

Cumner's Son and Other South Sea Folk, v2

Gilbert Parker

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THE HIGH COURT OF BUDGERY-GAR

We were camped on the edge of a billabong. Barlas was kneading a damper, Drysdale was tenderly packing coals about the billy to make the water boil, and I was cooking the chops. The hobbled horses were picking the grass and the old-man salt-bush near, and Bimbi, the black boy, was gathering twigs and bark for the fire. That is the order of merit Barlas, Drysdale, myself, the horses and Bimbi. Then comes the Cadi all by himself. He is given an isolated and indolent position, because he was our guest and also because, in a way, he represented the Government. And though bushmen do not believe much in a far-off Government even though they say when protesting against a bad Land Law, "And your Petitioners will ever Pray," and all that kind of yabber-yabber they give its representative the lazy side of the fire and a fig of the best tobacco when he bails up a camp as the Cadi did ours. Stewart Ruttan, the Cadi, was the new magistrate at Windowie and Gilgan, which stand for a huge section of the Carpentaria country. He was now on his way to Gilgan to try some cases there. He was a new chum, though he had lived in Australia for years. As Barlas said, he'd been kept in a cultivation-paddock in Sydney and Brisbane; and he was now going to take the business of justice out of the hands of Heaven and its trusted agents the bushmen, and reduce the land to the peace of the Beatitudes by the imposing reign of law and summary judgments. Barlas had just said as much, though in different language.

I knew by the way that Barlas dropped the damper on the hot ashes and swung round on his heel that he was in a bad temper. "And so you think, Cadi," said he, "that we squatters and bushmen are a strong, murderous lot; that we hunt down the Myalls [Aborigines] like kangaroos or dingoes, and unrighteously take justice in our own hands instead of handing it over to you?"

"I think," said the Cadi, "that individual and private revenge should not take the place of the Courts of Law. If the blacks commit depredations "

"Depredations!" interjected Drysdale with sharp scorn.

"If they commit depredations and crimes," the Cadi continued, "they should be captured as criminals are captured elsewhere and be brought in and tried. In that way respect would be shown to British law and " here he hesitated slightly, for Barlas's face was not pleasant to see "and the statutes."

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But Barlas's voice was almost compassionate as he said: "Cadi, every man to his trade, and you've got yours. But you haven't learned yet that this isn't Brisbane or Melbourne. You haven't stopped to consider how many police would be necessary for this immense area of country if you are really to be of any use. And see here," his face grew grim and dark, "you don't know what it is to wait for the law to set things right in this Never Never Land. There isn't a man in the Carpentaria and Port Darwin country but has lost a friend by the cowardly crack of a waddy in the dead of night or a spear from behind a tree. Never any fair fighting, but red slaughter and murder curse their black hearts!" Barlas gulped down what seemed very like a sob.

Drysdale and I knew how strongly Barlas felt. He had been engaged to be married to a girl on the Daly River, and a week before the wedding she and her mother and her two brothers were butchered by blacks whom they had often befriended and fed. We knew what had turned Barlas's hair grey and spoiled his life.

Drysdale took up the strain: "Yes, Cadi, you've got the true missionary gospel, the kind of yabber they fire at each other over tea and buns at Darling Point and Toorak all about the poor native and the bad, bad men who don't put peas in their guns, and do sometimes get an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. . . . Come here, Bimbi." Bimbi came.

"Yes, master," Bimbi said.

"You kill that black-fellow mother belonging to you?"

"Yes, master."

"Yes," Drysdale continued, "Bimbi went out with a police expedition against his own tribe, and himself cut his own mother's head off. As a race, as a family, the blacks have no loyalty. They will track their own brothers down for the whites as ruthlessly as they track down the whites. As a race they are treacherous and vile, though as individuals they may have good points."

"No, Cadi," once more added Barlas, "we can get along very well without your consolidated statutes or High Courts or Low Courts just yet. They are too slow. Leave the black devils to us. You can never prove anything against them in a court of law. We've tried that. Tribal punishment is the only proper thing for individual crime. That is what the nations practise in the islands of the South Seas. A trader or a Government official is killed. Then a man-of-war sweeps a native village out of existence with Hotchkiss guns. Cadi, we like you; but we say to you, Go back to your cultivation-paddock at Brisbane, and marry a wife and beget children before the Lord, and feed on the Government, and let us work out our own salvation. We'll preserve British justice and the statutes, too. . . . There, the damper, as Bimbi would say, is 'corbon budgery', and your chop is done to a turn, Cadi. And now let's talk of something that doesn't leave a bad taste in the mouth."

The Cadi undoubtedly was more at home with reminiscences of nights at the Queensland Club and moonlight picnics at lovely Humpy Bong and champagne spreads in a Government launch than at dispensing law in the Carpentaria district. And he had eager listeners. Drysdale's open-mouthed, admiring "My word!" as he puffed his pipe, his back against an ironbark tree, was most eloquent of long banishment from the delights of the "cultivation-paddock"; and Barlas nodded frequently his approval, and was less grim than usual. Yet, peaceful as we were, it might have puzzled a stranger to see that all of us were armed in this tenantless, lonely wilderness! Lonely and tenantless enough it seemed. There was the range of the Copper-mine hills to the south, lighted by the wan moon; and between and to the west a rough scrub country, desolating beyond words, and where even edible snakes would be scarce; spots of dead-finish, gidya, and brigalow-bush to north and east, and in the trees by the billabong the cry of the cockatoo and the laughing-jackass. It was lonely, but surely it was safe. Yes, perhaps it was safe!

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It was late when we turned in, our heads upon our saddles, for the Cadi had been more than amusing he had been confidential, and some political characters were roughly overhauled for our benefit, while so-called Society did not escape flagellation. Next morning the Cadi left us. He gave us his camps Bora Bora, Budgery-Gar, Wintelliga, and Gilgan since we were to go in his direction also soon. He turned round in his saddle as he rode off, and said gaily: "Gentlemen, I hope you'll always help to uphold the majesty of the law as nobly as you have sustained its envoy from your swags."

Drysdale and I waved our hands to him, but Barlas muttered something between his teeth. We had two days of cattle-hunting in the Copper-mine hills, and then we started westward, in the tracks of the Cadi, to make for Barlas's station. The second day we camped at Bora Bora Creek. We had just hobbled the horses, and were about to build a fire, when Bimbi came running to us. "Master, master," he said to Drysdale, "that fellow Cadi yarraman mumkull over there. Plenty myall mandowie!" (" Master, master, the Cadi's horse is dead over there, and there are plenty of black fellows' tracks about.")

We found the horse pierced with spears. The Cadi had evidently mounted and tried to get away. And soon, by a clump of the stay-a-while bush, we discovered, alas! the late companion of our camp-fire. He was gashed from head to foot, and naked.

We buried him beneath a rustling sandal-tree, and on its bark carved the words:

"Sacred to the memory of Stewart Ruttan."

And beneath, Barlas added the following:

"The Cadi sleeps. The Law regards him not."

In a pocket of the Cadi's coat, which lay near, we found the picture of a pretty girl. On it was written:

"To dearest Stewart, from Alice."

Barlas's face was stern and drawn. He looked at us from under his shaggy brows.

"There's a Court to be opened," he said. "Do you stand for law or justice?"

"For justice," we replied.

Four days later in a ravine at Budgery-Gar a big camp of blacks were feasting. With loathsome pantomime they were re-enacting the murders they had committed within the past few days; murders of innocent white women and children, and good men and true among them the Cadi, God help him! Great fires were burning in the centre of the camp, and the bodies of the black devils writhed with hideous colour in the glare. Effigies of murdered whites were speared and mangled with brutal cries, and then black women of the camp were brought out, and mockeries of unnameable horrors were performed. Hell had emptied forth its carrion.

But twelve bitter white men looked down upon this scene from the scrub and rocks above, and their teeth were set. Barlas, their leader, turned to them and said: "This court is open. Are you ready?"

The click of twelve rifles was the reply.

When these twelve white jurymen rode away from the ravine there was not one but believed that justice had been done by the High Court of Budgery-Gar.

AN EPIC IN YELLOW

There was a culminating growth of irritation on board the Merrie Monarch. The Captain was markedly fitful and, to a layman's eye, unreliable at the helm; the Hon. Skye Terryer was smoking violently, and the Newspaper Correspondent representing an American syndicate chewed his cigar in silence.

"Yes," Gregson, the Member of Parliament, continued, "if I had my way I'd muster every mob of Chinamen in Australia, I'd have one thundering big roundup, and into the Pacific and the Indian Sea they'd go, to the crack of a stock-whip or of something more convincing." The Hon. Skye Terryer was in agreement with the Squatting Member in the principle of his argument if not in the violence of his remedies. He was a young travelling Englishman; one of that class who are Radicals at twenty, Independents at thirty, and Conservatives at forty. He had not yet reached the intermediate stage. He saw in this madcap Radical Member one of the crude but strong expressions of advanced civilisation. He had the noble ideal of Australia as a land trodden only by the Caucasian. The Correspondent, much to our surprise, had by occasional interjections at the beginning of the discussion showed that he was not antipathetic to Mongolian immigration. The Captain?

"Yes, I'd give 'em Botany Bay, my word!" added the Member as an anti-climax.

The Captain let go the helm with a suddenness which took our breath away, apparently regardless that we were going straight as an arrow on the Island of Pentecost, the shore of which, in its topaz and emerald tints, was pretty enough to look at but not to attack, end on. He pushed both hands down deep into his pockets and squared himself for war.

"Gregson," he said, "that kind of talk may be good enough for Parliament and for labour meetings, but it is not proper diet for the Merrie Monarch. It's a kind of political gospel that's no better than the creed of the Malay who runs amuck. God's Providence where would your Port Darwin Country have been without the Chinaman? What would have come to tropical agriculture in North Queensland if it had not been for the same? And what would all your cities do for vegetables to eat and clean shirts to their backs if it was not for the Chinkie? As for their morals, look at the police records of any well-regulated city where they are well-regulated, mind you, not like San Francisco! I pity the morals of a man and the stupidity of him and the benightedness of him that would drive the Chinaman out at the point of the bayonet or by the crack of a rifle. I pity that man, and and I wash my hands of him."

And having said all this with a strong Scotch accent the Captain opportunely turned to his duty and prevented us from trying conclusions with the walls of a precipice, over which fell silver streams of water like giant ropes up which the Naiads might climb to the balmy enclosures where the Dryads dwelt. The beauty of the scene was but a mechanical impression, to be remembered afterward when thousands of miles away, for the American Correspondent now at last lit his cigar and took up the strain.

"Say, the Captain's right," he said. "You English are awful prigs and hypocrites, politically; as selfish a lot as you'll find on the face of the globe. But in this matter of the Chinaman there isn't any difference between a man from Oregon and one from Sydney, only the Oregonian isn't a prig and a hypocrite; he's only a brute, a bragging, hard-handed brute. He got the Chinaman to build his railways he couldn't get any other race to do it same fix as the planter in North Queensland with the Polynesian; and to serve him in pioneer times and open up the country, and when that was done he turns round and says: 'Out you go, you Chinkie out you go and out you stay! We're going to reap this harvest all alone; we're going to Chicago you clean off the table!' And Washington, the Home of Freedom and Tammany Tigers, shoves a prohibitive Bill through the Legislature, as Parkes did in Sydney; only Parkes talked a lot of Sunday-school business about the solidarity of the British race, and Australia for the Australians, and all that patter; and the Oregonian showed his dirty palm of selfishness straight out, and didn't blush either. 'Give 'em Botany Bay! Give'em the stock-whip and the rifle!' That's a nice gospel for the

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Anglo-Saxon dispensation."

The suddenness of the attack overwhelmed the Member, but he was choking with wrath. Had he not stone-walled in the New South Wales Parliament for nine hours, and been placed on a Royal Commission for that service? "My word!" But the box of cigars was here amiably passed, and what seemed like a series of international complications was stayed. It was perhaps fortunate, however, that at this moment a new interest sprang up. We were rounding a lofty headland crowned with groves of cocoa-palms and bananas and with trailing skirts of flowers and vines, when we saw ahead of us a pretty little bay, and on the shore a human being plainly not a Polynesian. Up the hillside that rose suddenly from the beach was a thatched dwelling, not built open all round like most native houses, and apparently having but one doorway. In front of the house, and near it, was a tall staff, and on the staff the British Flag.

In a moment we, too, had the British Flag flying at our mast-head.

Long ago I ceased to wonder at coincidences, still I confess I was scarcely prepared for the Correspondent's exclamation, as, taking the marine glass from his eyes, he said: "Well, I'm decalogued if it ain't a Chinaman!"

It certainly was so. Here on the Island of Pentecost, in the New Hebrides, was a Celestial washing clothes on the beach as much at home as though he were in Tacoma or Cooktown. The Member's "My oath!" Skye Terryer's "Ah!" and the Captain's chuckle were as weighty with importance as though the whole question of Chinese immigration were now to be settled. As we hove-to and dropped anchor, a boat was pushed out into the surf by a man who had hurriedly come down the beach from the house. In a moment or two he was alongside. An English face and an English voice greeted us, and in the doorway of the house were an English woman and her child.

What pleasure this meeting gave to us and to the trader for such he was, those only can know who have sailed these Southern Seas through long and nerveless tropic days, and have lived, as this man did with his wife and child, for months never seeing a white face, and ever in danger of an attack from cannibal tribes, who, when apparently most disposed to amity, are really planning a massacre. Yet with that instinct of gain so strong in the Anglo-Saxon, this trader had dared the worst for the chance of making money quickly and plentifully by the sale of copra to occasional vessels. The Chinaman had come with the trader from Queensland, and we were assured was "as good as gold." If colour counted, he looked it. At this the pro-Mongolian magnanimously forbore to show any signs of triumph. The Correspondent, on the contrary, turned to the Chinaman and began chaffing him; he continued it as the others, save myself, passed on towards the house.

This was the close of the dialogue: "Well, John, how are you getting on?"

"Welly good," was John's reply; "thirletty dollars a month, and learn the plan of salvation."

The Correspondent laughed.

"Well, you good Englishman, John? You like British flag? You fight?"

And John, blinking jaundicely, replied: "John allee samee Lingshman- muchee fightee blimeby nigger no eatee China boy;" and he chuckled.

A day and a night we lingered in the little Bay of Vivi, and then we left it behind; each of us, however, watching till we could see the house on the hillside and the flag no longer, and one at least wondering if that secret passage into the hills from the palm-thatched home would ever be used as the white dwellers fled for their lives.

We had promised that, if we came near Pentecost again on our cruise, we would spend another idle day in the pretty bay. Two months passed and then we kept our word. As we rounded the lofty headland the Correspondent

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said: "Say, I'm hankering after that baby!" But the Captain at the moment hoarsely cried: "God's love! but where are the house and the flag?"

There was no house and there was no flag above the Bay of Vivi.

Ten minutes afterwards we stood beside the flag-staff, and at our feet lay a moaning, mangled figure. It was the Chinaman, and over his gashed misery were drawn the folds of the flag that had flown on the staff. What horror we feared for those who were not to be seen needs no telling here.

As for the Chinaman, it was as he said; the cannibals would not "eatee Chinee boy." They were fastidious. They had left him, disdaining even to take his head for a trophy.

Hours after, on board the Merrie Monarch, we learned in fragments the sad story. It was John Chinaman that covered the retreat of the wife and child into the hills when the husband had fallen.

The last words that the dying Chinkie said were these: "Blitish flag wellee good thing keepee China boy walm; plentee good thing China boy sleepee in all a-time."

So it was. With rude rites and reverent hands, we lowered him to the deep from the decks of the Merrie Monarch, and round him was that flag under which he had fought for English woman and English child so valorously.

"And he went like a warrior into his rest
With the Union Jack around him."

That was the paraphrasing epitaph the Correspondent wrote for him in the pretty Bay of Vivi, and when he read it, we all drank in silence to the memory of "a Chinkie."

We found the mother and the child on the other side of the island ere a week had passed, and bore them away in safety. They speak to-day of a member of a despised race, as one who showed

"The constant service of the antique world."

DIBBS, R.N.

"Now listen to me, Neddie Dibbs," she said, as she bounced the ball lightly on her tennis-racket, "you are very precipitate. It's only four weeks since you were court-martialed, and you escaped being reduced by the very closest shave; and yet you come and make love to me, and want me to marry you. You don't lack confidence, certainly."

Commander Dibbs, R.N. was hurt; but he did not become dramatic. He felt the point of his torpedo-cut beard, and smiled up pluckily at her she was much taller than he.

"I know the thing went against me rather," he said, but it was all wrong, I assure you. It's cheeky, of course, to come to you like this so soon after, but for two years I've been looking forward up there in the China Sea to meeting you again. You don't know what a beast of a station it is besides, I didn't think you'd believe the charge."

"The charge was that you had endangered the safety of one of her Majesty's cruisers by trying to run through an unexplored opening in the Barrier Reef. Was that it?"

"That was it."

"And you didn't endanger her?"

"Yes, I did, but not wilfully, of course, nor yet stupidly."

"I read the evidence, and, frankly, it looked like stupidity."

"I haven't been called stupid usually, have I"

"No. I've heard you called many things, but never that."

Every inch of his five-feet-five was pluck. He could take her shots broadside, and laugh while he winced.

"You've heard me called a good many things not complimentary, I suppose, for I know I'm not much to look at, and I've an edge to my tongue sometimes. What is the worst thing you ever said of me?" he added a little bitterly.

"What I say to you now though, by the way, I've never said it before that your self-confidence is appalling. Don't you know that I'm very popular, that they say I'm clever, and that I'm a tall, good-looking girl?"

She looked down at him, and said it with such a delightful naivete, through which a tone of raillery ran, that it did not sound as it may read. She knew her full value, but no one had ever accused her of vanity she was simply the most charming, outspoken girl in the biggest city of Australia.

"Yes, I know all that," he replied with an honest laugh. "When you were a little child, according to your mother, and were told you were not good, you said: 'No, I'm not good I'm only beautiful.'"

Dibbs had a ready tongue, and nothing else he said at the moment could have had so good an effect. She laughed softly and merrily. "You have awkward little corners in your talk at times. I wonder they didn't reduce you at the court-martial. You were rather keen with your words once or twice there."

A faint flush ran over Dibbs's face, but he smiled through it, and didn't give away an inch of self-possession. "If the board had been women, I'd have been reduced right enough women don't go by evidence, but by their feelings; they don't know what justice really is, though by nature they've some undisciplined generosity."

"There again you are foolish. I'm a woman. Now why do you say such things to me, especially when when you are aspiring! Properly, I ought to punish you. But why did you say those sharp things at your trial? They probably told against you."

"I said them because I felt them, and I hate flummery and thick-headedness. I was as respectful as I could be; but there were things about the trial I didn't like irregular things, which the Admiral himself, who knows his business, set right."

"I remember the Admiral said there were points about the case that he couldn't quite understand, but that they could only go by such testimony as they had."

"Exactly," he said sententiously.

She wheeled softly on him, and looked him full in the eyes. "What other testimony was there to offer?"

"We are getting a long way from our starting-point," he answered evasively. "We were talking of a more serious matter."

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"But a matter with which this very thing has to do, Neddie Dibbs. There's a mystery somewhere. I've asked Archie; but he won't say a word about it, except that he doesn't think you were to blame."

"Your brother is a cautious fellow." Then, hurriedly: "He is quite right to express no opinion as to any mystery. Least said soonest mended."

"You mean that it is proper not to discuss professional matters in society?"

"That's it." A change had passed over Dibbs's face it was slightly paler, but his voice was genial and inconsequential.

"Come and sit down at the Point," she said.

They went to a cliff which ran out from one corner of the garden, and sat down on a bench. Before them stretched the harbour, dotted with sails; men-of-war lay at anchor, among them the little Ruby, Commander Dibbs's cruiser. Pleasure-steamers went hurrying along to many shady harbours; a tall-masted schooner rode grandly in between the Heads, balanced with foam; and a beach beneath them shone like opal: it was a handsome sight.

For a time they were silent. At last he said: "I know I haven't much to recommend me. I'm a little beggar nothing to look at; I'm pretty poor; I've had no influence to push me on; and just at the critical point in my career when I was expecting promotion I get this set-back, and lose your good opinion, which is more to me, though I say it bluntly like a sailor, than the praise of all the Lords of the Admiralty, if it could be got. You see, I always was ambitious; I was certain I'd be a captain; I swore I'd be an admiral one day; and I fell in love with the best girl in the world, and said I'd not give up thinking I would marry her until and unless I saw her wearing another man's name and I don't know that I should even then."

"Now that sounds complicated or wicked," she said, her face turned away from him.

"Believe me, it is not complicated; and men marry widows sometimes."

"You are shocking," she said, turning on him with a flush to her cheek and an angry glitter in her eye. "How dare you speak so cold-bloodedly and thoughtlessly?"

"I am not cold-blooded or thoughtless, nor yet shocking. I only speak what is in my mind with my usual crudeness. I know it sounds insolent of me, but, after all, it is only being bold with the woman for whom half-disgraced, insignificant, but unquenchable fellow as I am I'd do as much as, and, maybe, dare more for than any one of the men who would marry her if they could."

"I like ambitious men," she said relenting, and meditatively pushing the grass with her tennis-racket; "but ambition isn't everything, is it? There must be some kind of fulfilment to turn it into capital, as it were. Don't let me hurt your feelings, but you haven't done a great deal yet, have you?"

"No, I haven't. There must be occasion. The chance to do something big may start up any time, however. You never can tell when things will come your way. You've got to be ready, that's all."

"You are very confident."

"You'll call me a prig directly, perhaps, but I can't help that. I've said things to you that I've never said to any one in the world, and I don't regret saying them."

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She looked at him earnestly. She had never been made love to in this fashion. There was no sentimentalism in it, only straightforward feeling, forceful, yet gentle. She knew he was aware that the Admiral of his squadron had paid, and was paying, court to her; that a titled aide-de-camp at Government House was conspicuously attentive; that one of the richest squatters in the country was ready to make astonishing settlements at any moment; and that there was not a young man of note acquainted with her who did not offer her gallant service—in the ball-room. She smiled as she thought of it. He was certainly not large, but no finer head was ever set on a man's shoulders, powerful, strongly outlined, nobly balanced. The eyes were everywhere; searching, indomitable, kind. It was a head for a sculptor. Ambition became it well. She had studied that head from every stand-point, and had had the keenest delight in talking to the man. But, as he said, that was two years before, and he had had bad luck since then.

She suddenly put this question to him: "Tell me all the truth about that accident to the Ruby. You have been hiding something. The Admiral was right, I know. Some evidence was not forthcoming that would have thrown a different light on the affair."

"I can tell you nothing," he promptly replied.

"I shall find out one day," she said.

"I hope not; though I'm grateful that you wish to do so."

He rose hurriedly to his feet; he was looking at the harbour below. He raised the field-glass he had carried from the veranda to his eyes. He was watching a yacht making across the bay towards them.

She spoke again. "You are going again to-morrow?"

"Yes; all the ships of the squadron but one get away."

"How long shall you be gone?"

"Six months at least Great God!"

He had not taken the glasses from his eyes as they talked, but had watched the yacht as she came on to get under the lee of the high shore at their right. He had noticed that one of those sudden fierce winds, called Southerly Busters, was sweeping down towards the craft, and would catch it when it came round sharp, as it must do. He recognised the boat also. It belonged to Laura Harman's father, and her brother Archie was in it. The gale caught the yacht as Dibbs foresaw, and swamped her. He dropped the glass, cried to the girl to follow, and in a minute had scrambled down the cliff, and thrown off most of his things. He had launched a skiff by the time the girl reached the shore. She got in without a word. She was deadly pale, but full of nerve. They rowed hard to where they could see two men clinging to the yacht; there had been three in it. The two men were not hauled in, for the gale was blowing too hard, but they clung to the rescuing skiff. The girl's brother was not to be seen. Instantly Dibbs dived under the yacht. It seemed an incredible time before he reappeared; but when he did, he had a body with him. Blood was coming from his nose, the strain of holding his breath had been so great. It was impossible to get the insensible body into the skiff. He grasped the side, and held the boy's head up. The girl rowed hard, but made little headway. Other rescue boats arrived presently, however, and they were all got to shore safely.

Lieutenant Archie Harman did not die. Animation was restored after great difficulty, but he did not sail away with the Ruby next morning to the Polynesian Islands. Another man took his place.

Little was said between Commander Dibbs and Laura Harman at parting late that night. She came from her brother's bedside and laid her hand upon his arm. "It is good," she said, "for a man to be brave as well as

ambitious. You are sure to succeed; and I shall be proud of you, for for you saved my brother's life, you see," she timidly added; and she was not often timid.

.....

Five months after, when the Ruby was lying with the flag-ship off one of the Marshall Islands, a packet of letters was brought from Fiji by a trading-schooner. One was for Commander Dibbs. It said in brief: "You saved my brother's life that was brave. You saved his honour that was noble. He has told me all. He will resign and clear you when the Admiral returns. You are a good man."

"He ought to be kicked," Dibbs said to himself. "Did the cowardly beggar think I did it for him blast him!"

He raged inwardly; but he soon had something else to think of, for a hurricane came down on them as they lay in a trap of coral with only one outlet, which the Ruby had surveyed that day. He took his ship out gallantly, but the flag-ship dare not attempt it Dibbs was the only man who knew the passage thoroughly. He managed to land on the shore below the harbour, and then, with a rope round him, essayed to reach the flag- ship from the beach. It was a wild chance, but he got there badly battered. Still, he took her with her Admiral out to the open safely.

That was how Dibbs became captain of a great iron-clad.

Archie Harman did not resign; Dibbs would not let him. Only Archie's sister knew that he was responsible for the accident to the Ruby, which nearly cost Dibbs his reputation; for he and Dibbs had surveyed the passage in the Barrier Reef when serving on another ship, and he had neglected instructions and wrongly and carelessly interpreted the chart. And Dibbs had held his tongue.

One evening Laura Harman said to Captain Dibbs: "Which would you rather be Admiral of the Fleet or my husband?" Her hand was on his arm at the time.

He looked up at her proudly, and laughed slyly. "I mean to be both, dear girl."

"You have an incurable ambition," she said.

A LITTLE MASQUERADE

"Oh, nothing matters," she said, with a soft, ironical smile, as she tossed a bit of sugar to the cockatoo.

"Quite so," was his reply, and he carefully gathered in a loose leaf of his cigar. Then, after a pause: "And yet, why so? It's a very pretty world one way and another."

"Yes, it's a pretty world at times."

At that moment they were both looking out over a part of the world known as the Nindobar Plains, and it was handsome to the eye. As far as could be seen was a carpet of flowers under a soft sunset. The homestead by which they sat was in a wilderness of blossoms. To the left was a high rose-coloured hill, solemn and mysterious; to the right afar off a forest of gum-trees, pink and purple against the horizon. At their feet, beyond the veranda, was a garden joyously brilliant, and bright-plumaged birds flitted here and there.

The two looked out for a long time, then, as if by a mutual impulse, suddenly turned their eyes on each other. They smiled, and, somehow, that smile was not delightful to see. The girl said presently: "It is all on the surface."

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Jack Sherman gave a little click of the tongue peculiar to him, and said: "You mean that the beautiful birds have dreadful voices; that the flowers are scentless; that the leaves of the trees are all on edge and give no shade; that where that beautiful carpet of blossoms is there was a blazing quartz plain six months ago, and there's likely to be the same again; that, in brief, it's pretty, but hollow." He made a slight fantastic gesture, as though mocking himself for so long a speech, and added: "Really, I didn't prepare this little oration."

She nodded, and then said: "Oh, it's not so hollow, you would not call it that exactly, but it's unsatisfactory."

"You have lost your illusions."

"And before that occurred you had lost yours."

"Do I betray it, then?" He laughed, not at all bitterly, yet not with cheerfulness.

"And do you think that you have such acuteness, then, and I " Nellie Hayden paused, raised her eyebrows a little coldly, and let the cockatoo bite her finger.

"I did not mean to be egotistical. The fact is I live my life alone, and I was interested for the moment to know how I appeared to others. You and I have been tolerably candid with each other since we met, for the first time, three days ago; I knew you would not hesitate to say what was in your mind, and I asked out of honest curiosity. One fancies one hides one's self, and yet you see!"

"Do you find it pleasant, then, to be candid and free with some one?.... Why with me?" She looked him frankly in the eyes.

"Well, to be more candid. You and I know the world very well, I fancy. You were educated in Europe, travelled, enjoyed and suffered." The girl did not even blink, but went on looking at him steadily. "We have both had our hour with the world; have learned many sides of the game. We haven't come out of it without scars of one kind or another. Knowledge of the kind is expensive."

"You wanted to say all that to me the first evening we met, didn't you?" There was a smile of gentle amusement on her face.

"I did. From the moment I saw you I knew that we could say many things to each other 'without pre liminaries.' To be able to do that is a great deal."

"It is a relief to say things, isn't it?"

"It is better than writing them, though that is pleasant, after its kind."

"I have never tried writing as we talk. There's a good deal of vanity at the bottom of it though, I believe."

"Of course. But vanity is a kind of virtue, too." He leaned over towards her, dropping his arms on his knees and holding her look. "I am very glad that I met you. I intended only staying here over night, but "

"But I interested you in a way you see, I am vain enough to think that. Well, you also interested me, and I urged my aunt to press you to stay. It has been very pleasant, and when you go it will be very humdrum again; our conversation, mustering, rounding-up, bullocks, and rabbits. That, of course, is engrossing in a way, but not for long at a time."

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He did not stir, but went on looking at her. "Yes, I believe it has been pleasant for you, else it had not been so pleasant for me. Honestly, I don't believe I shall ever get you out of my mind."

"That is either slightly rude or badly expressed," she said. "Do you wish, then, to get me out of your mind?"

"No, no You are very keen. I wish to remember you always. But what I felt at the moment was this. There are memories which are always passive and delightful. We have no wish to live the scenes of which they are over again, the reflection is enough. There are others which cause us to wish the scenes back again, with a kind of hunger; and yet they won't or can't come back. I wondered of what class this memory would be."

The girl flushed ever so slightly, and her fingers clasped a little nervously, but she was calm. Her voice was even; it had, indeed, a little thrilling ring of energy. "You are wonderfully daring," she replied, "to say that to me. To a school-girl it might mean so much: to me !" She shook her head at him reprovingly.

He was not in the least piqued. "I was absolutely honest in that. I said nothing but what I felt. I would give very much to feel confident one way or the other forgive me, for what seems incredible egotism. If I were five years younger I should have said instantly that the memory would be one "

"Which would disturb you, make you restless, cause you to neglect your work, fill you with regret; and yet all too late isn't that it?" She laughed lightly and gave a lump of sugar to the cockatoo.

"You read me accurately. But why touch your words with satire?"

"I believe I read you better than you read me. I didn't mean to be satirical. Don't you know that what often seems irony directed towards others is in reality dealt out to ourselves? Such irony as was in my voice was for myself."

"And why for yourself?" he asked quietly, his eyes full of interest. He was cutting the end of a fresh cigar. "Was it" he was about to strike a match, but paused suddenly "was it because you had thought the same thing?"

She looked for a moment as though she would read him through and through; as though, in spite of all their candour, there was some lingering uncertainty as to his perfect straightforwardness; then, as if satisfied, she said at last: "Yes, but with a difference. I have no doubt which memory it will be. You will not wish to be again on the plains of Nindobar."

"And you," he said musingly, "you will not wish me here?" There was no real vanity in the question. He was wondering how little we can be sure of what we shall feel to-morrow from what we feel to-day. Besides, he knew that a wise woman is wiser than a wise man.

"I really don't think I shall care particularly. Probably, if we met again here, there would be some jar to our comradeship I may call it that, I suppose?"

"Which is equivalent to saying that good-bye in most cases, and always in cases such as ours, is a, little tragical, because we can never meet quite the same again."

She bowed her head, but did not reply. Presently she glanced up at him kindly. "What would you give to have back the past you had before you lost your illusions, before you had trouble?"

"I do not want it back. I am not really disillusioned. I think that we should not make our own personal experience a law unto the world. I believe in the world in spite of trouble. You might have said trouble with a woman I should not have minded." He was smoking now, and the clouds twisted about his face so that only his eyes looked through earnestly. "A woman always makes laws from her personal experience. She has not the

faculty of generalisation I fancy that's the word to use."

She rose now with a little shaking motion, one hand at her belt, and rested a shoulder against a pillar of the veranda. He rose also at once, and said, touching her hand respectfully with his finger tips: "We may be sorry one day that we did not believe in ourselves more."

"Oh, no," she said, turning and smiling at him, "I think not. You will be in England hard at work, I here hard at living; our interests will lie far apart. I am certain about it all. We might have been what my cousin calls 'trusty pals' no more."

"I wish to God I felt sure of that."

She held out her hand to him. "I believe you are honest in this. I expect both of us have played hide-and-seek with sentiment in our time; but it would be useless for us to masquerade with each other: we are of the world, very worldly."

"Quite useless here comes your cousin! I hope I don't look as agitated as I feel."

"You look perfectly cool, and I know I do. What an art this living is! My cousin comes about the boarhunt to-morrow."

"Shall you join us?"

"Of course. I can handle a rifle. Besides, it is your last day here."

"Who can tell what to-morrow may bring forth?" he said.

.....

The next day the boar-hunt occurred. They rode several miles to a little lake and a scrub of brigalow, and, dismounting, soon had exciting sport. Nellie was a capital shot, and, without loss of any womanliness, was a thorough sportsman. To-day, however, there was something on her mind, and she was not as alert and successful as usual. Sherman kept with her as much as possible the more so because he saw that her cousins, believing she was quite well able to take care of herself, gave her to her own resources. Presently, however, following an animal, he left her a distance behind.

On the edge of a little billabong she came upon a truculent boar. It turned on her, but she fired, and it fell. Seeing another ahead, she pushed on quickly to secure it, too. As she went she half-cocked her rifle. Had her mind been absolutely intent on the sport, she had full cocked it. All at once she heard the thud of feet behind her. She turned swiftly, and saw the boar she had shot bearing upon her, its long yellow tusks standing up like daggers. A sweeping thrust from one of them leaves little chance of life.

She dropped upon a knee, swung her rifle to her shoulder, and pulled the trigger. The rifle did not go off. For an instant she did not grasp the trouble. With singular presence of mind, however, she neither lowered her rifle nor took her eye from the beast; she remained immovable. It was all a matter of seconds. Evidently cowed, the animal, when within a few feet of her, swerved to the right, then made as though to come down on her again. But, meanwhile, she had discovered her mistake, and cocked her rifle. She swiftly trained it on the boar, and fired. It was hit, but did not fall; and came on. Then another shot rang out from behind her, and the boar fell so near her that its tusk caught her dress.

Jack Sherman had saved her.

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She was very white when she faced him. She could not speak. That night, however, she spoke very gratefully and almost tenderly.

To something that he said gently to her then about a memory, she replied: "Tell me now as candidly as if to your own soul, did you feel at the critical moment that life would be horrible and empty without me?"

"I thought only of saving you," he said honestly.

"Then I was quite right; you will never have any regret," she said.

"I wonder, ah, I wonder!" he added sorrowfully. But the girl was sure.

The regret was hers; though he never knew that. It is a lonely life on the dry plains of Nindobar.

DERELICT

He was very drunk; and because of that Victoria Lindley, barmaid at O'Fallen's, was angry not at him but at O'Fallen, who had given him the liquor.

She knew more about him than any one else. The first time she saw him he was not sober. She had left the bar-room empty; and when she came back he was there with others who had dropped in, evidently attracted by his unusual appearance he wore an eyeglass and he had been saying something whimsically audacious to Dicky Merritt, who, slapping him on the shoulder, had asked him to have a swizzle.

Dicky Merritt had a ripe sense of humour, and he was the first to grin. This was followed by loud laughs from others, and these laughs went out where the dust lay a foot thick and soft like precipitated velvet, and hurrying over the street, waked the Postmaster and roused the Little Milliner, who at once came to their doors. Catching sight of each other, they nodded, and blushed, and nodded again; and then the Postmaster, neglecting the business of the country, went upon his own business into the private sitting-room of the Little Milliner; for those wandering laughs from O'Fallen's had done the work set for them by the high powers.

Over in the hot bar-room the man with the eye-glass was being frankly "intr'juiced" to Dicky Merritt and Company, Limited, by Victoria Lindley, who, as hostess of this saloon, was, in his eyes, on a footing of acquaintance. To her he raised his hat with accentuated form, and murmured his name "Mr. Jones Mr. Jones." Forthwith, that there might be no possible unpleasantness for even such hostesses have their duties of tact she politely introduced him as Mr. Jones.

He had been a man of innumerable occupations nothing long: caretaker of tanks, rabbit-trapper, boundary-rider, cook at a shearers' camp, and, in due time, he became book-keeper at O'Fallen's. That was due to Vic. Mr. Jones wrote a very fine hand not in the least like a business man when he was moderately sober, and he also had an exceedingly caustic wit when he chose to use it. He used it once upon O'Fallen, who was a rough, mannerless creature, with a good enough heart, but easily irritated by the man with the eye-glass, whose superior intellect and manner, even when drunk, were too noticeable. He would never have employed him were it not for Vic, who was worth very much money to him in the course of the year. She was the most important person within a radius of a hundred and fifty miles, not excepting Rembrandt, the owner of Bomba Station, which was twenty miles square, nor the parson at Magari, ninety miles south, by the Ring-Tail Billabong. For both Rembrandt and the parson had, and showed, a respect for her, which might appear startling were it seen in Berkeley Square or the Strand.

When, therefore, O'Fallen came raging into the barroom one morning, with the gentle remark that "he'd roast the tongue of her fancy gent if he didn't get up and git," he did a foolish thing. It was the first time that he had insulted

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Victoria, and it was the last. She came out white and quiet from behind the bar-counter, and, as he retreated from her into a corner, said: "There is not a man who drinks over this bar, or puts his horse into your shed, who wouldn't give you the lie to that and thrash you as well you coward!" Her words came on low and steady: "Mr. Jones will go now, of course, but I shall go also."

This awed O'Fallen. To lose Vic was to lose the reputation of his house. He instantly repented, but she turned her shoulder on him, and went into the little hot office, where the book-keeper was, leaving him gesticulating as he swore at himself in the glass behind the bar. When she entered the room she found Mr. Jones sitting rigid on his stool, looking at the open ledger before him. She spoke his name. He nodded ever so slightly, but still looked hard at the book. She knew his history. Once he had told it to her. It happened one day when he had resigned his position as boundary-rider, in which he was practically useless. He had been drinking, and, as he felt for the string of his eye-glass, his fingers caught another thin black cord which protruded slightly from his vest. He drew it out by mistake, and a small gold cross shone for a moment against the faded black coat. His fingers felt for it to lift it to his eye as though it were his eye-glass, but dropped it suddenly. He turned pale for a minute, then caught it as suddenly again, and thrust it into his waistcoat. But Vic had seen, and she had very calm, intelligent eyes, and a vast deal of common sense, though she had only come from out Tibbooburra way. She kept her eyes on him kindly, knowing that he would speak in time. They were alone, for most of the people of Wadgery were away at a picnic. There is always one moment when a man who has a secret, good or bad, fatal or otherwise, feels that he must tell it or die. And Mr. Jones told Vic, and she said what she could, though she knew that a grasp of her firm hands was better than any words; and she was equally sure in her own mind that word and grasp would be of no avail in the end.

She saw that the beginning of the end had come as she looked at him staring at the ledger, yet exactly why she could not tell. She knew that he had been making a fight since he had been book-keeper, and that now he felt that he had lost. She guessed also that he had heard what O'Fallen said to her, and what she had replied.

"You ought not to have offended him," she tried to say severely.

"It had to come," he said with a dry, crackling laugh, and he fastened his eye-glass in his eye. "I wasn't made for this. I could only do one thing, and " He laughed that peculiar laugh again, got down from the stool, and held out his hand to her.

"What do you intend?" she said. "I'm going, of course. Good-bye!" "But not at once?" she said very kindly.

"Perhaps not just at once," he answered with a strange smile.

She did not know what to say or do; there are puzzling moments even for a wise woman, and there is nothing wiser than that.

He turned at the door. "God bless you!" he said. Then, as if caught in an act to be atoned for, he hurried out into the street. From the door she watched him till the curtains of dust rose up about him and hid him from sight. When he came back to Wadgery months after he was a terrible wreck; so much so that Vic could hardly look at him at first; and she wished that she had left O'Fallen's as she threatened, and so have no need to furnish any man swizzles. She knew he would never pull himself together now. It was very weak of him, and horrible, but then . . . When that thirst gets into the blood, and there's something behind the man's life too as Dicky Merritt said, "It's a case for the little black angels."

Vic would not give him liquor. He got it, however, from other sources. He was too far gone to feel any shame now. His sensibilities were all blunted. One day he babbled over the bar-counter to O'Fallen, desiring greatly that they should be reconciled. To that end he put down the last shilling he had for a swizzle, and was so outrageously offended when O'Fallen refused to take it, that the silver was immediately swept into the till; and very soon, with

his eye-glass to his eye, Mr. Jones was drunk.

That was the occasion mentioned in the first sentence of this history, when Vic was very angry.

The bar-room was full. Men were wondering why it was that the Postmaster and the Little Milliner, who went to Magari ten days before, to get married by the parson there, had not returned. While they talked and speculated, the weekly coach from Magari came up slowly to the door, and, strange to say, without a blast from the driver's horn. Dicky Merritt and Company rushed out to ask news of the two truants, and were met with a warning wave of the driver's hand, and a "Sh-h! sh!" as he motioned towards the inside of the coach. There they found the Postmaster and the Little Milliner mere skeletons, and just alive. They were being cared for by a bushman, who had found them in the plains, delirious and nearly naked. They had got lost, there being no regular road over the plains, and their horse, which they had not tethered properly, had gone large. They had been days without food and water when they were found near the coach-track.

They were carried into O'Fallen's big sitting-room. Dicky brought the doctor, who said that they both would die, and soon. Hours passed. The sufferers at last became sane and conscious, as though they could not go without something being done. The Postmaster lifted a hand to his pocket. Dicky Merritt took out of it a paper. It was the marriage licence. The Little Milliner's eyes were painful to see; she was not dying happy. The Postmaster, too, moved his head from side to side in trouble. He reached over and took her hand. She drew it back, shuddering a little. "The ring! The ring!" she whispered.

"It is lost," he said.

Vic, who was at the woman's head, understood. She stooped, said something in her ear, then in that of the Postmaster, and left the room. When she came back, two minutes later, Mr. Jones was with her. What she had done to him to sober him no one ever knew. But he had a book in his hand, and on the dingy black of his waistcoat there shone a little gold cross. He came to where the two lay. Vic drew from her finger a ring. What then occurred was never forgotten by any who saw it; and you could feel the stillness, it was so great, after a high, sing-song voice said: "Those whom God hath joined let no man put asunder."

The two lying cheek by cheek knew now that they could die in peace.

The sing-song voice rose again in the ceremony of blessing, but suddenly it quavered and broke, the man rose, dropping the prayer-book to the floor, and ran quickly out of the room and into the dust of the street, and on, on into the plains.

"In the name of God, who is he?" said Dicky Merritt to Victoria Lindley.

"He was the Reverend Jones Leverton, of Harfordon-Thames," was her reply.

"Once a priest, always a priest," added Dicky. "He'll never come back," said the girl, tears dropping from her eyes.

And she was right.

OLD ROSES

It was a barren country, and Wadgery was generally shrivelled with heat, but he always had roses in his garden, on his window-sill, or in his button-hole. Growing flowers under difficulties was his recreation. That was why he was called Old Roses. It was not otherwise inapt, for there was something antique about him, though he wasn't

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old; a flavour, an old-fashioned repose and self-possession. He was Inspector of Tanks for this God-forsaken country. Apart from his duties he kept mostly to himself, though when not travelling he always went down to O'Fallen's Hotel once a day for a glass of whisky and water whisky kept especially for him; and as he drank this slowly he talked to Victoria Lindley the barmaid, or to any chance visitors whom he knew. He never drank with any one, nor asked any one to drink; and, strange to say, no one resented this. As Vic said: "He was different." Dicky Merritt, the solicitor, who was hail-fellow with squatter, homestead lessee, cockatoo-farmer, and shearer, called him "a lively old buffer." It was he, indeed, who gave him the name of Old Roses. Dicky sometimes went over to Long Neck Billabong, where Old Roses lived, for a reel, as he put it, and he always carried away a deep impression of the Inspector's qualities.

"Had his day," said Dicky in O'Fallen's sitting-room one night, "in marble halls, or I'm a Jack. Run neck and neck with almighty swells once. Might live here for a thousand years and he'd still be the nonesuch of the back-blocks. I'd patent him file my caveat for him to-morrow, if I could, bully Old Roses!"

Victoria Lindley, the barmaid, lifted her chin slightly from her hands, as she leaned through the opening between the bar and the sitting-room, and said: "Mr. Merritt, Old Roses is a gentleman; and a gentleman is a gentleman till he "

"Till he humps his bluey into the Never Never Land, Vic? But what do you know about gentlemen, anyway? You were born only five miles from the jumping-off place, my dear."

"Oh," was the quiet reply, "a woman the commonest woman knows a gentleman by instinct. It isn't what they do, it's what they don't do; and Old Roses doesn't do lots of things."

"Right you are, Victoria, right you are again! You do Tibbooburra credit. Old Roses has the root of the matter in him and there you have it."

Dicky had a profound admiration for Vic. She had brains, was perfectly fearless, no man had ever taken a liberty with her, and every one in the Wadgery country who visited O'Fallen's had a wholesome respect for her opinion.

About this time news came that the Governor, Lord Malice, would pass through Wadgery on his tour up the back-blocks. A great function was necessary. It was arranged. Then came the question of the address of welcome to be delivered at the banquet. Dicky Merritt and the local doctor were named for the task, but they both declared they'd only "make rot of it," and suggested Old Roses.

They went to lay the thing before him. They found him in his garden. He greeted them, smiling in his quiet, enigmatical way, and listened. While Dicky spoke, a flush slowly passed over him, and then immediately left him pale; but he stood perfectly still, his hand leaning against a sandal tree, and the coldness of his face warmed up again slowly. His head having been bent attentively as he listened, they did not see anything unusual.

After a moment of inscrutable deliberation, he answered that he would do as they wished. Dicky hinted that he would require some information about Lord Malice's past career and his family's history, but he assured them that he did not need it; and his eyes idled ironically with Dicky's face.

When the two had gone, Old Roses sat in his room, a handful of letters, a photograph, and a couple of decorations spread out before him, his fingers resting on them, his look engaged with a far horizon.

The Governor came. He was met outside the township by the citizens and escorted in a dusty and numerous cavalcade. They passed the Inspector's house. The garden was blooming, and on the roof a flag was flying. Struck by the singular character of the place Lord Malice asked who lived there, and proposed stopping for a moment to make the acquaintance of its owner; adding, with some slight sarcasm, that if the officers of the Government were

too busy to pay their respects to their Governor, their Governor must pay his respects to them. But Old Roses was not in the garden nor in the house, and they left without seeing him. He was sitting under a willow at the billabong, reading over and over to himself the address to be delivered before the Governor in the evening. As he read his face had a wintry and inhospitable look.

The night came. Old Roses entered the dining-room quietly with the crowd, far in the Governor's wake. According to his request, he was given a seat in a distant corner, where he was quite inconspicuous. Most of the men present were in evening dress. He wore a plain tweed suit, but carried a handsome rose in his button-hole. It was impossible to put him at a disadvantage. He looked distinguished as he was. He appeared to be much interested in Lord Malice. The early proceedings were cordial, for the Governor and his suite made themselves agreeable, and talk flowed amiably. After a time there was a rattle of knives and forks, and the Chairman rose. Then, after a chorus of "hear, hears," there was general silence. The doorways of the room were filled by the women-servants of the hotel. Chief among them was Vic, who kept her eyes fixed on Old Roses. She knew that he was to read the address and speak, and she was more interested in him and in his success than in Lord Malice and his suite. Her admiration of him was great. He had always treated her as though she had been born a lady, and it had done her good.

"And I call upon Mr. Adam Sherwood to speak to the health of His Excellency, Lord Malice."

In his modest corner Old Roses stretched to his feet. The Governor glanced over carelessly. He only saw a figure in grey, with a rose in his button-hole. The Chairman whispered that it was the owner of the house and garden which had interested His Excellency that afternoon. His Excellency looked a little closer, but saw only a rim of iron-grey hair above the paper held before Old Roses' face.

Then a voice came from behind the paper: "Your Excellency "

At the first words the Governor started, and his eyes flashed searchingly, curiously at the paper that walled the face, and at the iron-grey hair. The voice rose distinct and clear, with modulated emphasis. It had a peculiarly penetrating quality. A few in the room and particularly Vic were struck by something in the voice: that it resembled another voice. She soon found the trail. Her eyes also fastened on the paper. Then she moved and went to another door. Here she could see behind the paper at an angle. Her eyes ran from the screened face to that of the Governor. His Excellency had dropped the lower part of his face in his hand, and he was listening intently. Vic noticed that his eyes were painfully grave and concerned. She also noticed other things.

The address was strange. It had been submitted to the Committee, and though it struck them as out-of-the-wayish, it had been approved. It seemed different when read as Old Roses was reading it. The words sounded inclement as they were chiselled out by the speaker's voice. Dicky Merritt afterwards declared that many phrases were interpolated by Old Roses at the moment.

The speaker referred intimately and with peculiar knowledge to the family history of Lord Malice, to certain more or less private matters which did not concern the public, to the antiquity of the name, and the high duty devolving upon one who bore the Earldom of Malice. He dwelt upon the personal character of His Excellency's antecedents, and praised their honourable services to the country. He referred to the death of Lord Malice's eldest brother in Burmah, but he did it strangely. Then, with acute incisiveness, he drew a picture of what a person in so exalted a position as a Governor should be and should not be. His voice assuredly at this point had a touch of scorn. The aides-de-camp were nervous, the Chairman apprehensive, the Committee ill at ease. But the Governor now was perfectly still, though, as Vic Lindley thought, rather pinched and old-looking. His fingers toyed with a wine-glass, but his eyes never wavered from that paper and the grey hair.

Presently the voice of the speaker changed.

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"But," said he, "in Lord Malice we have the perfect Governor; a man of blameless and enviable life, and possessed abundantly of discreetness, judgment, administrative ability and power; the absolute type of English nobility and British character."

He dropped the paper from before his face, and his eyes met those of the Governor, and stayed. Lord Malice let go a long choking breath, which sounded like immeasurable relief. During the rest of the speech delivered in a fine-tempered voice he sat as in a dream, his eyes intently upon the other, who now seemed to recite rather than read. He thrilled all by the pleasant resonance of his tones, and sent the blood aching delightfully through Victoria Lindley's veins.

When he sat down there was immense applause. The Governor rose in reply. He spoke in a low voice, but any one listening outside would have said that Old Roses was still speaking. By this resemblance the girl, Vic, had trailed to others. It was now apparent to many, but Dicky said afterwards that it was simply a case of birth and breeding men used to walking red carpet grew alike, just as stud-owners and rabbit-catchers did.

The last words of the Governor's reply were delivered in a convincing tone as his eyes hung on Old Roses' face.

"And, as I am indebted to you, gentlemen, for the feelings of loyalty to the Throne which prompted this reception and the address just delivered, so I am indebted to Mr. Adam Sherwood for his admirable words and the unusual sincerity and eloquence of his speech; and to both you and him for most notable kindness."

Immediately after the Governor's speech Old Roses stole out; but as he passed through the door where Vic stood, his hand brushed against hers. Feeling its touch, he grasped it eagerly for an instant as though he were glad of the friendliness in her eyes.

It was just before dawn of the morning that the Governor knocked at the door of the house by Long Neck Billabong. The door opened at once, and he entered without a word.

He and Old Roses stood face to face. His countenance was drawn and worn, the other's cold and calm. "Tom, Tom," Lord Malice said, "we thought you were dead "

"That is, Edward, having left me to my fate in Burmah you were only half a mile away with a column of stout soldiers and hillmen you waited till my death was reported, and seemed assured, and then came on to England: to take the title, just vacant by our father's death, and to marry my intended wife, who, God knows, appeared to have little care which brother it was! You got both. I was long a prisoner. When I got free, I learned all; I bided my time. I was waiting till you had a child. Twelve years have gone: you have no child. But I shall spare you awhile longer. If your wife should die, or you should yet have a child, I shall return."

The Governor lifted his head wearily from the table where he now sat. "Tom," he said in a low, heavy voice, "I was always something of a scoundrel, but I've repented of that thing every day of my life since. It has been knives knives all the way. I am glad I can't tell you how glad that you are alive."

He stretched out his hand with a motion of great relief. "I was afraid you were going to speak to-night to tell all, even though I was your brother. You spared me for the sake "

"For the sake of the family name," the other interjected stonily.

"For the sake of our name. But I would have taken my punishment, in thankfulness, because you are alive."

"Taken it like a man, your Excellency," was the low rejoinder. He laughed bitterly.

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"You will not wipe the thing out, Tom? You will not wipe it out, and come back, and take your own now?" said the other anxiously.

The other dried the perspiration from his forehead. "I will come back in my own time; and it can never be wiped out. For you shook all my faith in my old world. That's the worst thing that can happen a man. I only believe in the very common people now those who are not put upon their honour. One doesn't expect it of them, and, unlikely as it is, one isn't often deceived. I think we'd better talk no more about it."

"You mean I had better go."

"I think so. I am going to marry soon." The other started nervously.

"You needn't be so shocked. I will come back one day, but not till your wife dies, or you have a child, as I said."

The Governor rose to his feet, and went to the door. "Whom do you intend marrying?" he asked in a voice far from vice-regal, only humbled and disturbed. The reply was instant and keen: "A bar-maid."

The other's hand dropped from the door. But Old Roses, passing over, opened it, and, waiting for the other to pass through, said: "I do not doubt but there will be issue. Good-day, my lord!"

The Governor passed out from the pale light of the lamp into the grey and moist morning. He turned at a point where the house would be lost to view, and saw the other still standing there. The voice of Old Roses kept ringing in his ears sardonically. He knew that his punishment must go on and on; and it did.

Old Roses married Victoria Lindley from "out Tibbooburra way," and there was comely issue, and that issue is now at Eton; for Esau came into his birthright, as he said he would, at his own time. But he and his wife have a way of being indifferent to the gay, astonished world; and, uncommon as it may seem, he has not tired of her.

MY WIFE'S LOVERS

There were three of them in 1886, the big drought year: old Eversofar, Billy Marshall, and Bingong. I never was very jealous of them, not even when Billy gave undoubted ground for divorce by kissing her boldly in the front garden, with Eversofar and Bingong looking on to say nothing of myself. So far as public opinion went it could not matter, because we were all living at Tilbar Station in the Tibbooburra country, and the nearest neighbour to us was Mulholland of Nimgi, a hundred miles away. Billy was the son of my manager, John Marshall, and, like his father, had an excellent reputation as a bushman, and, like his mother, was very good-looking. He was very much indeed about my house, suggesting improvements in household arrangements; making remarks on my wife's personal appearance with corresponding disparagement of myself; riding with my wife across the plains; shooting kangaroos with her by night; and secretly instructing her in the mysteries of a rabbit-trap, with which, he was sure, he could make "dead loads of metal" (he was proficient in the argot of the back-blocks); and with this he would buy her a beautiful diamond ring, and a horse that had won the Melbourne Cup, and an air-gun! Once when she was taken ill, and I was away in the South, he used to sit by her bedside, fanning her hour after hour, being scarcely willing to sleep at night; and was always on hand, smoothing her pillow, and issuing a bulletin to Eversofar and Bingong the first thing in the morning. I have no doubt that Eversofar and Bingong cared for her just as much as he did; but, from first to last, they never had his privileges, and were always subordinate to him in showing her devotion. He was sound and frank with them. He told Eversofar that, of course, she only was kind to him, and let him have a hut all to himself, because he was old and had had a bad time out on the farthest back-station (that was why he was called Eversofar), and had once carried Bingong with a broken leg, on his back, for twenty miles. As for Bingong, he was only a black fellow, aged fifteen, and height inconsiderable. So, of the three, Billy had his own way, and even shamelessly attempted to lord it over me.

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Most husbands would consider my position painful, particularly when I say that my wife accepted the attention of all three lovers with calm pleasure, and that of Billy with a shocking indifference to my feelings. She never tried to explain away any circumstance, no matter how awkward it might look if put down in black and white. Billy never quailed before my look; he faced me down with his ingenuous smile; he patted me on the arms approvingly; or, with apparent malice, asked me questions difficult to answer, when I came back from a journey to Brisbane for a man naturally finds it hard to lay bare how he spent all his time in town. Because he did it so suavely and naively, one could not be resentful. It might seem that matters had reached a climax, when, one day, Mulholland came over, and, seeing my wife and her lovers together watering the garden and teaching cockatoos, said to me that Billy had the advantage of me on my own ground. It may not be to my credit that I only grinned, and forbore even looking foolish. Yet I was very fond of my wife all the time. We stood pretty high on the Charwon Downs, and though it was terribly hot at times, it was healthy enough; and she never lost her prettiness, though, maybe, she lacked bloom.

I think I never saw her look better than she did that day when Mulholland was with me. She had on the lightest, softest kind of stuff, with sleeves reaching only a little below her elbow her hands and arms never got sunburnt in the hottest weather her face smiled out from under the coolest-looking hat imaginable, and her hair, though gathered, had a happy trick of always lying very loose and free about the head, saving her from any primness otherwise possible, she was so neat. Mulholland and I were sitting in the veranda. I glanced up at the thermometer, and it registered a hundred in the shade! Mechanically I pushed the lime-juice towards Mulholland, and pointed to the water-bag. There was nothing else to do except grumble at the drought. Yet there my wife was, a picture of coolness and delight; the intense heat seemed only to make her the more refreshing to the eye. Water was not abundant, but we still felt justified in trying to keep her bushes and flowers alive; and she stood there holding the hose and throwing the water in the cheerfulest shower upon the beds. Billy stood with his hands on his hips watching her, very hot, very self-contained. He was shining with perspiration; and he looked the better of it. Eversofar was camped beneath a sandal-tree teaching a cockatoo, also hot and panting, but laughing low through his white beard; and Bingong, black, hatless less everything but a pair of trousers which only reached to his knees was dividing his time between the cockatoo and my wife.

Presently Bingong sighted an iguana and caught it, and the three gathered about it in the shade of the sandal. After a time the interest in the iguana seemed to have shifted to something else; and they were all speaking very earnestly. At last I saw Billy and my wife only talking. Billy was excited, and apparently indignant. I could not hear what they were saying, but I saw he was pale, and his compatriots in worship rather frightened; for he suddenly got into a lofty rage. It was undoubtedly a quarrel. Mulholland saw, too, and said to me: "This looks as if there would be a chance for you yet." He laughed. So did I.

Soon I saw by my wife's face that she was saying something sarcastical. Then Billy drew himself up very proudly, and waving his hand in a grand way, said loudly, so that we could hear: "It's as true as gospel; and you'll be sorry for this-like anything and anything!" Then he stalked away from her, raising his hat proudly, but immediately turned, and beckoning to Eversofar and Bingong added: "Come on with me to barracks, you two."

They started away towards him, looking sheepishly at my wife as they did so; but Billy finding occasion to give counter-orders, said: "But you needn't come until you put the cockatoos away, and stuck the iguana in a barrel, and put the hose up for for her."

He watched them obey his orders, his head in the air the while, and when they had finished, and were come towards him, he again took off his hat, and they all left her standing alone in the garden.

Then she laughed a little oddly to herself, and stood picking to pieces the wet leaves of a geranium, looking after the three. After a little she came slowly over to us. "Well," said I, feigning great irony, "all loves must have their day, both old and new. You see how they've deserted you. Yet you smile at it!"

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"Indeed, my lord and master," she said, "it is not a thing to laugh at. It's very serious."

"And what has broken the charm of your companionship?" I asked.

"The mere matter of the fabled Bunyip. He claimed that he had seen it, and I doubted his word. Had it been you it would not have mattered. You would have turned the other cheek, you are so tame. But he has fire and soul, and so we quarrelled."

"And your other lovers turned tail," I maliciously, said.

"Which only shows how superior he is," was her reply. "If you had been in the case they would never have left me."

"Oh, oh!" blurted Mulholland, "I am better out of this; for I little care to be called as a witness in divorce." He rose from his chair, but I pushed him back, and he did not leave till "the cool of the evening."

The next morning, at breakfast-time, a rouseabout brought us a piece of paper which had been nailed to the sandal-tree. On it was written:

"We have gone for the Bunyip. We travel on foot! Farewell and Farewell!"

We had scarcely read it, when John Marshall and his wife came in agitation, and said that Billy's bed had not been slept in during the night. From the rouseabout we found that Eversofar and Bingong were also gone. They had not taken horses, doubtless because Billy thought it would hardly be valiant and adventurous enough, and because neither Bingong nor Eversofar owned one, and it might look criminal to go off with mine. We suspected that they had headed for the great Debil-devil Waterhole, where, it was said, the Bunyip appeared: that mysterious animal, or devil, or thing, which nobody has ever seen, but many have pretended to see. Now, this must be said of Billy, that he never had the feeling of fear he was never even afraid of me. He had often said he had seen a Bunyip, and that he'd bring one home some day, but no one took him seriously. It showed what great influence he had over his companions, that he could induce them to go with him; for Bingong, being a native, must naturally have a constitutional fear of the Debil-debil, as the Bunyip is often called. The Debil-debil Waterhole was a long way off, and through a terrible country quartz plains, ragged scrub, and little or no water all the way. Then, had they taken plenty of food with them? So far as we could see, they had taken some, but we could not tell how much.

My wife smiled at the business at first; then became worried as the day wore on, and she could see the danger and hardship of wandering about this forsaken country without a horse and with uncertain water. The day passed. They did not return. We determined on a search the next morning. At daybreak, Marshall and I and the rouseabout started on good horses, each going at different angles, but agreeing to meet at the Debil debil Waterhole, and to wait there for each other. If any one of us did not come after a certain time, we were to conclude that he had found the adventurers and was making his way back with them. After a day of painful travel and little water, Marshall and I arrived, almost within an hour of each other. We could see no sign of anybody having been at the lagoon. We waited twelve hours, and were about to go, leaving a mark behind us to show we had been there, when we saw the rouseabout and his exhausted horse coming slowly through the bluebush to us. He had suffered much for want of water.

We all started back again at different angles, our final rendezvous being arranged for the station homestead, the rouseabout taking a direct line, and making for the Little Black Billabong on the way. I saw no sign of the adventurers. I sickened with the heat, and my eyes became inflamed. I was glad enough when, at last, I drew rein in the home paddock. I couldn't see any distance, though I was not far from the house. But when I got into the garden I saw that others had just arrived. It was the rouseabout with my wife's lovers. He had found Billy nursing Eversofar in the shade of a stunted brigalow, while Bingong was away hunting for water. Billy himself had

pushed his cause as bravely as possible, and had in fact visited the Little Black Billabong, where he always maintains he had seen the great Bunyip. But after watching one night, they tried to push on to the Debil-debil Waterhole. Old Eversofar, being weak and old, gave in, and Billy became a little delirious he has denied it, but Bingong says it is so; yet he pulled himself together as became the leader of an expedition, and did what he could for Eversofar until the rouseabout came with food and water. Then he broke down and cried he denies this also. They tied the sick man on the horse and trudged back to the station in a bad plight.

As I came near the group I heard my wife say to Billy, who looked sadly haggard and ill, that she was sure he would have got the Bunyip if it hadn't been for the terrible drought; and at that, regardless of my presence, he took her by the arms and kissed her, and then she kissed him several times.

Perhaps I ought to have mentioned before that Billy was just nine years old.

THE STRANGERS' HUT

I had come a long journey across country with Glenn, the squatter, and now we were entering the homestead paddock of his sheep-station, Winnanbar. Afar to the left was a stone building, solitary in a waste of saltbush and dead-finish scrub. I asked Glenn what it was.

He answered, smilingly: "The Strangers' Hut. Sundowners and that lot sleep there; there's always some flour and tea in a hammock, under the roof, and there they are with a pub of their own. It's a fashion we have in Australia."

"It seems all right, Glenn," I said with admiration. "It's surer than Elijah's ravens."

"It saves us from their prowling about the barracks, and camping on the front veranda."

"How many do you have of a week?"

"That depends. Sundowners are as uncertain as they are unknown quantities. After shearing-time they're thickest; in the dead of summer fewest. This is the dead of summer," and, for the hundredth time in our travel, Glenn shook his head sadly.

Sadness was ill-suited to his burly form and bronzed face, but it was there. He had some trouble, I thought, deeper than drought. It was too introspective to have its origin solely in the fact that sheep were dying by thousands, that the stock-routes were as dry of water as the hard sky above us, and that it was a toss-up whether many families in the West should not presently abandon their stations, driven out by a water-famine and worse.

After a short silence Glenn stood up in the trap, and, following the circle of the horizon with his hand, said: "There's not an honest blade of grass in all this wretched West. This whole business is gambling with God."

"It is hard on women and children that they must live here," I remarked, with my eyes on the Strangers' Hut.

"It's harder for men without them," he mournfully replied; and at that moment I began to doubt whether Glenn, whom I had heard to be a bachelor, was not tired of that calm but chilly state. He followed up this speech immediately by this: "Look at that drinking-tank!"

The thing was not pleasant in the eye. Sheep were dying and dead by thousands round it, and the crows were feasting horribly. We became silent again.

The Strangers' Hut, and its unique and, to me, awesome hospitality, was still in my mind. It remained with me

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until, impelled by curiosity, I wandered away towards it in the glow and silence of the evening. The walk was no brief matter, but at length I stood near the lonely public, where no name of guest is ever asked, and no bill ever paid. And then I fell to musing on how many life-histories these grey walls had sheltered for a fitful hour, how many stumbling wayfarers had eaten and drunken in this Hotel of Refuge. I dropped my glances on the ground; a bird, newly dead, lay at my feet, killed by the heat.

At that moment I heard a child's crying. I started forward, then faltered. Why, I could not tell, save that the crying seemed so a part of the landscape that it might have come out of the sickly sunset, out of the yellow sky, out of the aching earth about me. To follow it might be like pursuing dreams. The crying ceased.

Thus for a moment, and then I walked round to the door of the hut. At the sound of slight moaning I paused again. Then I crossed the threshold resolutely.

A woman with a child in her arms sat on a rude couch. Her lips were clinging to the infant's forehead. At the sound of my footsteps she raised her head.

"Ah!" she said, and, trembling, rose to her feet. She was fair-haired and strong, if sad, of face. Perhaps she never had been beautiful, but in health her face must have been persistent in its charm. Even now it was something noble.

With that patronage of compassion which we use towards those who are unfortunate and humble, I was about to say to her, "My poor woman!" but there was something in her manner so above her rude surroundings that I was impelled to this instead: "Madam, you are ill. Can I be of service to you?"

Then I doffed my hat. I had not done so before, and I blushed now as I did it, for I saw that she had compelled me. She sank back upon the couch again as though the effort to achieve my courtesy had unnerved her, and she murmured simply and painfully: "Thank you very much: I have travelled far."

"May I ask how far?"

"From Mount o' Eden, two hundred miles and more, I think"; and her eyes sought the child's face, while her cheek grew paler. She had lighted a tiny fire on the hearthstone and had put the kettle on the wood. Her eyes were upon it now with the covetousness of thirst and hunger. I kneeled, and put in the tin of water left behind by some other pilgrim, a handful of tea from the same source the outcast and suffering giving to their kind. I poured out for her soon a little of the tea. Then I asked for her burden. She gave it to my arms a wan, wise-faced child.

"Madam," I said, "I am only a visitor here, but, if you feel able, and will come with me to the homestead, you shall, I know, find welcome and kindness, or, if you will wait, there are horses, and you shall be brought yes, indeed," I added, as she shook her head in sad negation, "you will be welcome."

I was sure that, whatever ill chances had befallen the mother of this child, she was one of those who are found in the sight of the Perfect Justice sworn for by the angels. I knew also that Glenn would see that she should be cordially sheltered and brought back to health; for men like Glenn, I said to myself, are kinder in their thought of suffering women than women themselves—are kinder, juster, and less prone to think evil.

She raised her head, and answered: "I think that I could walk; but this, you see, is the only hospitality that I can accept, save, it may be, some bread and a little meat, that the child suffer no more, until I reach Winnanbar, which, I fear, is still far away."

"This," I replied, "is Winnanbar; the homestead is over there, beyond the hill."

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"This is Winnanbar?" she whisperingly said, "this is Winnanbar! I did not think I was—so near." . . . A thankful look came to her face. She rose, and took the child again and pressed it to her breast, and her eyes brooded upon it. "Now she is beautiful," I thought, and waited for her to speak.

"Sir " she said at last, and paused. In the silence a footstep sounded without, and then a form appeared in the doorway. It was Glenn.

"I followed you," he said to me; "and !" He saw the woman, and a low cry broke from her.

"Agnes! Agnes!" he cried, with something of sternness and a little shame.

"I have come to you again—Robert," she brokenly, but not abjectly, said.

He came close to her and looked into her face, then into the face of the child, with a sharp questioning. She did not flinch, but answered his scrutiny clearly and proudly. Then, after a moment, she turned a disappointed look upon me, as though to say that I, a stranger, had read her aright at once, while this man held her afar in the cold courts of his judgment ere he gave her any welcome or said a word of pity.

She sank back on the bench, and drew a hand with sorrowful slowness across her brow. He saw a ring upon her finger. He took her hand and said: "You are married, Agnes?"

"My husband is dead, and the sister of this poor one also," she replied; and she fondled the child and raised her eyes to her brother's.

His face now showed compassion. He stooped and kissed her cheek. And it seemed to me at that moment that she could not be gladder than I.

"Agnes," he said, "can you forgive me?"

"He was only a stock—rider," she murmured, as if to herself, "but he was well—born. I loved him. You were angry. I went away with him in the night . . . far away to the north. God was good " Here she brushed her lips tenderly across the curls of the child. "Then the drought came and sickness fell and . . . death . . . and I was alone with my baby "

His lips trembled and his hand was hurting my arm, though he knew it not.

"Where could I go?" she continued.

Glenn answered pleadingly now: "To your unworthy brother, God bless you and forgive me, dear! though even here at Winnanbar there is drought and famine and the cattle die."

"But my little one shall live!" she cried joyfully. That night Glenn of Winnanbar was a happy man, for rain fell on the land, and he held his sister's child in his arms.