'm going to harness my mare."*

When he came back the messenger had gone. Robert Johnstone had paid their score and waited with the few belongings that they carried with them. Dick left Paddiaddigaddi, who had ridden from Connell's Inn leading Robert Johnstone's horse, to wait his return at the Woolpack. His mare fled through the town as though inspired by the over-mastering eagerness of her driver, and the clustering houses and farms were quickly left behind. The moon had not yet risen, and in the starlight the tall trees threw eerie shadows across the road. They drove in silence, concerned with their own thoughts, but at last Dick said, almost as though against his will, *"Tell me of Elizabeth Gordon."*

His friend turned towards him, startled and dismayed.

*"Is it then Miss Gordon to whom you go to-night?"*

*"Yes,"* Dick turned to look at him, but Robert Johnstone only said, looking at the shadowed road before him, *"She is a most beautiful lady."*

They came to the first toll-bar, and found it closed, since it was long after midnight.

The mare pivoted uneasily, ears pricked, mistrustful of the black shadows about the barrier.

Dick descended and rapped loudly on the gate.

*"Toll-bar ! Ho, there, toll-bar!"* his voice echoed.

There was no answer, but the night seemed suddenly to conceal danger. Grasping the reins Robert Johnstone found himself listening uneasily for some sound from the impenetrable shadows. Dick approached the toll keeper's cottage, a small hut a little removed from the road, and in the starlight scarcely distinguished from its

background of trees. He struck the door with his heavy whip handle, again calling loudly to the keeper of the tollbar.

*"Toll-bar! I say, toll-bar!"*

In the distance a night owl hooted mournfully, accentuating the silence of the hut, while, behind him, the mare stamped impatiently, her shoes ringing on the stones of the road, and her head tossing until the reins tightened uncomfortably in Robert Johnstone's nervous grip, but there was no other response. He called again, and at last there were movements within the hut, and suddenly a light shone through the chink above the door.

Dick had grown impatient, disturbed by some hint perhaps unconsciously communicated to him from the sensitive perception of his friend.

*"Hurry, man, hurry. We can't wait here all night."*

The door opened slowly, with a creaking reluctance, and the tollkeeper stood before him, a tall man holding a guttering candle.

The exigencies of his calling perhaps required that he should sleep in his clothes, for he was fully clad, even to his boots, but he was ill-pleased at being roused at such an hour.

*"It'll cost you five shillings to open the bar this side of midnight, my fine gentleman,"* he said sourly.

Dick's reply was equally lacking in courtesy. *"Open it and don't talk so much."*

The tollkeeper held the candle high so that its light fell on Dick's face.

*"And who are you who crow so loud on the Parramatta-road after midnight? You're in a mighty hurry to have the bar open."*

Dick was about to make an angry retort, but suddenly the tollkeeper dashed the candle to the ground and sprang at him. He swung his whip to defend himself.

The night became full of sound, and something sped from the shadows across the white road towards the dogcart where Robert Johnstone vainly strove to control the terrified mare. He would have leapt to the road, but she tore the reins from his grasp, and whirling about galloped madly back towards Parramatta, the dogcart rocking behind her, while the driver set his teeth and frantically dragged upon reins which seemed to be no longer attached to the bit.

The struggle at the hut had been short. Almost before the dogcart was out of sight, Dick Ashley had been overpowered. He lay on the ground in front of the hut, dazed by a blow given by someone who had come up behind him as soon as the toll-keeper made his attack. Men were gathered about him, dark figures curiously distorted in the dim light. Some of them wore caps which nodded as they spoke to one another, and when they moved it could be seen that they were sailors.

The toll-keeper addressed a man who was evidently known to him.

*"What now, Farrell?"*

*"It's a pity the other man got away. Do you think he saw much?"*

*"He saw enough to lose me the toll,"* the toll-keeper swore venomously. *"Get the man out of the way before the other sends the*



*police from Parramatta. I wish I'd sent you further when you came to me to-night, Farrell."*

*"You remember what'll happen to you if you turn informer,"* Farrell warned him unsympathetically, and gave an order to a French sailor.

*"Hi, Lenoir. Tell your frog eaters to gag the man and put him in the cart."*

They gagged Dick roughly but effectually with a knitted muffler, binding it about his head until sight and hearing were gone. They tied his arms and legs and lifted him not urgently into the light market-cart which had been concealed some distance from the toll-bar.

With a last warning to the toll-keeper Farrell drove rapidly towards Sydney, his victim lying helplessly behind him in the Jolting cart, and the French sailors whispering about him, excited by the success of their coup.

Dick lay, raging furiously against the fate which had ordained that he should fall a victim to the bushrangers who infested the roads, on this night of all others. His head ached furiously and he had a very indistinct recollection of the struggle at the toll-bar, but the words of Elizabeth's letter tumbled over and over in his head, as though she wrote them for him to see, now slowly, and now too fast almost for him to follow them, *"I must see you before you are taken by Colin Stewart's men. I shall watch for you to-night until you come. Elizabeth."*

She would watch for him, but there was no possibility of his reaching her, even though she had said that she must see him.

They came into Sydney by devious ways while the town was still in darkness, and in a lonely spot on the water-front they found Farrell's boat in charge of a fellow-smuggler. Cocks were crowing somewhere near when they carried Dick to the waiting boat, and daybreak was at hand. The mists were lifting from the water.

Farrell was anxious, and Lenoir and his men rowed with a will. The Marie Louise was ready for the open sea, and they had orders to reach her before dawn. They were still some distance from her when the quick ears of Lenoir caught the faint splash of oars in pursuit. He told Farrell and they redoubled their efforts, but the boat was heavy and the bound man interfered with their movements. The other boat was now clearly audible, racing in pursuit of them, and Farrell knew that it was a revenue cutter.

The Marie Louise showed ahead of them when the boat, manned by excisemen, leapt to sight from the rapidly thinning mist, and Farrell's old enemy, Cunningham, was in charge of the crew.

The French sailors called excitedly to their friends on the Marie Louise, but the excise boat drew up beside them, and Farrell knew from bitter experience that its occupants were well armed.

*"What do you want, Mr. Cunningham?"* he asked angrily. *"I'm taking her crew to the Marie Louise so that she can sail."*

*"Do you take them roped? That man will upset you in a moment."* Dick felt that the boat had stopped and was struggling violently.

*"We'll have out that gag, Farrell, and see who is here,"* the excise officer said maliciously, and Farrell cursed him under his breath.

They unbound the scarf that muffled Dick's head and he saw the rocking boats and behind them the towering canvas of the Marie Louise.

"Come, now, who are you?" Dick saw with joy that the man who questioned him wore uniform.

"My name is Richard Ashley, and I am a squatter from the south. These men attacked me to-night at a toll-bar on the Parramatta-road."

Dick stopped, aware for the first time that the French sailor Lenoir, sat in the boat with him.

"Then it was a trap," he said bitterly.

But the effect upon the boatmen of Dick's announcement of his name was startling.

"Richard Ashley known as Richard Carey," Cunningham was the first man to find his voice.

"Why the old American will give a thousand pounds for you ,and Farrell was shanghaiing you for the Mario Louise. Or were you getting two thousand pounds for doing it, Farrell?"

Farrell stared open mouthed, angry and dumbfounded by this discovery. Lenoir had carefully concealed Dick's identity from his accomplices knowing that they would certainly sell him to Colln Stewart. The crew of the excise cutter were jubilant.

"We'll take you to the Barracks, Mr. Ashley, and leave you under guard until the Governor's pleasure is known," Cunningham said.

"As for you. Farrell, you shall swing tor this night's work, but you've given us a thousand pounds so we'll leave you to "the police."

They cut Dick's bonds and he stepped into the cutter while Farrell cursed them furiously and the faithful Lenoir watched in despair. The excisemen gave way with a will, talking to one another and leaving Dick to wrestle with the confusion of his own thoughts.

## CHAPTER XVII.

The Commissioner of Police sent a messenger to the Governor's residence at Parramatta, with a letter for Sir George Gipps. It was opened by his secretary, since Sir George was in poor health and Lady Gipps Insisted on his secretary dealing with his entire correspondence. Mr. Mills asked for Immediate instructions in regard to a matter of Importance.

Robert Johnstone had expected a visit from the Commissioner, but the letter startled him. It seemed that Colin Stewart had not let the grass grow beneath his feet. The secretary decided that he must incur Lady Glpps's displeasure and intrude upon his Excellency during the morning visit of the Governor's old school friend the Bishop of Australia.

Sir George Gipps and his visitor stayed on the garden terrace enjoying the morning sun- shine while Lady Gipps watched them from a window where she sat with her sewing. The Governor's health was failing. He was worn out by unceasing strife with the colonists whom he governed. AH his efforts to make them accept the policies he followed had failed. They still fought bitterly for the things which

he would not concede them lest he endanger the interests of the home Government, whose representative he was.

They rejected the district councils with which he sought to govern them, and which he had originated with such success In Canada.

They refused to purchase waste land at the, Government auction sales, so that the revenue was depleted, and he must impose further taxation.

The squatters would not pay the stock tax or even the licence fees, and the Legislative Council threw out his measures.

He was weary of the struggle, but he would not give them an inch. He feared that he might fail in his duty to those who had sent him to the colony. Lady Gipps prayed that he might be recalled.

As Robert Johnstone approached, he heard Sir George Gipps cry angrily to the Bishop "Fixity of tenure! With that parrot cry they demand that the whole colony shall be given into their greedy hands. They ask me to allow the squatters to seize all the waste lands of the Crown thereby ruining the future of the country. That I will never permit"

The Bishop answered soothingly, and they turned to see who came across the terrace.

Colin Stewart had indeed, not let the grass grow beneath his feet, and the Governor frowned angrily as he read the letter which the secretary gave him. Mr. Mills had penned it in haste, and the perturbed state of his mind was evident in the faulty construction of his sentences.

He wrote that Richard Ashley was confined in a cell at the police barracks, and that Colin Stewart demanded he should immediately be sent to Parramatta, whither he himself would accompany the prisoner in order that he might wait upon his Excellency with the American warrant.

*"He claims your Excellency's promise,"* Mr. Mills ended, *"and I don't know what to do with him. I think the old man is demented."* Sir George read with marked distaste. He had no liking for this business.

*"This Colin Stewart has his warrant,"* he said at last, *"and I can do nothing but comply with its requirements. Write that I shall be in Sydney within three days, and if the warrant be then produced and Richard Ashley properly identified, he shall be sent back to America under escort."*

Robert Johnstone was about to retrace his steps when Sir George asked feverishly: *"In the matter of the Goulburn District Council, Mr. Johnstone. Has the return yet come to hand?"*

The secretary hesitated, and Sir George tapped impatiently upon the arm of his chair,

*"The vacancies have not yet been filled by election, your Excellency,"* Robert Johnstone said unwillingly.

The Governor's face crimsoned with anger, *"Then send immediately, saying that I have appointed William Hilton Hovell and William Chatfield to hold office."*

*"I knew that they would not hold the election as I ordered. Rebels. Rebels."*

He fell back exhausted, and the Bishop motioned to the secretary to leave them.

The messenger who presently rode in haste to Sydney bore two letters. One was an official communication addressed to the Commissioner of Police and the other was a private letter to be delivered at the Royal Hotel in George-street. It was in answer to this letter that Elizabeth drove from Sydney on the afternoon of the same day, bidding the driver of her hired phaeton take the road that led to Parramatta. For Elizabeth life had been of an almost unendurable bitterness. She journeyed, tormented and despairing, seeing no hope, but still eagerly "grasping at the suggestion in Robert Johnstone's letter. She came to the toll-bar, where he waited for her, sitting on his horse by the roadside among the tall gums, and he greeted her with grave politeness, thinking that in truth here was a beauty that could draw a man's heart to her.

He conducted her to a place removed from sight and hearing of anyone upon the road, while the driver of the phaeton waited beside his vehicle.

They were in a group of trees, surrounded by the magic of many colours, flashes of orange and black, lilac and silver, scarlet and ivory, from the gums, gleaming amid the sober brown and grey of the box, while high above them the leafy crests stirred delicate green traceries against a sky over which the rain clouds slowly gathered.

*"Why did you write to me?"* Elizabeth asked, her voice unsteady.

*"Because I think that you are his friend, and that you would help him."*

She placed a shaking hand upon the tree near which she stood.

*"You said in your letter that you were a friend of Richard Ashley. Will you not tell me what you meant when you wrote that I might still save him had I courage to do so?"*

*"There is one way in which Richard Ashley could be saved, but one way only."*

*"And that way?"*

Robert Johnstone's voice was hard, but his eyes were curiously kind.

*"His Excellency has said that he will not deliver Richard Ashley to Justice unless he has the warrant. If the warrant which Colin Stewart possesses were destroyed-"* his voice ceased and Elizabeth cried out in horror.

*"Not that! Not that. You ask me to steal the warrant from my guardian."*

*"There is no other way."*

She looked at him in terror, knowing that she would do it, and seeing the dread and misery of her face he spoke vehemently, overcome by remorse *"Forget what I have said. It is a wrong way, bringing only wretchedness Richard Ashley would not wish it."*

*"I must go back,"* Elizabeth said, *"Janet will miss me."*

When she returned to the Royal Hotel an unusual crowd had collected about its doors, but they made way for her, and she passed into the building without noticing that they stared and whispered as she passed them Elizabeth wondered vaguely why the people seemed to speak in hushed voices but at the foot of the stairs the proprietor

accosted her and, as he spoke, she caught at the banisters to prevent herself from falling. It was as though his words were hammers beating upon her brain, until it grew numb and incapable of understanding the thing he told her.

Colin Stewart was dead, his body lying in a room above them Elizabeth listened, then climbed the stairs of the hotel to find Janet feeling her way as though sightless while the man stared helplessly after her.

Janet knelt beside her father, praying that at last he might find the peace that life had not given him. Surely in death there must be understanding.

She uttered a stifled cry when she saw Elizabeth's face *"Come away, my dear, come away,"* and Elizabeth suffered herself to be led from the room with a strange meekness. Janet watched her anxiously, while she told her of Colin Stewart's death

*"He went to visit the Commissioner of Police, Elizabeth, and they say he became very excited. He had a seizure and fell, dying before the doctor could reach him."*

*"He died without knowing that I had betrayed him,"* Elizabeth said dully. *"Did you know that I deceived him and lied to him, Janet?"*

*"I always knew that you loved Richard Ashley, Elizabeth, but for years we have been straws at the mercy of forces from which we could not free ourselves. Our own loves and hates are bonds which we can never hope to break. Elizabeth. They override our judgments until we helplessly do the things we hate."*

Janet rose, and crossing to a dressing table began to light a candle, while Elizabeth watched her in strained silence. Suddenly she saw what Janet was about to do, and she wrung her hands.

*"The warrant I meant to steal it to-night and burn it myself, Janet."*

Janet smiled a queer, tortured smile.

*"See, I burn it myself. It is nothing to me. For years I have cared only for my father."*

Her voice broke, and as the burning fragments floated upwards she sank into a chair, sobbing broken-heartedly, while Elizabeth strove to comfort her.

Colin Stewart was buried the next day, and within three days Richard Ashley was liberated by the Commissioner of Police, since Janet Stewart said that she had destroyed the American warrant and Sir George Gipps refused to detain him unless it should be presented.

It was weeks before Dick saw Elizabeth. She went with Janet to stay with Lady Gipps at Parramatta, where the Governor strove to regain his strength in order that he might deal with the more urgent matters of State before his recall should come. But the lethargy and depression into which Elizabeth had sunk after Colin Stewart's funeral grew so much deeper that Janet became alarmed and consulted Robert Johnstone.

*"She wrote to Richard Ashley that she would not see him,"* Robert Johnstone said, *"but he waits In Sydney until she shall have recovered from the shock of your fathers death."*

Janet wrote a letter which Robert Johnstone carried to Sydney, travelling with a light heart over the Kissing Point-road, and stopping

to speak to the new tollkeeper at the toll-bar where Dick Ashley had been captured by Sir John Kent's men. Sir John Kent's regiment was to be transferred to India it was said

Robert Johnstone knew that he had never been before so welcome in any place as he was when he reached Dick Ashleys lodging.

"If I were not in love with Elizabeth Gordon I should be with Janet Stewart," Dick cried. "Would you have thought she could have been so forgiving?"

*"She forgave you years ago,"* his friend said wisely *"Her father was her chief concern."*

Dick rode to Parramatta, stopping at the Woolpack Inn to remove the dust of the road. At Government House Janet Stewart looked at him in wonder.

*"If Dr. Hanrahan were here, Dick, he'd say you were your father."*

Dick wrung her hand until she winced, and Janet sent him to the garden, where Elizabeth sat, surrounded by books which she had been given to read.

Dick knelt beside her chair before she knew that he had come across the grass. *"The last time we were together, you said that you would come to me across the world. When I would have gone to you, Elizabeth, you wrote that our love had been a youthful madness you said that you had married!"*

*"I lied to you, as I have lied to everyone else for seven years,"* Elizabeth said, looking at him steadily. *"I do not know how not to lie, I think. Since the day on which Colin Stewart showed me the warrant for your arrest I have never ceased to lie, and yet I know that you were right when you came to face him I have always known that I should have written bidding you come, instead of preventing him from finding you."*

*"You could go to the gallows, but you could not see me go,"* Dick said, and kissed her.

They decided to be married in the little brick church on Church Hill within a month since Janet wished to leave the colony as soon as possible and a vessel would sail for America on the day after that appointed for their wedding.

Elizabeth and Dick discussed their plans with Janet before she left. David Macfarlane was in Sydney and had come to see them. He told them that John Wyatt was about to take his family from the Cross Roads near Berrima to Mullengandra. They proposed to reside there for two years and would take the necessary stores with them. The manager at Mullengandra had been conducting a dairy, and they had learnt that he was killing the calves to obtain rennet for his cheese-making. He had been sent away, and things on the station would be straightened. David Macfarlane suggested that Dick and his wife should travel with Miss. Wyatt and her family, and Dick had written to John Wyatt asking whether he would permit them to do so. There were to be five bullock waggons, David Macfarlane said and a covered cart drawn by horses. Elizabeth was delighted at the mere thought of such a caravan, and Dick was anxious that she should be spared the discomfort of the ordinary coaches. The waggons would be slow but with Mrs. Wyatt as a travelling companion the journey to the station would not be tedious.

David Macfarlane was elated. The cause of the squatters prospered. There was even a rumour that those in the more outlying districts would be given 14-year leases. He thought of selling most of his cattle and stocking his stations with sheep now that the dingoes could be controlled. He would fence some of his runs.

Dick asked him to marry them and he said that he would. He married them in Dr. McGregor's own church on the hill overlooking the harbour and when they came from the church they heard the shanties sung by the sailors on the ship that would take Janet Stewart home.

*"That's John Wyatt,"* Dick said, as they drew nearer to the group, *"and that must be Mrs. Jamieson, travelling with her immigrants. She takes the unemployed families from Sydney, never sparing herself in her efforts to settle them in some employment."*

John Wyatt came to meet them, pleased that they had chosen to travel with his family, and Elizabeth knew that she would like him.

Mrs. Jamieson was anxious that they should take one of her families with them.

*"James Scott is a useful man,"* she said persuasively to John Wyatt, *"and your wife would find Mary Scott invaluable. The boy would be useful on the station."*

They arranged that Mrs. Wyatt should visit the camp and give her own decision, but Mrs. Wyatt was not pleased when her husband told her what he had done; they found her at her house near Black Bob's Creek, busied with preparations for their welcome. Her hospitality knew no bounds, and she was fond of Dick.

*"You've a good husband,"* she told Elizabeth, *"and I believe he has the prettiest wife in the colony."*

Elizabeth laughed. *"He has the least skilled in colonial ways, Mrs. Wyatt. Will you teach them to me?"*

*"You'll learn soon enough,"* her hostess assured her, *"since if you don't your life's a misery. The first thing I learnt myself was the way the blunderbuss is fired."*

Elizabeth looked at the great gun over the fireplace and shuddered.

*"There's a great need to know that,"* Mrs. Wyatt continued, *"for only a week ago, when John was away, the children saw a face watching them through a great crack between the slabs of the kitchen wall. I fired a gun through a window where I thought I saw a shadow, and in the morning we found a bloodstain on the ground. The country is full of bad characters."*

*"Then I'll learn to use the blunderbuss,"* Elizabeth decided tranquilly.

The great trek to the back country began. There were seven bullock waggons, two of which belonged to the Waterhole Station, and a hooded waggon drawn by a team of horses. It had a wide feather bed in the bottom, on which the women and children might rest. Mrs. Wyatt took her four children with her. There was a baby in arms and a small boy in a plaid frock, with two elder children, who usually preferred to walk beside the plodding oxen. They were sturdy, happy children.

Mrs. Jamieson had had her way, and the Scotts travelled with them. Mary Scott helped to care for the children, and Mrs. Wyatt admitted that she was a useful woman. *"But on the station, Elizabeth, you'd*

*rather see the blacks than whites. You're safer with the blacks. When John's away I dread to see a white man coming."*

The roads were very bad; they seldom travelled as many as 18 miles in a day, and the men would spend hours cutting saplings to make a corduroy lest the heavy waggons should be bogged where the ground was moist.

Day after day they travelled the endless southern track, the creaking of the waggons and the clank of the harness chains always in their ears. At night they camped beside a stream, building great fires, about which the men would sit smoking until a late hour, while Elizabeth lay on her bed of leaves crushed into chaff bags, listening to their voices.

One night there was a terrific storm, and a tree fell across Mary Scott's legs. They freed her while Mrs. Wyatt directed them, holding a flickering lantern, the rain beating upon her uncovered head. They passed through the scattered townships, seldom stopping and always on their guard against the bushrangers who frequented the outskirts of the settled districts. Mrs. Wyatt would scold her husband for his carelessness in leaving money about, but there were few places in which it could be concealed, and they were forced to carry large sums with them. One day she placed her notes in her stockings, but on that day she walked for a long time beside the waggons and the notes became worn and tattered.

They came to the crossing of the Murrumbidgee where their ways should have parted, but Mrs. Wyatt had long since persuaded Dick that he must bring Elizabeth to Mullengandra for some months before he took her to his station on the Buthawa water, and although Elizabeth longed to see her own homestead, she was loath to leave the Wyatt family.

They travelled across the green plains between the Murrumbidgee and the Hume, where the little native bears watched them from every tree. Dick brought one to Elizabeth, but she placed it in a tree again because she could not bear to hear its pitiful crying.

Before they reached Mullengandra, old James Barry came to meet his daughter and her family, riding with them for the rest of the journey. He had a bad-tempered Irish face, surmounted by an ill-fitting red wig, and he would give the children sovereigns. Mrs. Wyatt would take them away when her father was not looking, since he hated to be crossed.

They came to the stream known as the Billabong, and followed it to a wide and shallow crossing. James Barry rode across to show them the way, and John Wyatt followed, driving the hooded waggons in which the women, and children travelled.

He drove the vehicle over a submerged log and it overturned, throwing them all into the water. There was much confusion, but when they had scrambled to the farther bank, Mrs. Wyatt stood wringing her hands as she watched a feather pillow floating down the stream, and crying to her husband to save her son. She was not pacified until Elizabeth produced her small son, his plaid frock dripping about his sunburnt legs, from the bushes whose shelter he had succeeded in reaching from the water. It was a cold morning, and John Wyatt made them walk briskly lest they should take a chill.



They were all miserably uncomfortable, but the remaining waggons crossed in safety, and they righted the overturned vehicle.

Elizabeth had seen many station homesteads when she at length came to Mullengandra. Its huts had fallen into disrepair and the rain poured through the roofs, from which the bark had slipped. They lived in discomfort until the men repaired it and built them additional huts.

Mrs. Wyatt summoned the blacks from their camp as soon as she had unpacked her clothes, but they already knew that she had come again, and the gins quarrelled with one another as to which of them should do the household scrubbing.

In Yass, John Wyatt had obtained a brass plate for Paddiaddigaddi, on which was inscribed his title of King of the Buthawa tribe, and he displayed it proudly to the King of Thirllnginanga, who served John Wyatt. He would tell them of the marvels he had seen on his travels, while they listened with delight. But of all the wonders he had seen, the big water and an iron steamer which floated upon it were those that most astounded him. He would tell them again and again how the big bingle went "puff, puff, puff," as the beef cask which stood in the meat house sometimes did.

Every night he slept at Elizabeth's door. He strode across the plains with the Mullengandra mail bag, as he had been wont to do with Dick's at the Waterhole Station. He brought Elizabeth a letter from Sir John Kent, and Dick one from Robert Johnstone. Sir John sailed as an extra aide to Sir George Gipps, and the secretary wrote that he must accompany the Governor, but that some day he would return.

Strangers seldom came to the station, but one day Louis Martin rode to Mullengandra from the Martin station of Walla Walla. He brought the new squatting regulations made in England, and soon to be transmitted to the colony. They listened to him in amazement. It seemed incredible that the policy of Sir George Gipps could be so entirely reversed; but the Bent-street Club had had the news in a letter from London.

The squatters who held licences within the unsettled lands would be granted 14-year leases and the right of pre-emption.

Old James Barry slapped his knee. *"They've given us the land."* he cried triumphantly. *"They've given it to us in perpetuity."*

Louis Martin laughed. *"What's that catch they used to sing in Sydney?"*

*"My lord, it seems to me more clever, To me and to my heirs for ever."*

## CHAPTER XIX.

For a week Jarrett had been drinking heavily at the Black Duck. The score chalked up against him grew steadily longer but Ryan, who had come in from Albury with a team, had talked with Mick Conlan the publican and Jarrett was given as much liquor as he wanted. All the men who frequented the Black Duck drank at his expense, and young Jamie Macdonald from the smithy would slip away while his father slept and join the riotous company. There was a streak of wildness in Jamie which led him always from the straight and narrow paths in which his father walked. Ryan flattered him and found him easily led. One night Jamie brought news which set Ryan thinking. Richard

Ashley and his wife were coming from Mullengandra to the station of the Buthawa water.

Ryan knew that he must work speedily or lose the wealth that was almost within his grasp. He went to Mick Conlan who listened to him attentively. In some way Ryan had discovered that the publican had once practised as a solicitor in Ireland before he came to the colony in search of wealth, and he knew that Conlan would do anything for money. Ryan had little difficulty in persuading him that they must act immediately.

They took Jarrett to a room at the back of the Black Duck and Conlan told him that he would give him no more liquor.

Jarrett listened stupidly.

*"That's all right Conlan. That's all right."*

*"It's not all right. You owe me about seven hundred pounds and where are you going to get it? I want the money."*

*"Get me a drink, Conlan, and stop talking."* A raging thirst tormented Jarrett past all endurance.

*"You'll not get another drink until you've paid me."*

Jarrett pleaded with him like a child tortured by pain. *"Get me a drink, Conlan. Get me a drink. I'll sell my cattle and pay you."*

*"It's getting too dry to move the cattle. They'd starve on the stock route. I'll buy your licence for the Far Waterhole country, Jarrett,"* Ryan suggested.

Jarrett only knew that he must have liquor. Conlan brought brandy and glasses, holding them before Jarrett's tormented eyes, and produced a paper.

*"We'll have two witnesses,"* Conlan said to Ryan.

*"Get them from the bar."*

Ryan went back to the bar. *"How old are you, Macdonald?"* he asked Jamie.

*"Twenty-two, Ryan, and what's that to you."*

*"I want a couple of witnesses. You'll do, Jamie, and you, Jack."*

They went with him, flattered at having been singled out from the company.

Jarrett made his mark on the document which gave the station of the Far Waterhole to Ryan and the witnesses signed it. Ryan produced money, which Jarrett solemnly handed to Conlan. There were drinks all round.

When they were alone Conlan said to Ryan, with satisfaction: *"Let Ashley try to undo that if he can. It'll stand against an appeal to the Privy Council."*

Over at Mullengandra Mrs. Wyatt helped Elizabeth to pack her clothes. She had far too many, little Mrs. Wyatt said severely. She must not be extravagant. Elizabeth said that Dick liked them.

Dick had bought cattle from John Wyatt, paying him two thousand pounds in notes, and they were worried about the disposal of the money. There was no bank at Albury, and bushrangers were known to be in the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Wyatt insisted on its being hidden until it was time for an escort to leave for Melbourne. Money, she said, was the worry of her life. It

was more trouble than it was worth. She placed some in bottles and buried it, triumphantly setting a hen in a coop above the spot. It was her favourite way of hiding notes. When she had gold to be concealed she melted a barrel of fat and dropped the money into the bubbling depths. It would sink to the bottom of the cask, and be safe from prying eyes when the fat cooled.

She rolled a parcel of notes into a pair of old stockings, and old James Barry thrust a handful of them into the pocket of a faded coat which belonged to John Wyatt, and hung behind the door. His son Henry would have to take the money to Melbourne should the promised escort be unduly delayed.

Dick drove Elizabeth away from Mullengandra in a hooded, four-wheeled buggy while the children wept to see them go, and all the household wished them luck.

The plains were dry again and they carried water. Elizabeth had grown used to the long monotony of a journey across the plains, but she was glad when on the last day Dick pointed to a distant rise and told her that it was her own homestead that she saw against the skyline. They had stayed at hospitable station homesteads on their way to the Buthawa water, and her own was as primitive as any they had been. But it was her own, and the stockmen waited at the gate to greet her, while Paddiaddigaddi brought his gin to wait upon her, and the black boys followed, admiring the brass plate that hung about his neck.

Elizabeth inspected the collection of low wooden buildings, with the long verandahs, while Dick watched her anxiously, impatient for her verdict.

*"It's not a second Belmont, Elizabeth."*

*"I had not you at Belmont, Dick. This will be heaven."*

*"I'll build you a second Belmont, Elizabeth, beside the waterhole in the years to come."* He kissed her tenderly.

In the morning Macdonald rode from his smithy with a gift of flowers sent to Elizabeth by his wife. He was in great distress.

*"I've horse-whipped Jamie, Mr. Ashley, big as he is. He'd taken drink or he'd not have put his name on it. The wife says perhaps you will not think hardly of him, Mr. Ashley; he's but a laddie."*

*"But what has Jamie done?"* Dick asked in surprise.

Macdonald stared at him. *"Then you've no heard how Jarrett sold the Far Waterhole to the man Ryan for a bottle of rum!"*

Dick said a hard word between his teeth. *"Tell me about it."*

Macdonald told him what he knew of the transaction at the Black Duck.

*"Where is Jarrett now?"*

*"He's out at the Far Waterhole with Ryan."* Dick said good-bye to Elizabeth with a look in his eyes that she had never before seen there, and rode away in the direction of the Far Waterhole.

Macdonald rode back to the smithy with a heavy heart. Since he had come to this country he had known nothing but trouble and hardship, but this matter of his son Jamie foreshadowed a new bitterness for him and his wife. He did not know how to deal with the boy.

At the Far Waterhole homestead Ryan waited for Dick Ashley. He had sobered Jarrett to meet him when he should come, and a blackboy had warned them of Dick's approach.

Dick tied his horse to a post and walked to the house, a little cloud of red dust rising and sinking with each footstep. Ryan opened the door at his knocking, but Dick strode past him without a word and faced Jarrett.

*"What is this man doing here, Jarrett?"* His voice was pitiless, but Jarrett only stared at him with sullen, wretched eyes, saying nothing.

*"I'm here as owner, Mr. Ashley,"* Ryan said civilly. *"Jarrett sold this place to me."*

Dick pointed to the door. *"Never show your face in this house again. As for your deed of possession, I'll contest it with my last penny."*

*"It'll cost you your last penny then,"* Ryan said triumphantly, *"and I'll see the day when you don't own an acre of the waterhole country."*

He went back to the Black Duck, knowing that he had only to wait until the next visit of the Commissioner to obtain possession of the run. Jarrett stayed at the homestead. Even in his anger Dick did not deal harshly with him. He was determined that Ryan should not have the Far Waterhole, but he was more troubled than he cared to admit. He wrote to David Macfarlane asking him to meet him in Yass and go with him to the office of the Commissioner.

It was a very dry season and the water had ceased to flow in the billabongs. The remnants of the tribes had come in to the Buthawa water, where they camped in the great timber belt as they had been accustomed to do before the coming of the white men. At night they held corroborees, and the echo of the peace song could be faintly heard at the station homestead.

Elizabeth would ride with Dick to a knoll overlooking the lake and listen to the songs, while Dick told her of his first journey to the three waterholes. The shaft that now marked Frank Ashley's grave glimmered amid a forest of green pines, and it seemed to Dick that he must still linger beside the waterhole.

The game had come to the water as it always did in the dry time. A long line of kangaroos would pass them silently, grey shadows hopping into the timber, while their horses snorted and plunged, or emus would speed across the plain before them, necks stretched and tails drooping. At sunset the sky would be darkened with the flight of the wild fowl, duck and ibis, black swans and cranes seeking the water, or parrots flocking to the trees. At night the dingoes howled.

But of all the tribes once camped beside the Buthawa water only three or four remained and of these the tribesmen were few in number.

The warlike Geelamatong were no more. The last remnant of that tribe had been wiped out in a battle with the Wiradjuri, and the Wiradjuri had seen their hunting-grounds pass into the possession of the white men, while their hunters roamed the boundaries of the stations, dispirited and scattered. The tribe of the Kiewa came no more to sit down beside the waterhole.

All the blacks from the station had gone to join their fellows. Paddiaddigaddi and his gin camped with their tribe, Elizabeth doing the work of the household, assisted by Dick and the stockmen.

Dick waited for a letter from David Macfarlane, but it was long in coming. It came at last, bidding him hasten to Yass before the Commissioner left the town, and he prepared to leave that night.

It was a hot and breathless evening. There were storm clouds banked about the horizon, but the setting sun was an angry red.

Elizabeth rode with Dick to the knoll near the waterhole, and it seemed to Dick that it had become a place of ill-omen, as he had known it once before, but Elizabeth laughed at his fears. Macdonald's wife was coming to stay with her until Dick returned, and Paddiaddigaddi was with the Buthawa tribe. The stockmen were trustworthy. What harm could come from the waterhole.

She watched Dick from sight, sitting on her horse amid the green pines, and as he passed the waterhole she saw him wait almost as though he meant to return. The rays of the setting sun slanted across the crimson sky, and the surface of the water reflected its colour until the great waterhole seemed to glow a warning. It looked like a sea of blood. Watching it, Dick half resolved to return, but Elizabeth waved to him, and he rode on.

Elizabeth stayed to see the colour fade from the sky. A breathless hush hung over the water, and for the first time for many nights there was no song from the camps. In the dusk the little pines crowded about her Wee an army of marching spears. Elizabeth was suddenly afraid. She turned her horse, and cantered swiftly back to the homestead, and as she reached the shelter of the trees about the house, heavy drops of rain fell, forerunners of the gathering storm.

Across the Buthawa water the war song rolled like thunder. The women of the visiting tribes gathered their belongings, placing babies and treasures in the dilli bags, while the men looked to their weapons and daubed themselves with the war paint.

Paddiaddigaddi led the Buthawa tribe noiselessly from their camp. They stole like shadows to their places in the bed of the billabong which crossed the path that the strangers would take to reach their hunting grounds. It was a well-planned ambush, and towards dawn the hapless Wiradjuri came to the trap that awaited them.

The Buthawa blacks surrounded them, and drove them like sheep down the billabong, killing as they went. The air was thick with hurtling spears, and the night hideous with cries. The Buthawa tribe far outnumbered the Wiradjuri, but the latter fought as though they knew that this was their last tribal fight, and would leave the world accompanied by their enemies.

In the morning the women of the Buthawa tribe wailed for their dead who would hunt no more, and the few men who remained lay beneath the bark shelters, weak from the pain of their wounds.

Paddiaddigaddi came to the house, lamed by a spear thrust, and told them of the battle. The tribe had slain when the rain came, in accordance with their ancient law.

It rained steadily, and the men of the station rejoiced, but Elizabeth listened to the singing of the women with a catch of the heart. They lamented the warriors dead, singing the song to be sung when in grief, but she knew that they sang the dirge of their own race.

Never again would the tribe hold the truce of the Buthawa water, giving sanctuary until the rain came, beside the great waterhole

whose waters never failed. The plains would be fenced and the tribes scattered.

*Mulleh mulleh g'nar-r worah-r-goomah-r,*

*Currah-mulleh g'nor-r worrah-r,*

*Goomah currah-mulleh-mulleh.*

The mournful voices echoed across the water in time to the beating upon the folded opossum skins.

## CHAPTER XX.

The little old woman of Ashley came again to the Buthawa waterhole. Paddiaddigaddi saw her on the day on which Elizabeth's son was born. He entered the room where Mrs. Macdonald held the baby, singing gently to herself in Gaelic, and stood staring at her in strange terror.

*"What ails the boy?"* Mrs. Macdonald asked, ceasing her song.

Paddiaddigaddi turned and fled, and there- after the black boys refused to come to the house. They said they were afraid of that old one who sat down there.

The time set for the renewal of the licences drew near, and Dick began to worry lest some accident should prevent his application reaching the Treasury. Ryan now held the station of the Far Waterhole. The Commissioner had upheld his claim, and Dick's lawyers had insisted that it would be useless to dispute it, since Jarrett himself stubbornly maintained that he had sold his licence to Ryan. Jarrett was now droving about the Murrumbidgee. David Macfarlane, who never took risks if he could avoid it, would travel to Sydney with his application for the renewal of his licences, and Dick decided that he would send Paddiaddigaddi to him with his own application.

Paddiaddigaddi strode across the plain, proud of his mission. The packet entrusted to his care was as much a symbol to him as the brass plate about his neck. He was the chief black boy on the Waterhole station and the king of the Buthawa tribe; he was very content. At dusk he came to the Billabong that flowed from the north to the second waterhole, and an ill chance had sent Ryan to the same place. He had met Jamie Macdonald out duck-shooting, and Jamie had lent him his gun and gone home.

Ryan had been drinking, and he was in an evil temper. He watched Paddiaddigaddi from the reeds where he crouched, waiting for the coming of the wild duck, and the package carried by the black boy caught his eye. He guessed what it was, since he was preparing to send his own application for the renewal of his depasturing licence, and he was overcome by a sudden blind rage. Many times he had sworn to oust Dick Ashley from the country of the waterholes, and before him was Ashley's pet black boy carrying the application whose failure to reach the Treasury in Sydney within the allotted span might result in the waterhole country being publicly sold by auction. Should that happen Ashley might lose his land, unless he could outbid the wealthier squatters on the Hume, who already cast covetous eyes on the waterholes.

Ryan lifted his gun, a murderous light in his eyes. It would not be the first time he had shot a black boy. Paddiaddigaddi leapt in his tracks and fell forward, his brass plate striking the ground, as the shattering report of the gun startled the wild fowl. Ryan stood thinking. He was not hampered by remorse, and he had a natural instinct for self preservation. At length he dragged the body of the murdered boy far into the reeds, and left the package beside it. He then took the gun and went back towards the waterhole.

In the morning Macdonald reprimanded Jamie for not having cleaned his gun.

*"Didna' I tell you, Jamie, that you should clean it every time you went duck-shooting?"*

Jamie stared, open-mouthed. The gun that he had lent Ryan stood in a corner of the smithy.

*"Take it and clean it now,"* his father said. He watched Jamie go, and then with a sigh resumed his work.

Johann Hermann, the mailman who had brought in one of his horses to be shod, looked at him sympathetically.

*"Well, now, Macdonald, you are hard upon the lad. It was not his fault that the gun was not cleaned."*

*"Why wouldna' it be his fault?"* Macdonald asked stiffly.

*"I saw Black Ryan, of the Far Waterhole, with it late last night."*

*"Good morning, Macdonald,"* Dick Ashley walked into the smithy and both men were glad to see him.

*"Good morning, Mr. Ashley."*

Dick sat on a bench and filled his pipe; he liked the German who ran the mail from Albury, and Johann Hermann could tell him the news that travelled the rounds of the stations. He talked to the mailman while Macdonald went on with his work, pondering the incident of Jamie's gun. At length his misgivings overcame his natural caution, and he told Dick about it.

*"Where was Ryan coming from when you saw him, Johann?"* Dick was always suspicious of Ryan, and he thought it funny that Jamie should not have admitted to his father that Ryan had had the gun.

*"He passed me about one hundred yards from here, coming from the billabong,"* Johann said, *"and I tell you, Mr. Ashley, he has the face of a murderer. I had been to see to the horses, and I kept out of his way. He didn't see me."*

Macdonald dropped his hammer, and strode from the shop to interview Jamie. He came back, looking relieved.

*"Maybe it's a'richt. Jamie was duck shooting at the reedy crossing when Ryan came along, and the laddie lent him his gun, Ryan must have brought it back last night."*

*"Duck shooting at the reedy crossing last night."* Dick had an instant vision of Paddiaddigaddi crossing the billabong on his way to David Macfarlane's run on the Murrumbidgee. He turned to Hermann.

*"You said that Ryan looked as if he had committed a murder?"*

They both stared at him, and Hermann said slowly, *"I shouldn't be surprised."*

Dick took Jamie with him, and rode to the reedy crossing, but they searched for an hour before they found the body of Paddiaddigaddi.

While Jamie rode back for help, Dick waited beside the dead king of the Buthawa tribe, Paddiaddigaddi, most faithful of black boys. They carried him to the Buthawa waterhole, where his tribe received him, wrapping his body in bark so that it might be placed in a tree, according to the ancient custom.

There were tears in Dick's eyes when he told Elizabeth about it that night.

*"I'd rather have lost my licence for the Waterhole Country, Elizabeth"*

Down at the cottage beside the smithy Macdonald prayed long and fervently with his family. Had it not been ordained that Johann Hermann should have seen Ryan pass to the smithy with Jamie's gun, they would have taken Jamie away in irons, as they had taken the man Ryan.

The Commissioner had come swiftly with the border police from a neighbouring station. They hind ridden in with a flourish, their carbines slung and their spurs jingling, to hear the evidence Ryan had been taken from his house at the Far Waterhole to be sent to Yass in irons, and his licence was forfeit.

The next year Dick Ashley bought the station of the Far Waterhole at a Government auction sale In Sydney, so that in years to come his sons should hold all the country of the Waterholes.

THE END.

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