

## about this book . . .

Geoffrey Bingham's short stories, and this book in particular, have unique features which fill a niche almost wholly uncatereed for in recently published Australian literature. *The Raymond Connection* is a collection of interrelated short stories of richly varying texture; they are unmistakably, unashamedly but unselfconsciously Australian in the best possible way. They are woven into life experiences inextricably bound up in that amalgam of historical, geographic and cultural circumstances with which the Australian reader uniquely identifies.

This is not another book of reminiscences, nor just the pungent evocations of a particular decade. Some chapters are slow and pastoral, some mystical and vaguely disturbing, others humorous and whimsical. There is immense and sensitive perception of the effect of day-by-day life in Australia and our responses to it.

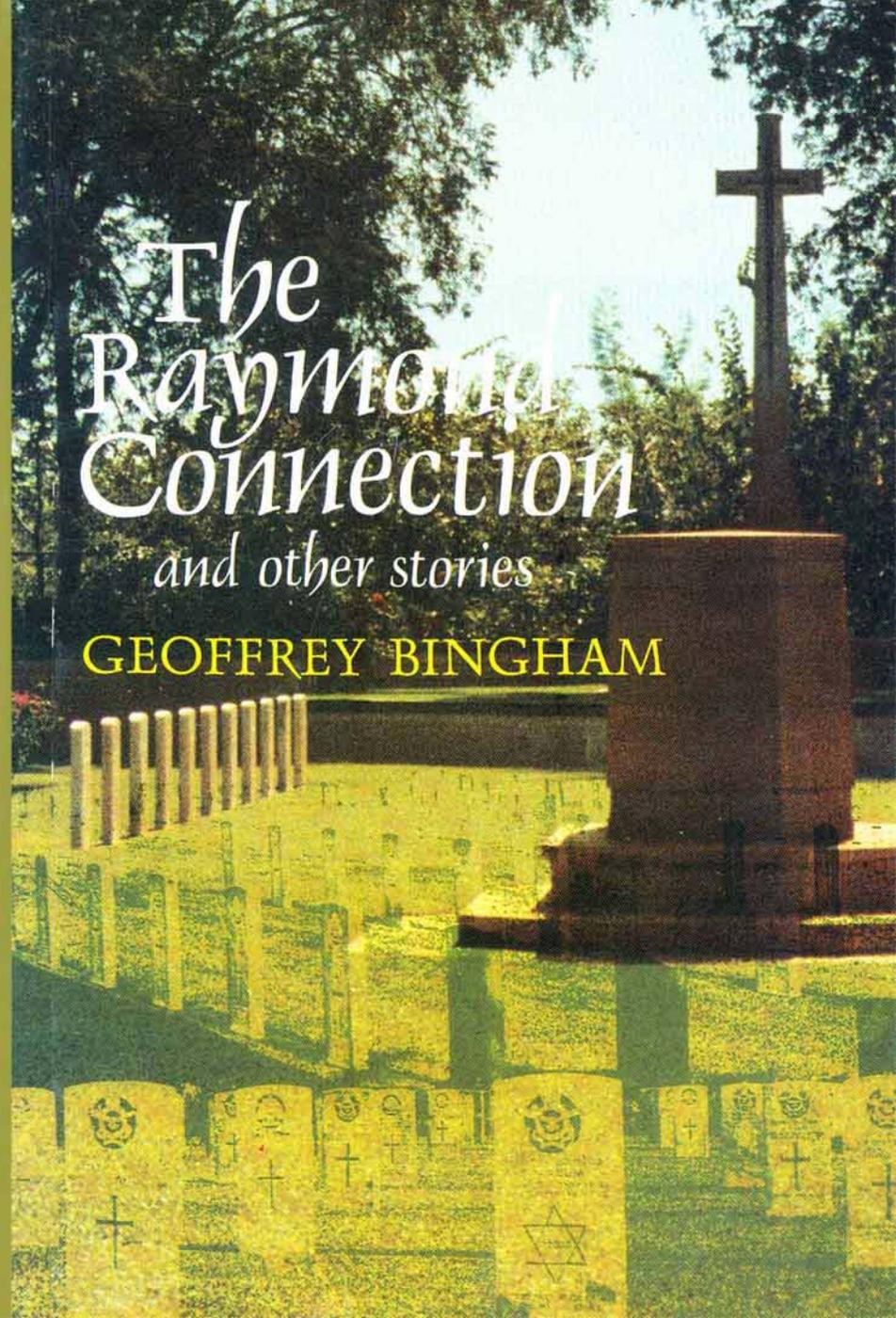
The quality generally absent from most recent Australian writing and present in this work is a wholly credible 'up-beat.' Human failing and frailties are laid bare—but sensitively and uncondemningly; our foolish characteristics are deftly revealed but not 'knocked'; deep emotions are evoked but not sentimentalized. The writer is not simply impressing us with his virtuosity, but with sensitive integrity he imparts a 'point of view.' It is refreshing. The reader hopes again. Human dignity is in view.

*new creation publications inc.* 

# The Raymond Connection

*and other stories*

**GEOFFREY BINGHAM**



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*The  
Raymond  
Connection*

and other stories

GEOFFREY BINGHAM

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### **PUBLISHER'S NOTE**

The stories contained in this volume have been written over the past year or two. The one exception is 'Over the Hill,' published in a Sydney evening newspaper—among others of my early writing—in late 1945. The two stories 'The Raymond Connection' and 'The Power Within' were included in a slim volume specially published to fit an Australian Broadcasting Corporation 'Encounter' session, broadcast in April and November 1985.

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### **THE COVER:**

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## *The Variety of Man*

### *A Preface to Another Collection of Stories*

SHORT story writing—or even writing itself—is not my vocation. Stories irresistibly get themselves written from time to time, and accumulate themselves, like all other letters and papers, on my spare desk. That is why I wait for my critics to tell me how I write, as also for them to give evaluation judgements. Yet even these generally puzzle me, for my own yarns seem to come from some alien planet of my own mind-system. So I just grin wryly whilst a book is in the processes of publication, launching and review.

Having said this, I know I am deeply involved in the tales I write. Of course they form themselves, insistently, and one becomes a servant to their action and thought. Yet somewhere within us a wisdom has grown over the years. In childhood it was a dream and fantasy wisdom which met the turmoil of adolescent years, and became realistic when it met the evil and goodness of its humanity in others and itself.

Stories, then, do not wholly form themselves. They issue from the heart of a writer who is not looking for recognition or praise to boost his insecure psyche. For some years now,

Milton's lines keep recurring in my mind:

Fame is the spur that the pure doth raise  
(That last infirmity of noble minds)  
To spurn delights and live laborious days.

I sometimes wonder whether any human being does not have his (or her) eye cocked to his present public or coming posterity. Keeping integrity is a demanding exercise. Because I not only write but am a theologian, I find nothing in me of the cynical or the critical, anymore than the romantic unrealism that haunted me as a boy who fantasised when he ought to have been concentrating on algebra. I assure myself that I know pretty well what humanity is, and this not only in the abstract. That is why I treat the stories that come as gifts from somewhere, to be shared out with a certain amount of discernment and objectivity.

This volume is a departure, even if a mild one, from the previous three volumes of short stories. Few—if any—of those yarns had deliberate attempts to teach, to take up issues and struggle with them. In this present collection, the stories 'The Raymond Connection,' 'The Power Within,' 'Man Abed,' 'The Little Light,' 'The Holy Feast,' 'The Murder,' and 'The Strange Case of Caraby Quinn,' are attempts to give one's mind on certain issues.

I find modern humanism quite naive—and even mindless—in the face of the tragedy of man and his world. Idealism, messianism and utopianism are dangerous ingredients and elements working in our society. Man is not bland because he is mainly urban and suburban. His huge and angry attempts at justice-at-any-price keep wreaking terrible havoc. An old prophet stated bluntly, 'The way of a man is not in himself. It is not in man to direct his own footsteps.' I admit this sounds strange in the ears of militant humanism which—in my mind—does not really understand humanity.

Stories, tales and yarns, then, have as powerful and

responsible a function today as in the ancient times, when men and women—along with their children—gathered around a desert or a village fire, and were caught in the rich mystery of man through the wise telling of stories and sagas. Wisdom came into them, as though by some osmosis, and they went about life with the power of it within them.

The same could, and should, happen today. The mindless use of man's degradation without seeing his glory, the fantasising about perversion as though it were the human norm, and the making obscene of the beautiful gifts man has received, add nothing to our wisdom. This kind of yarning cheats, steals, destroys and kills.

If all of this sounds like *apologia* for the simplicity of the true life—that of a boy in a cricket match, parent-birds sitting silently up in a tree, or a tired prisoner-of-war going to his happy rest, then so be it. This may sound like a mild recall to reality, or even a not-so-subtle bit of preaching, but neither is intended. I feel the mere representation of life as stark, ugly, obscene and despairing, is not enough. This is not true realism. It is not realistic humanism. It is prostituting the emotional reserves of bewildered, embittered, cynical humans, in the name of art. Shakespeare and Carlyle may have been didactic, but to some purpose. Chesterton may have been tractarian in his writing, but he reads none the worse for it. Take the wisdom of these three writers away, and their characters become bland, and their writing tasteless.

Stories should help to tell us who we are, where we came from, and—if possible—where we are going. They should help us to understand our history, not only in its delights, but in the depths, too, of its titanic tragedies.

GEOFFREY BINGHAM

## *The Cricket Match*

You've seen some cricket matches in your day, I bet. Probably some of you can remember back as far as Clarrie Grimmett, but perhaps not Hobbs. I can remember Don Bradman very well. He was a young man when I was a boy. I can remember writing to him and asking for an autographed photograph. To my immense surprise and delight, he sent me one. I was the envy of my schoolmates and my local cricketing friends-

We had cricketing obsession. No sooner were we home from school than we were out on the local pitch. No sooner were Saturday morning chores finished—mowing the lawns and cutting the edges—than we were out on the pitch again. Most of us were sure we would be Test players, although that never eventuated. Of course, not every boy gets his break in life. If I had had my 'break' then I don't doubt my brilliance as a Test player would have shown forth!

What some of us wanted to do, when we were grown, married and had families, was to get our sons to do what we had not been able to achieve, due to force of circumstances, not getting the desired break, and possibly to not being Test quality material, although the latter is difficult to believe, let alone accept.

For some of us, one of the deepest sorrows of being fathers was to find that our sons had decided to skip a generation in cricket obsession. They scarcely noticed the game was being played. They had other interests. With a trifle of sadness, a gulp or-two, and some steeling of ourselves, we accepted this gloomy fact. None of us dreamed that it is often the grandchildren who repeat the things of the grand-fatherly generation.

I mention these simple and insignificant things so that you may more fully appreciate the resurgence of cricket in the-next-but-one generation. For obvious reasons, I tell the story in the third person.

It was all very exciting. Young Timmy—aged seven—Timmy’s Dad and Mum, and young Kathryn—aged about two—were going to visit Grandpa and Nanna in the Adelaide Hills. This happened every so often, and Timmy would have liked it to be more often. He had memories of winter evenings and the great logs on the hearth fire, of books and books and books, and then the toys they could litter over the large living room. In spring and summer there were no end of strawberries and the like. Grandpa also had lots of exciting birds, and once he (Grandpa) and John—another member of the Team—had built young Timmy an aviary. Now it was bright with ceaselessly chattering zebra finches and a few budgies.

Timmy chattered too. When excited, he could beat any zebra finch or budgie. He could leave them standing. But now he, Timmy, had many things to do. First he must put in his two cricket bats, the yellow plastic one, and the more grown-up wooden one with the spring handle. Of course, there were the stumps and the fixed bails. Mustn’t forget the ball, eh? So Timmy didn’t forget the ball.

He rushed inside to get his cricketing book. This book

told all about cricket—how to stand at the crease, handle the bat, face the bowler, be careful of the field. It also told how to bowl, how to stop a ball, and all the other things he had seen on TV

Voices were telling him to hurry. Mum had put a few good things in to help with the lunch, although Nanna didn’t need all that much help. She could prepare quite nice lunches if it came to that.

They were in their new car, all blue and shiny and smelling good, and feeling comfortable. They stopped at the stationers to get something, and Timmy bought some cricketer cards. There were all the famous men like Allan Border, Wayne Daniels, Rodney Hogg and others. There ‘was also one of Imran Khan. He looked very confident.

Dad drove carefully as usual, up the winding Hills road, and the view from Windy Point—if you were quick—was really good. Adelaide set out well on every side. The windiest of all hills was the one to Grandpa’s place.

It was quite exciting getting out of the car and seeing Nanna and Grandpa. After the usual kisses and hugs there was the large living room, and Kathryn going straight to the story-books, crying to her Nanna, ‘Tory! Tory!’ meaning, ‘I want a story read to me.’ Daddy took her aside whilst Timmy excitedly produced his cricketing cards.

He held his thumb over the names. ‘Guess who that cricketer is, Grandpa,’ he insisted.

Grandpa pretended for a moment or two that he didn’t know, and screwed up his eyes as though that would make him see better or remember better. Slowly he guessed all the names, and every one was correct.

‘Grandpa,’ said Timmy with sudden seriousness, ‘will you help to bring in my cricket gear?’

Together they brought in the important gear. Then Grandpa said brightly, ‘I guess we had better have a game of cricket after lunch, don’t you think?’

Timmy thought, all right. He thought it was a very good idea. He could scarcely wait until the lunch was finished, delicious as it was, there being lobster salad, with plenty of potato chips, watermelon, preserved fruit and multi-coloured icecream. All Kathryn wanted was watermelon. She kept on wanting it, and cried when the adults said she had had enough. Kathryn could never have enough watermelon.

Then it was time to go to the cricket game. Timmy had run down to the playing field, but not before the arrangements were made. Because Kathryn was too small to play, she had to stay with Nanna while the dishes were washed and dried. The game needed a good organiser, and Timmy thought he could be that.

'We all have to have special names,' he said. 'We must have the names of good cricketers.' His eyes shone. 'We need two captains, eh?' They all agreed that two captains were needed. Timmy began to get excited. 'I say that I be one captain and Daddy be the other. Then we must pick our team.'

He certainly was excited. He kept jumping around as he thought of the beautiful match which would soon be played. 'I vote Grandpa be on my team, and Mummy be on Daddy's side.' Mummy and Daddy exchanged looks, and accepted the decisions of their son.

'I'm Allan Border,' said Timmy, and he looked at Grandpa. 'Who will you be, Grandpa?'

Grandpa thought quickly and said, 'Keppler Wessels.' Then Daddy and Mummy had to think hard, and suddenly Daddy was Kim Hughes so that there were two captains, and Mummy became Rodney Hogg, or 'Hoggy,' as we call him.

The next thing was to go down to the playing area and talk about where the wicket should be. That was soon done, and in no time a merry game of cricket was under way. The toss had been won by Timmy, who decided that his team

should bat first. So they batted. Because it was a strange wicket, and it took a lot of thinking to be a captain, Allan Border got out after one. Never mind. Grandpa would help a bit, probably.

And he did. He got nineteen, even against the fierce bowling of that devil Rodney Hogg, and that clever Kim Hughes. Then he was bowled and the whole team was out. Allan Border then led his men on to the field. He undertook to lead the bowling attack. His bowling was pretty good, although once or twice there was something that looked like a wide. Rodney Hogg batted well for his (her) team, and knocked up a reasonable score.

Then it was Kim Hughes' turn. It was one of Hughes' better days. He hit balls here and there, causing great excitement as the field tried to get him out. It wasn't all that easy. Stumping is hard, and Hughes kept crying out 'Crease!'

Allan Border was keeping the score pretty well. 'Fifteen to go,' he would say, and a bit later, 'Fourteen to go.' And SO On.

It was going to be a pretty close thing. Keppler Wessels seemed in fairly good bowling form, and yet Hughes was batting well. It began to get very exciting. Border would cry out, 'Five to go, four to go, three to go!' and everyone was holding his (her) breath, and suddenly, with a great under-arm yorker, Wessels' ball hit Hughes' wicket, knocking off the bails.

'Oh!' shouted Allan Border, 'that's it. We have beaten Sri Lanka!'

And so they had. It may seem strange to some that Hogg and Hughes were playing for Sri Lanka, but sometimes in cricket you have to do that sort of thing. Cricket is a great game.

We repeat, 'Cricket is a great game!' Oh, yes, it is! Border was pretty proud as he led his team off the field, and the great crowd roared its applause, and Border was smiling and

waving his bat to them in the pavilion. Keppler Wessels was quite proud to be led by his captain, Allan Border, and he also waved his bat. At the same time the Sri Lankan players were not depressed. After all, the Australians had only won by three runs, and it had been a good game.

A very good game. Timmy was quite delighted when Grandpa said they had better have another game soon, on the playing oval. Grandpa looked a bit exhausted by the whole game, but then he was not a young man, not like Timmy Leeder-Allan Border. But then you can't expect Grandpas to be quite as good as their grandsons.

After the match, Nanna and Kathryn came. It was a pity they had to wash up, and miss the thrilling game, but sometimes it has to be that way. Nanna had been reading stories to Kathryn, so that made up for it a bit. Also the two teams—along with Nanna and Kathryn—went for a walk to see the new building. Perhaps the new building would turn into a splendid pavilion for the spectators. You never knew. Anything can happen in the Hills, and there was Grandpa so excited and saying, 'We'd better have another game one day, hey?'

Timmy thought that was a good idea. They went up to the white house to have a drink. A strenuous match makes you quite thirsty, and no drinks had been brought out on to the Oval, which, when you think about it, is a bit strange. After the drinks, preparations were made for going home, down from the Hills.

Soon Border, Hughes and Hogg were in the Bluebird with little Kathryn, and were speeding towards home. Timmy kept thinking about the match and the puzzling idea of being both Timmy and Captain Allan Border, but then that was not too difficult to understand. All the time he kept thinking about the match, and also about the next match they would soon be playing.

Grandpa, seated in his Jason rocker—back at the white

house—was wondering whether one day Timmy might be a Test star, and even reach the giddy heights of captaining the Test team. Still in the Bluebird, Timmy was wondering much the same thing, which shows you that there is really no generation gap in these matters.

Then Grandpa thought what a wonderful life he had had, *not* being a Test cricketer. The thought had not struck him before: he had always held regrets that the circumstances of life—especially the outbreaking of world war—had been the things preventing him from reaching that coveted position of Test cricketer. Now he wondered why he had ever wanted to be a famous cricketer. What was in it, anyway, when you thought about it?

This new idea was so novel that Grandpa really relished it. He savoured it, ruminating, chewing the cud of it with delight. For goodness sake! He had done very well without being a special Test cricketer, thank you very much! He even got to the point where he became sorry for Test players who have to go through all that rigmarole about manners, clothes, travelling, changeable moods of fickle crowds, and all the rest.

In fact, Grandpa began to glow at having got out of the whole business. He was quite jubilant, chuckling away there in his comfy Jason rocker. He rocked, he tilted, he lay back. He began chortling. Nanna thought he must have been going over the cricket match in his mind. She concentrated on the rather difficult pattern she was working on for patchwork quilting. For his part, Grandpa felt like clapping and clapping. Instead he fell into a snooze, a delicious, cosy and comfy snooze.

Strangely enough, as the Bluebird brought Timmy closer to his Adelaide suburban home, he also was feeling tired. The motion of the vehicle helped him to drowse. Just at the back of his thoughts was the memory of the great match they had just played. Without realising it, he was asleep. His

Mum thought he was quite a handsome little fellow.

Her Mum was looking across at her Dad and thinking, 'Well, for a man of his age, he isn't all that bad looking.'

## *Brother Bill*

When it comes to birds I am quite helpless, and, as my wife says, 'Hopeless.' This condition has been mine since I was a small boy. I had a brother—Francis—who built a large aviary, and kept birds. They were budgies and finches and made quite a noise. It is this noise which planted itself in my strongly associative mind and memory, and I grow a bit weak when I hear the cries and chatterings and whistlings which issue from any aviary. In fact, any conversation I am having, or any rumination visiting me, is ignored whilst I peer and stare towards the centre of bird cries.

From time to time, the obsession has come upon me. I think I am due for the blue ribbon for having built aviaries in so many places, not only in this vast continent, but also overseas. On top of this, I have dreamed wildly of the vast and lofty aviaries I could build, even ones in which forty-foot high trees are covered with bird-wire, and domestic birds lived as though in the wild.

Generally I am too shy to talk about these things, but an event has happened in my life which impels me to break bird-silence and tell the story. With this is a bit of softness that comes to you when you are moving towards seventy years—in terms of age. I notice older people become almost

maudlin about gardens—flowers, shrubs and vegetables. They also show signs of softness in the head or brain about pets. Dogs suddenly become precious to them, cats become indispensable, and even fish become little individuals all on their own. Especially, however, parrots and other birds assume significant identities.

If you think about it, older folk either revert to their childhood affections, or they become childish in a way that children are childish. That is about the sum of the matter.

I sometimes assure myself that if the bird that flew in— willy-nilly—had not been Bill, then I would not have succumbed to so much parrot interest, or, as my wife would say, ‘Obsession.’ But then Bill was—and is—a long-billed corella. To be precise, he is *Cacatua Tenuirostris*. I have learned a lot about LBCs in my bird books, but nothing which would have prepared me for the advent of Bill himself.

At this point, I suppose I ought to describe to you what a long-billed corella looks like. The good (modern) book on parrots says that he is .375 metres in length, including his 130 mm tail. He is a reasonably large white parrot who is sometimes called a white cockatoo. He does not have a yellow crest like the sulphur-crested cockatoo, but he does have yellow under his wings. He has orange scarlet around his eyes, across his forehead and on the foreneck, which gives him the appearance of having had his throat cut a bit. He has large grey eye-rings. His eyes are most unusual. Brown in colour, they fix you with their stare. No other parrot has quite the same look. It is that superior look, almost of hauteur, which tells you he knows all about you. Such is a regular long-billed corella.

I heard this harsh cry, and when I looked up, a fierce pair of our territory magpies were hurling themselves at the white offender. They knew Bill had no right in our six acres of

bushland. Not only had they pegged out their territory, but they knew that LBCs do not normally inhabit the Adelaide Hills. Parrots in plenty do that, parrots such as Adelaide rosellas, green grass parrots, and even—from time to time—little corellas, who are related to the long-billed variety of the same name.

So they were attacking Bill, and he was warning them off with harsh parrot cries. Because of this they were a trifle wary. One thing they did do, and that was let him alight on the gutter of our two-storey house. That was when I saw him—against the light and the sky of a summer mid-morning. It was the way he cocked his head on one side, and looked down at me—gamin-like—that entranced me. I immediately ‘wanted to know Bill. I called him ‘Bill’ in my mind.

‘Pretty cocky,’ I said, and if parrots can be scornful, he was, at that stupid statement. Anyone knows a long-billed corella is *not* pretty. He might be called ‘handsome’ (though I doubt it), but he is not pretty. He is—well, he is just a long-billed corella, the tough guy and gamin of all the parrot species.

Nobody had warned me against Bill’s ilk. Later I heard of a man who possessed such a parrot, and it chattered away day-long, had a great dialogue and repertoire, plus a whole stack of antics, and this man became deeply attached to his bird. In fact—if I have the matter correctly—he built a business around that feathered friend, and the business was a pet shop, mainly featuring birds. The bird was famous, and the shop-owner lived in the reflection of its glory. One night a covetous fanatic broke in through the plate-glass window and stole the bird, and the man gave up his business. He even offered to buy back his own bird, but—no response. Somewhere, at this very moment, there is an idolatrous possessor of the stolen bird, whose eyes are glued to the parrot in its cage, and who is babbling away like a buffoon, so caught is he in his LBC addiction. I myself am warned by

this event, and by no means will give you my home address or even my phone number, for fear you or someone else will steal my beloved Bill.

To get back to the gutter: Bill was cocking his eye down at me, so I rushed off and hastily gathered up budgie seed and a few spare crusts. Then I laid these out in inviting fashion below. His eyesight was telescopic, and to my enormous relief he flew down, and stood staring at me from a distance. I had to back away some metres before he would come to the food. When I did, he walked cautiously, and with a certain amount of birdly hauteur, towards the grain and crusts. He thought the whole matter through, after which he scattered the seed in a lordly sort of way and took up a crust.

That should have told me that he was a domesticated parrot, but then I knew little about parrots. When I was a boy, my Irish grandfather kept parrots—large exotic birds like giant macaws—and they were so large and I was so small, that I have always had an awe of such creatures. Bill, of course, was not overly large, but there was just something about him, and I watched with fascination.

After a time, he took a crust up to the roof guttering. He stripped it into pieces. Some he ate, some he dropped. I could only look at him helplessly, and after a time I decided I had better get back to my vegetable gardening.

Now that was just what the LBC wanted of me. He followed me to the garden. To my trembling delight, he even followed me along the rows where I was planting seed. When I went into my summer house (that is, my plastic-covered igloo, my hot-house), he had the curiosity and temerity to try to see what I was doing. LBCs are like that, I have discovered. They have an insatiable curiosity, and this is about the only thing they have which can prove their undoing. Curiosity can catch a parrot!

I would be lying if I said I caught him, there and then, in the hot-house. Oh, no! It took more than a day, I can tell

you. In fact, I was near heart-failure more times than I care to tell. One cause of that was that my plastic-covered hothouse igloo is a delicate thing, and just one parrot with a sharp, long and pointed upper mandible such as Bill possesses, could do dreadful havoc in a little time. When he would alight on to the hot-house I would go hot and cold. Just a claw or two through that plastic sheeting would be enough to make 'Kaput!'

Strangely enough, no damage was done. But Bill loved to forage in my vegetable garden. He liked carrots, or, rather, rooting them up. Later I learned that his bill was not overgrown—I was going to take him to a vet to have it cut down!—but that he had been given that bill to dig up yams and roots. Well, he was doing that.

Most of all, he liked strawberries. Ah! Strawberries! When he was not doing wild flights across the hills, giving his strange harsh cry and irritating magpies galore, he would be seated high on the hot-house, staring down at the strawberries. Strangely enough, he did not eat them. But when I began picking them, he did the closest thing to scrounging that I have known a bird to do. He would cock his eyes at the strawberries, give me a look in a gleaming eye, and almost say, 'What about a few strawberries, mate?'

One day I was in the hot-house, planting out young tomato seedlings. Curious Bill made his way to the door-opening and poked his head inside. He waddled in, swaggering slightly, and began systematically to either snip off the seedlings at earth level or yank them from the soil. Indignation stirred in me. Then I had an idea. I picked a half punnet of strawberries. I strewed them around halfway down the hot-house. I beat a retreat and closed the eastern door behind me. The western door, of course, was open. I watched Bill.

Sure enough, his passion for strawberries overcame his psittaciformian caution, and he began eating them. I crept

westwards slyly and slowly, and shut the door. I then went for my big net and a small cage. I guess I trembled a bit as I approached him, and he, for his part, seemed surprised. It was a quick operation, and in a flash I had secured *Cacatua Tenuirostris*. I savoured that triumph with unholy delight.

Capturing a threat to your strawberries and your plastic hot-house may seem a small matter, but let me tell you it wasn't. There were phone calls to and from the National Parks and Wildlife people. We chatted long over the phone about Bill, his threat to our property, and the fact that he was a domesticated creature. Finally I was issued with a Rescue Permit, and Bill was validly mine. He was mine under legal permit and licence. He, of course, knew nothing about this.

Strangely enough, he did not seem to resent the new cage. In fact, it was as though he was relieved to be in captivity. Not that he did not try to undo the catch and little things like that. He was always busy looking over his cage, but he settled in. It soon became clear that Bill was a domesticated bird. Whilst my awe of parrots continued, he took the thing rather nonchalantly and entertained me and the team of men and women we have at our place. He could spring, jump, walk and waddle. He could even do a sort of nodding walk in which his body would go forward whilst he did a kind of slow march. It was most ceremonious, and, from what I could gather, was a form of skiting. He loved it, and so did we. But it was his talking repertoire that would get us in fits of laughter.

He talked only when it suited him. It was a kind of ruminative chatting away to himself. He most often said, 'Hullo, George!' and with this he would go off into silly laughter. In fact, he would gurgle. Sometimes he barked. He was a fox terrier. At other times he had a collation of bird-calls. Mostly, however, he would say a number of things which he alone understood. He would heave up great conversations

from his sub-conscious mind and rattle them off to his heart's content. I could write for hours on this score.

Once, Bill escaped. I think I didn't fasten the latch. He escaped. I was away in another State and the Team was quite upset. They knew I had a thing for Bill, as indeed they also had. Bill went soaring over our high pines and stringy-barks as though he were never coming back. But he did return, time and again, and every time to seat himself on the hot-house plastic roof. The Team knew mild terror. It also knew how fond of Bill I had become. So they set about recapturing the corella.

The man at Parks and Wildlife laughed when they asked whether Bill might get caught again with the strawberry method. 'Catch a long-billed corella with the same trick!' he exclaimed scornfully. 'Never!'

He went on to tell them that this parrot is the most intelligent of all parrots in the world. It is also the best talker. Talker, and thinker, Bill evaded their every move and looked with a kindly but disaffected eye at their attempts to lure him with strawberries.

When I returned, there was some apprehension in the Team. They told me about Bill. Flushed with the good things that had happened on my interstate tour, I did not mind very much. It was only when I saw Bill soaring over the trees that I felt some regret. However, I wished him well, and wondered what I would tell Parks and Wildlife.

It was when I had gathered a small bucket of strawberries that Bill appeared. He sat looking down from the hot-house roof. I carelessly left a small pile of them outside the eastern door and disappeared into the igloo. He flew down and devoured the small pile. He followed me into the hot-house, walking and waddling in his inimitable way, following the carelessly scattered fruit along the path between the fully grown tomato plants. He seemed not to care when I disappeared westwards, closing the door behind me. He was

unaware when I slipped off for the net and the small cage and appeared at the eastern door. Looking back, I think he wanted me to recapture him, but I cannot swear to that.

The second escape was his last. By this time the strawberry season was over. Autumn was far advanced. In fact, winter was drawing on. Perhaps a lack of food and affection drove the LBC back to us. It was not that he was meek, but when I went to his cage to open the door and entice him in, he actually followed me across the lawn, waddling, waving from side to side, and being quite interested in what I was doing.

I went into the cage, poured out some parrot food, filled up his can with fresh water, whilst he stood outside looking at me. I kept calling him to come inside, but he stared at me, much as a human stares at a parrot in a cage! After a time I became embarrassed when I realised the reversal of roles. The morning tea call came across the lawn, and so I came out of the cage.

‘You can jump in the lake!’ I said with some anger. ‘I’m tired of you and your escape escapades!’

He looked at me curiously, pulled a blade or two of grass, and when I looked back I could see he was still eyeing me with that curious look. After discussing him at a gossip session during morning tea, we trooped out. I went down to see whether Bill had gone into one of his white flights, but he was sitting in his cage, on the highest perch, as though he had never left it. Parrots don’t wink, but he went close to it. After a time, he ignored me.

That, I suppose, is the end of my story. It was at that point I wrote the story of long-billed Bill, because I wanted people to know about LBCs. Lots of Australians live their precious little suburban lives without knowing that this is the land of

the long-billed corella. Why, many people do not know that the Budgerigar is indigenous to Australia! Some Europeans think these birds have been in the Old Continent since the dawn of time. How many people—I ask you—have ever seen a long-billed corella, one after the image of Bill?

The story I wrote had a sad ending, and I repent of ever having written it. It was based on a true happening. The parrot, however, was not a corella but a galah. Galahs are the skites of the parrot family. If you have seen them in the bush, you will know what I mean. They have a variety of antics which they act, but all the time they are shrieking for everyone to watch them or they will go home and sulk. LBCs have a bit more dignity. They are dignified even in their silliest acts, which is more than you can say for a galah.

This galah of whom we are speaking was a pet and a pest. He tricked a whole family into falling in love with him, and then he went and died on them. He was always unlocking windows and doors, and indulging in the most crazy actions. On the last occasion, he ripped open a bag of plaster of Paris and ate copiously. Then he felt thirsty, fluttered and squawked his way to some water, and drank copiously. They found him next morning, claws upward, and most solid in his death.

I wrote my story about Bill, and then tacked on this ending. How terrible! How undignified. A long-billed corella would never fall for a bag of calcium sulphate!

My remorse has been long and bitter. I have hidden the offending story. I now come to the final paragraphs which will vindicate LBCs for ever, and place them in a dignified and honourable class of their own.

I discovered that LBCs (or at least the one called Bill) are incredibly affectionate birds. Because of my awe of parrots,

I had kept away a bit from Bill. I would go into his large cage, place the feed, give him fruit, and fill up his water vessel. He would look at me, attempt to come close, at which gesture I would slip out, not too sure what he would do with his long mandible.

A young woman on our team, whose name may not be mentioned, was a rival for Bill's affection. She talked to him endlessly. When I was away on one of my trips, she went in to feed him. He nibbled her hand: he climbed her arm. He rested on her shoulder. She said, 'Hullo, gorgeous!'

After a day or two, he greeted her. He said, 'Hullo, gorgeous!' She thought that was good.

When I discovered he was affectionate I dropped all barriers. We both had a friendship time each morning. I had always said, 'How are you?' to which he now replied in good Australianese, "Ow are yuh?"

When I procured other parrots, built cages for them, and fed them too, he became a bit resentful. He would snap at me when I entered his cage. I was astonished, even sad. However, he still said, "Ow are yuh?"

I realised after some days that if I went first to his cage,, and fed him, and spent plenty of time with him, he would greet me happily the next morning. If I went to another cage first, then I was in for it. His feathers would ruffle, and he would let me have it, 'Snap! Snap! Snap!' I felt highly obliged to come first to him every day. I was fast becoming his slave. He would reward me, however, with incredible affection, climbing over my head, my shoulders, nibbling at my ears, and even trying to clean them. All the time he would chatter, "Ow are yuh? 'Ow are yuh? 'Ow are yuh?' Sometimes he would add, "'Ullo Bill 'Ullo Bill!' 'Ullo Bill!' He would also chortle, giggle, and turn his head around and around as though it were on a swivel. If I whistled or sang, he would keep swivelling his head. It was a continual reckless gesture. It was a motion of sheer abandon.

If you have followed my story to this point—about a mere bird—then you must be crazy, or as enamoured as I am of birds and parrots. The fact is that this story scarcely has a point to it. What follows now is by way of trying to give it some kind of a rationale, but probably it won't succeed.

What I have discovered about Bill is that he has a personal interest in everyone who comes to see him. He picks out the silly people and ignores them. Young children who want to bang on his cage, he either ignores or fixes with a baleful stare. They soon desist. But with sensible people, he will be incredibly accommodating-

If they evince interest, he will turn on a bout of entertainment. He will walk, waddle, sidle; he will fly, flutter and flap, but mostly he will regurgitate the repertoire of many years of learning. It does not always make sense, for some things are garbled. He is superb at Sneezing- If you should involuntarily sneeze (which is almost always the case—involuntarily, I mean), then he will, without a thought, return the sneeze. He will also return coughs, laughter, and even shrieks.

The thing that has impressed me most is that he imitates on the principle that 'Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.' John, our printer and do-everything-and-all-odd-jobs man, shouts every morning, 'Coffee time!' Now Bill does not just mimic the words: he has the tone, the resonance, the base and treble, all off to perfection, so that you think it is John shouting. Sometimes he shouts before time, which is disconcerting.

When he tells the young woman, 'You're gorgeous!' it is said in her own voice. When Doug the builder says to Bill, 'How are you, mate?' Bill answers in a Doug voice. Of course, he utters these statements at various times of the day, and often visitors are startled, thinking they are addressed, being told it is coffee time, and that they are

gorgeous, or they are barked at, sneezed at, and coughed at.

The most important thing to tell you is that parrots are very affectionate, especially the LBCs. For those who pity caged birds as such, it is good news to let you know that birds like Bill are more interested in affection than in food. Bill is not primarily interested in the food I bring. He wants *me*. He would rather have affection than food, although I suppose he wants both. Other parrots I have also climb over me. They love doing it, even when I don't have food. They like the contact.

What fascinates me about Bill is that although he will stage a concert for friends or strangers, he always talks to me in my voice, to the young woman in hers, to Doug in his, and to John in his! How discerning! How intimately personal in his relationships! He gives the young woman the affection for herself, and he gives it to me for myself. I think he would give to other persons if they shared their fondness with him.

You know, at this moment I feel a whole moralistic thing coming upon me, a sort of preachy mood. I'll restrain myself from it, for your sakes, but if I am dragged away, kicking and even screaming, I'll have to say it. There is something about the creation which is incredibly beautiful, especially when humans do not fear it, and when they love it. There is some kind of communion between humans and it. Maybe Doctor Doolittle carried it a bit too far, but then we don't carry it far enough. End of sermon.

Now I think I'll just wander down to Bill's cage for a moment or two, and chat the whole thing over with him.

## *A Day in the Life of Grandpa*

JOEY-BOY the sulphur-crested cockatoo said, 'Hullo, Grandpa!' Grandpa grunted. He liked his morning greeting from Joey-Boy. 'Hullo to you too,' he said back.

Joey-Boy swayed on his perch. He was a bit of a skite. Also he could dance. He danced. Grandpa looked at him out of the corner of his eye. Cocky caught the look and shouted, 'Cocky wants a carrot!' He liked carrots and parsnips, and got them when they were in season. Grandpa always grew carrots.

Right now he was not in the mood to satisfy Joey's whims. He had other things to do. Like turning on the sprays in the vegetable gardens. He could feel the warmth of the coming day. It could easily be a scorcher. There was red in the eastern sky. He had better water the tomatoes in the hot-house. He called it a hot-house, but it was really a plastic-house, plastic sheeting over galvanised piping frame. He was proud of his plastic hot-house. Each morning he would be down in it, seeing if the tomatoes were ripening, and the cucumbers filling out, to say nothing of the succulent zucchinis. There was sweet corn also, ripening so early in the season.

Joey-Boy screamed after the old man as he disappeared,

head bent forward as though he were pushing his way through the early morning. The truth was that Grandpa had the most evocative mind. That is to say, any little thing would evoke the past for him. He could see himself now, barefooted, making towards the bush, bird-trap in hand, his butterfly net tucked through his belt.

It was strange, he thought, how the early days came back to you clear as crystal, and yet yesterday was difficult to remember. Not that he minded: he liked browsing around in the past. He could remember faces and names and incidents. He liked that. However, on his early morning jaunts—as indeed now—he was always alone. Even in the jungles in Malaya he had liked being alone. Not that you were, of course. There were animals peering at you, or a native, and in the later days, a silent Jap or two.

It was difficult for Grandpa when his association of thoughts became crowded and complex. One moment he was heading towards the bush as a barefooted child. At the same moment he was creeping through the jungle, feet in strong army boots, trying to be as silent as the still trees about him.

He saw a cut-worm on a sweet corn-cob and picked it off, crushing it underfoot. A tomato plant was wilting from a cut-worm at the base of the plant. Grandpa was philosophical about cut-worms, snails, nematodes and bronze-wilt. He knew that somehow it was part of the scheme of things. He never questioned that scheme. He only questioned those who questioned. In later years he hadn't worried about them much, either. He let so much of life flow about him, and even over him. He kept quiet, but none of this had anything to do with senility.

At least he hoped not. It was just that serenity had some how or another come to him. At times, of course, he was irascible. But generally speaking he had become a patient man. People liked that and called in on him, ostensibly to

ask a question about curly-leaf on the peach trees, or red mites on the strawberries. He answered their questions and yet they stayed on, drinking in the quietness.

This morning he stood watching the water flit happily from the butterfly sprays. He never ceased to marvel at water so prodigal. There had been times when he had worked out around Hay and Condobolin. There had been little water there, to be sure. So he savoured the silver water as it pattered out to the extremity of its own circles. The smell of it on freshly turned earth was another delight to him. He liked these things. They seemed significant to him, although he could not say why.

After a time, the black cockatoos came. Joey-Boy was mad with jealousy. He raged up and down the length of his perch. He hurled abuse at the black so-and-so's. He flapped his wings, turned upside-down on his perch and hung by one claw, defying them to do the same. 'They were headed towards the young almonds, but the nets over the trees defeated them. They lofted high into the pine trees looking for nuts in the cones, but it was a bit early for them.

Grandpa's mind was away again. He was up north, in the Dorrigo, where the black cockatoos arrived about the same time as the currawongs. There were the bell-like notes of these black-and-white birds, and the harsh screeching, high up in the tall gums, of the black parrots. The Dorrigo had many memories for Grandpa, some of them not so good. He brushed the Dorrigo from his mind, and came back to his peaceful valley and the sweet corn.

He collected a couple of cobs for Grandma, and the first capsicum of the season. He disliked capsicum and Grandma's salads. When he thought of those salads he became a trifle gloomy. He threw a carrot into Joey's cage, who climbed down the wire quickly to get it. It was a large carrot, and the bird lay on the cage floor, rolling over and over with the vegetable. The creature loved mock wrestling.

'Idiot!' Grandpa said, roughly and affectionately. He hurried into the kitchen. It was time for the 7:15 am. news from the ABC. The theme dirge of the news beat out from the little transistor radio. Grandpa put the water on to boil. He had better pre- pare Grandma's egg. One morning he would boil it, and another morning he would poach it. This morning it was to be egg-and-cheese omelette. Grandpa Makin rather fancied himself on omelettes. Occasionally Grandma would encourage him.

He had everything worked out to a T. On went the water to boil, the bread was slipped into the toaster. He would set out the breakfast things on a tray. Then he would cut the grapefruit and squeeze half of it into a small glass. He would put the instant coffee into Grandma's cup and get out his own mug for a cup of sweet tea, pour the water into the cup, butter the aromatic toast and apply the Vegemite. This was all to the accompaniment of the abuse the Labor Party was hurling at the Liberals, the sarcastic rejoinders of the Liberals, and the support statements issued by the Australian Council of Trade Unions. He wondered why they never let up. Could any good come out of Labor, the Liberals, or the ACTU? When the BBC news came on, all that would be finished. Fifteen minutes and Grandpa had prepared breakfast and listened to the news.

He went into their bedroom which was next to the kitchen, slipped up the blind, arranged Grandma's pillows, and went back for the breakfast tray. She would peer at him out of one half-opened eye. He would nod as the fruity Pommy voice would begin the ever-so-formal BBC news. Trust the British never to change. Behind it all he rather liked Brits. Moreover their news always seemed to be authentic. He didn't quite know why.

Grandma never liked waking up. She would sleep on for ever if he didn't wake her. Often he wondered what might happen if he let her sleep on. He would chuckle over that

thought. She would probably be angry that she had been allowed to sleep.

Now she had both eyes open. She looked down at the breakfast and up at him. 'I could smell the cheese through my sleep,' she said. He sat on the bed and ate his toast, his chopped-up orange, and drank his tea.

Every morning he thought about Grandma. He would always see her as a girl of sixteen—the first time he had met her. Pert she was then, nigh unto cheeky. He had liked that. Now he fell to ruminating.

Grandma looked at him, a bit severely. 'There he goes,' she thought, 'thinking about his vegies and what he is going to do today. He never spares a thought for me.' She had forgotten about the breakfast every morning when he spared quite a number of thoughts for her.

He was thinking. 'She is always busy in her mind about those grandchildren, and for that matter the children too, although they are all grown up and married.' It was then that the phone rang. He went into the next room and answered it. It was one of his daughters. She was saying, 'It's hot down here, Dad. They say its going to be 42° Celsius today. Do you mind if we bring up the kids?'

'Do that,' said Grandpa pleasantly. He was thinking something out on the side, about meals and the effervescent Rita, all blonde and bright and busy. 'Yes,' he repeated, 'you come up here.' Then something clicked in his mind. 'Tell Rita we have some strawberries.' He could hear Rita offstage shouting to her Mum.

Grandma said instantly, 'Who was that?'

Grandpa looked vague. Calculated senility, and a foolish grin. 'Who was it?' he echoed vaguely. 'I guess it was some one.' His grin was secretive. 'Like your egg-and-cheese omelette?'

She had, but she wasn't going to tell him; not at this moment. 'Who rang?' she persisted.

'Ah!' he said, as though he had difficulty in recalling. Then he grinned. 'Could be that blonde daughter of yours.' Grandma gave a little snort, but she was satisfied. Just then the phone rang again. This time it was another daughter. Same idea; hot down in the city, cool up in the hills. Grandpa's house was cool. Also he had an air-conditioner in the study, if ever that was needed.

Grandpa shut his study door before they arrived. They might not think about him, but that was wishful thinking. The two cars arrived within minutes of each other. Children tumbled out, and rushed into the kitchen. They eyed the fat bananas. One of them looked into the fridge where the Smarties were kept. Then they bombarded the study door. Grandpa opened it with simulated surprise. He survived the hugs, kissing's and concerted shoutings. They insisted that he take them to Joey-Boy, then to the budgies, and after that to the vegie garden. They had the strawberries in the forefront of their minds.

The two daughters were most tolerant of Grandpa. They liked him around, especially for the children. If pressed, they would admit that Grandpa was a wise enough person, but on the whole they thought their kind of maturity was more practical. They closeted themselves with Grandma. The blonde daughter—Elaine—had brought the ironing. It was too hot to iron, down in her suburb. The not-so-blonde daughter, Raelene, wished she had brought her ironing too. They sat around talking to Grandma whilst she ironed. They admired her efficiency. Secretly they saw her as the paradigm of true motherhood and grandmotherhood. They rested in the security she brought them, albeit unconsciously.

Joey-Boy went mad when the children appeared. He flew to his seed container and chopped at a seed with his incisors. Then he flew to the back perch and screamed raucously. He

walked sideways like a crazy monkey and then swung on his perch. He seemed to be screaming, 'Look what I can do!'

The children appreciated that. It was part of their mentality. They scampered in front of the cage, mimicking Joey whilst he went into madder and madder exploits. After a while they tired of that. Even though he called out, 'Mu-um! Da-ad!' all in the one breath, and finally 'Grandpa!' they followed the old man to the strawberry patch.

'No eating without collecting,' he told them. 'I'll get some tins and you can pick them. You have to whistle while you do it.' Young Jimmy didn't understand why they should whistle. Anyway, he couldn't whistle.

Grandpa watched them eating the berries with some indulgence. After 'a while their containers were filled, in fact tumbling over with the ripe red fruit.

He persuaded them to take their picking to Grandma. 'Then we'll put out the water-slide,' he said.

Grandma spent all her waking hours planning good things for her children and their children. One of the good things was a plastic water-slide. You pinned it to the sloping lawn, and connected the hose to the tap. The water sprayed out softly, and wet the smooth surface.

Daughters Elaine and Raelene came out in their flimsy bathers, and the children with scarce cover. They waited until the plastic was wet and slippery. Joey-Boy jumped up and down on his perch with the glory of it all. When the children screamed, he screamed. When they slid, he would rush up to one end of the perch, reverse, and waddle rapidly to the other. It was a great day for the children, and a great day for Joey.

Grandpa didn't mind the grandchildren. He knew that in a way they were inevitable, just as his own children had been. Grandma had kept having them, and each occasion had been a surprise and a temporary distraction from the mainstream of life. He always marvelled that they were his

children, but since they looked and acted like Grandma, he really thought of them as her offspring. Somewhere along the line he must have been too busy to give them extra training, that is, to make his own impression on them. On the whole, nevertheless, he was pleased with them, and a bit awed by them.

It was quiet when they left, in the later afternoon. There was a babble of voices as the children clicked on their seat-belts, having given excited hugs and moist kisses to their grandparents. The girls were quietly appreciative of the day in the cooler hills. Wavings, cries, and they were gone. Peace settled again about the house.

Being Thursday, he knew it was their time to go shopping. He didn't mind shopping. For years they had had little money, although a lot of enjoyment from life. They would go to the supermarket and buy their week's goods. It was quite an occasion. They usually went in mid-afternoon. This day, Grandpa had an exciting idea. 'Let's go after tea,' he suggested. 'It's late night shopping.' He grinned. 'We'll see a different set of people.' He was quite pleased that he had thought it up.

Grandma stared at him the way she always did when she didn't want to do what he wanted. He knew her for a strong-minded person. Grandma had always wanted to do what she wanted to do. She didn't give in easily.

He let the moment slip by. 'Straight after tea,' he said, and Grandma knew it was useless arguing. At least she had learned that in all their years of marriage.

Grandpa felt himself eagerly looking forward to the evening treat. He crunched his mixed salad, almost without regret. He had it stuck fast in his mind from his old Dad that man

wasn't made to be a rabbit or a cow. Cows chewed their cuds. So did rabbits. Greens, especially uncooked greens, were made for ruminants. Grandpa did quite a bit of ruminating, but not that kind. He chuckled over his little pun, and Grandma looked at him sideways. Still, he liked growing the salad vegies, and if no one had wanted them he would have been deeply disappointed.

Before getting into the car, he put on his hat. 'You won't need that,' said Grandma. 'The day is just about over. There's no sun-'

'A man isn't dressed without a hat,' he said.

She gave her fine snort. 'No one wears hats these days,' she said.

'I do,' he said, thus confirming to Grandma for the millionth time that he was an obstinate aged male, and would never change.

Secretly Grandpa disliked hats. Outwardly he was a stickler for convention. Something of his own father still dominated him. But he also had a sense of humour. He knew that young people were always put out when they saw a man driving the car in front of their vehicle, and wearing a hat. By nature, he was a meteoric driver. He was a meteoric do-everything. Yet for the young people's sake he drove as though he were senile. He would chuckle when they swerved past him, looking at him as though he were out of the ark. Sometimes he would give them a drag just for the hell of it, and Grandma would shout in alarm and say, 'Godfrey, stop it! You know it is against the law!'

This evening Grandpa Makin was circumspect. He wished to arrive in one piece at the shopping centre.

Grandpa's day was essentially Grandma's day also. She really related well to her husband. A bit younger than he was, she nevertheless sought to mother him. He was a bit

wary of that. He just liked her being around, mothering the children, and smothering the grandchildren so that he could be free to think. He placed great store by his thinking. He seemed to need it as flowers need water. Without it, he might even wilt. As a result of thinking, he would sometimes write poetry, or a bit of fiction. Once he had written a novel. After that effort, he had gone back to shorter pieces. The literary critics were always kind to Grandpa. They felt he was part of life's unusual conspiracy—whatever they understood by that!

Right now, Grandma knew Grandpa was being stimulated for some of his own thinking. Later he would write. She knew the evocative mind of her elusive husband. In a way he was a bit of a scamp. Always had an eye for a beautiful woman. His mind was busy discerning the Ways people related to one other. She saw Grandpa actually rubbing his hands with satisfaction after he had emerged from the car and deposited his keys in his back trouser pocket. He looked around with keen eyes. He knew the substance of life was people, and although he never let them get too close to him, or expect responding intimacy from him, his study—to be sure—was just human persons.

For the first ten minutes in the supermarket they concentrated on buying. Grandpa had a good memory. He knew the prices of things from one brand to another. 'No, Mother,' he would say, 'don't get that margarine. It looks cheap, but it's coarse. This is your best buy.' He would steer her to the right brand with the right price.

Sometimes she giggled. She had never been one for being scrupulously frugal. Life was too busy to be penny-pinching. So she had just bustled in, bought, and bustled out again. She too wanted to get on with life. Godfrey had inherited some of his Dad's canny ways. She remembered when she was younger that they had laughed over old couples debating the price of things. That was why she was

giggling now. It was true of course that Grandpa was saving them dollars, but then the children would get it when they died and what was the point of being frugal? She was all for busting it now and enjoying it.

So was Grandpa, for that matter. Today he would save ten cents on each article and tomorrow make some extravagant gift to one or other of the children or grandchildren.

Grandpa was comparing the prices of two brands of biscuits when the beautiful young woman came up to him. 'Mr Makin,' she exclaimed, her voice full of thrills, 'how nice to meet you here.'

Grandpa could always gain time by peering. His sight was 'perfect and he did not have to peer. So he peered. Other times he would seem to be deaf, when, in fact, he was not hard of hearing. 'Oh,' he said blankly, 'I can't quite be sure...' He left the rest unsaid.

'Oh,' she exclaimed, 'you have never met me. I've seen you, but I doubt whether you have seen me. It was at the Literary Club.'

'Ah,' he said, relieved. 'We met there, did we? Good thing, that Literary Club.'

'Good indeed,' she echoed. 'Helps us all to develop the talents we have.'

Grandpa nodded firmly. She was a fine-looking woman. He rather liked the conversation and the contact. Not every day did he have such attractive women talking to him. This one—for some reason or other—seemed to admire him. He soon found out why. 'Your last book,' she said rapturously, 'it was wonderful.'

He thought about his last book. It wasn't difficult to remember which. He had only had three published. Much to his secret shame, he had paid for the printing of the first title. 'Ah yes,' he said vaguely, giving her an opportunity to talk about the book.

Grandma watched them both. Harmless enough, she thought. She was also a bit proud about her masculine husband. 'Good thing I nabbed him when I did,' she said to herself, 'or some other woman would have got him.'

Often he irritated her, but she wouldn't have swapped him for the world. So she pattered off to buy four slices of ham and three of corned silverside. It always helped with the salads. She could hear the enthusiastic gush of praise from the good-looking woman. She chuckled at Grandpa and his insincere modesty.

Others talked to them that night. Grandpa would pause now and then, especially in the arcades, and watch the people go by. He had been doing it since he was a little boy, when he developed his famous game of staring people out. Now he did not stare them out, but he stared at them, and accumulated the most amazing store of ideas and wonders about which to write. She wondered how these ideas could get there. They were strange and wonderful when he poured them out on paper. He had wads of stories stacked away. One day perhaps, when they had passed on, the children would fish them out and get them published. She gave a little sigh at that, and then giggled again, Careful not to let Godfrey know her thoughts. The beggar would write about her; he would, given half a thought.

Finally they left the shopping centre. Grandpa gave a deep sigh of satisfaction. He sat in front of the wheel before turning the key. His hands were rubbing together. 'Great night!' he said. He looked at her with genuine joy in his eyes. 'Must do it again sometime,' he said.

She nodded. She was feeling drowsy. For an hour or two, her thoughts had not been with the children. They began naturally to drift back in that direction. Grandpa had his own thoughts. He was thinking about the handsome woman.

'No,' he thought, 'she wasn't handsome. She was beautiful. Had a good mind too.' He appreciated good minds. Did not always expect to find them in women, but often they were there. You could not deny it.

Someone had once said to him, 'You rarely write about women.' That had surprised him because he certainly thought a lot about them. Perhaps, after tonight, he could write more about women. He chuckled and Grandpa knew he had private thoughts. Well, she had her own also. She was thinking about Raelene and Elaine, and how different they were.

Now it was the ritual before they went to bed. It was the tea making. Grandpa had a special way of making tea. It was a ritual caught from his mother. She used to turn the pot three times. Grandpa was not a bit superstitious, but he wouldn't drink tea until the pot had been turned three times. With the tea they had dry crunchy biscuits with a smear of butter on them. He always cut thin slices of cheese for her, but ate none himself. He did not consider himself to be a cheese man.

They drank the tea in bed and crunched on the biscuits. The whole thing was pleasant to them, one of the fruits of life and old age. Often Grandpa would remind his wife of the time they had considered having separate beds, just for comfort's sake, and how their children had become highly indignant.

'No way, Dad and Mum,' they had said. 'It just wouldn't be good.' They had never explained how it wouldn't be good, but Grandpa and Grandma had never dared think about separate beds again.

In the middle of the tea, the phone rang. Grandma leapt out of bed like a sprightly teenager. 'That's Maisie,' she said. 'She'll be ringing from Ceduna.' Ceduna was as far from them, in the Adelaide Hills, as Melbourne was, in the

State of Victoria.

He leaned back. She was going to be a long time. She lived by her telephone conversations with her children. Grandpa Makin? Well, he wasn't so bound by them. He had an enjoyable novel which he took from the top of the radio digital clock. He began to read. After a time, he drowsed. He had almost slipped away into sleep when she arrived back, animated from her discussion. 'She never grows old,' he thought.

She began settling herself in for the night. She drank the last of the tea, brushed a few crumbs from the quilt. Then she moved around and around.

'My old sow,' he said, half to her and half to himself.

'Your "old sow!"' she said indignantly. 'Just what do you mean?'

He grinned widely. 'I remember those nights we had to attend the sows when they were farrowing. Brother Norman and myself. They always seemed, to come on in the winter.' He grinned again. 'You knew when it was going to happen,' he said. 'The sow would move around and around until she had made a kind of nest. Then she would settle down, and, after a time the little ones would come.'

' "My old sow" yourself!' she said half-indignant, half-laughing.

'It's warmer here than in those sties,' he said. 'My, they were cold.'

She was sure they were cold. Here, with the electric blanket, they were assured of some defence against the aches and pains of old age.

'You know,' he said, almost from the depths of sleep, 'you keep your age well. You are just like a young woman.'

She liked that, and began to feel the glow of warmth steal through her. Sleep was coming. Oh, how she loved sleep!

Grandpa liked it too, but then not too much of it. His last thoughts, as he drifted off, were that morning would come,

and a new day with it, and all the riches of being a human — especially a thought-stocked mature human. He would never want it any other way.

For a moment the image of the beautiful woman came before his eyes, but after another moment it faded. All he could think about was Grandma, and the comfort and the full-bodied reality of her.

'Full-bodied reality'—he liked that phrase. Drowsily he thought of getting out of bed and going into the study to jot it down. No, he would remember. Perhaps, tomorrow, he would begin writing about women in earnest. Maybe he could start with Grandma Makin. He chuckled, as in a dream. 'What a subject!' he thought, and he liked the idea.

He was powerless to develop it, because sleep claimed him, and with it, the wife of his youth, the woman of his old age.

## *Dadda's Doubloons*

**I**T is a particular item of news that is making me restless these days. Rarely am I disturbed by any item of news. Having been a writer for some years, I am sceptical about most news I read or hear. However, when they keep telling me that the price of gold is going up, and up, then I become restless. If Secundra were around he would tell me it was not so much restlessness as wistfulness.

He would say, 'What would a fellow like you be wanting, to do with gold? Gold never really interested you.'

Then I would have to nod, and say, 'Secundra, you are dead right. I just don't know why I even respond to the thought of gold.'

You wouldn't catch Secundra being stirred by the mention of gold. No way. Secundra could always hang loose to anything that was an object. It was only when it came to people—persons you might say—that he began to show a gleam of interest. Very interested in persons was Secundra.

Very interested in our Dadda was Secundra. Plenty of gleams of interest he showed. He thought there was no one in the world like our Dadda, and probably he was right.

'A most unusual person, our Dadda,' he often used to say. Yet he had no interest in Dadda for the gold. I mean the

gold Dadda used to have in his thick leather bag.

You might prick up your ears at that, and say, 'What gold?' and I would have to tell you, 'Well, I don't rightly know. I just don't fully understand.'

Doubtless that would make you even more curious, yet it would not be in order to make you curious that I would talk like that. I just never figured out Dadda and his gold. Not ever.

First let me tell you that besides Secundra, there was Skillon. Don't ask me how they came to have these names. 'Secundra,' somehow or another, in some language or another, means 'Alexander.' Don't ask me why Dadda and Mumma fixed on 'Secundra,' or 'Skillon' for that matter. 'They were a couple, those parents. My other brother they called Silas. Silas was younger than us, the very youngest. He was fair-haired and wild. Between him and us was Natalia. She was fair, but calm. In fact she was very beautiful. She was always calm with her beauty, and consequently went a long way. So did Secundra and Skillon, but then that is another story.

Secundra was what you would call 'hatchet-faced.' He had dark peering eyes, set back, with his brows jutting over them. His jaw started way back and kept coming forward. That gave Secundra an unchanging look of determination, though what for I cannot imagine. He was a very gentle person. He loved people, but was never naive. He just knew people and loved them as they were. Skillon was different. He was acquisitive, always trying to obtain the things in life he desired. Like Dadda's gold. Not, mind you, that he would ever have stolen it. At least I don't think so.

To come to Dadda's gold. It wasn't outright gold, so to speak. It was sovereigns, gold sovereigns. True, we called them 'Dadda's Doubloons,' but they were gold, nevertheless. I couldn't even tell you what a doubloon looks like, that is to say, looked like. But then I can tell you what

sovereigns looked like. Oh yes, that I really know.

First of all, let me tell you about Dadda. He was the one who gave Secundra his looks as well as his name. Their features were moderately alike, except that Dadda's chin was less prominent. He was a mild version of Secundra. But then he was more matured than that son of his, and very, very determined. I mean that although he often appeared mild he was really not that way at all. If he set out to do things in life, then he did them. That is why he had his gold, his multitude of sovereigns.

Dadda had been a dentist. I often met people who had been treated by Dadda, and they always spoke highly of him. You will hear people joking that dentists are always looking down in the mouth. When you laugh shortly at that the conversation ends there, for who finds much character in a dentist? After the joke the conversation tails off and then finishes. However, I have to say it, he being my father and all, that he was an exceptional dentist. He was gentle, encouraging, insistent, firm, and a person who made an extraction seem like an adventure. He was careful when he drilled teeth. He kept asking whether one felt the pain. Because he gave dignity to his patients they liked him. Aged persons came to him without terror, and I have heard that little children feigned toothache because they loved the way he played up to them. Oh, I could go on with many such stories, but this is not the time for that. This is a serious time. It is the time when the price of gold is rapidly rising.

Dadda was shrewd about the gold. Being a dentist he had a special privilege. It was that he was allowed to hoard gold, and even sovereigns. These he would melt down to make fillings, gold fillings of course. When it came to amalgam fillings he was superb. After fifty years I still have some of Dadda's amalgam fillings in my mouth. Who, however, wants a dark amalgam filling showing in the front teeth? No-one, and why should they? Many people like the display

of gold in the teeth. It was for such people Dadda collected the sovereigns.

I must tell you, at the same time, that hoarding of sovereigns was forbidden by law. Dentists and a few others were excepted. Dadda had a strong-room. In that strong-room he had a large collection of gold coins. There was nothing wrong with that until Dadda retired. By rights he should then have taken the gold sovereigns to a bank and deposited them in his account. The old pound notes used to have a statement printed on them that the pound was legal tender for one gold sovereign. Think of that! What if they had that printed on them now? Now, with one ounce of gold worth more than four hundred dollars. It makes your head reel to think of it.

Now, to get back to Dadda. My dentist-father was a man of integrity. He never went outside the law to do anything. However, having retired he was no longer entitled to keep his gold or have it in his strong-room. To keep his conscience calm and quiet he simply said that he intended, from time to time, to do a little dentistry. He was a young man, and, as things turned out, he did return to dentistry for a short period after some years. Nevertheless I feel that at the time of which we are speaking, Dadda really had no such intention. He just hung on to those sovereigns because he loved them.

If you have seen a gold sovereign you will understand. They were not large coins: about the size of a five cent piece, I would say. After fifty years it is not easy to remember. What I can easily recollect was the rich deep colour of those coins. Imprinted with the head of the reigning king or queen, they were brilliant when newly minted. Sometimes you could get them as change, and then you had to be careful you did not get them mixed up with halfpennies or farthings. The latter were smaller, the former larger, but what a tragedy if you were not careful.

Grandpa on Mumma's side always gave us a sovereign when we went to his large house. We rarely went, but wanted to meet him regularly. He had a large sandy moustache, stained with nicotine and alcohol. He had a large red face which he kept impassive. Even when he was putting the coin into your hand he never betrayed an emotion. We did. We could scarcely be seen off the premises before we went wild with our sovereigns. That is, all of us with the exception of Secundra. He would look at the coin with a little curiosity, slip it into his pocket, and forget it. Sometimes Mumma would find it there, even weeks later, and Secundra just wasn't interested.

This is all to tell you that I have handled sovereigns, and know all about them. It is also to tell you about Dadda's very large cache of gold coins which he kept first in his strong-room and later in the strong leather bag which he sometimes buried. You see, we left that country town where we had lived, and we came to live in the big city. First we lived at Grandpa's place when he was off to Ireland, and when he returned we went to a very posh suburb, where Dadda had built a special kind of home. For some years we lived with Dadda and the restlessness which had come to him following retirement.

At first, whilst we were going to school, he was not restless. We had a large plot of ground and he grew roses, vegetables, lawns and fruit trees. The soft fruits grew in the vegetable garden area, and the citrus fruits amongst the roses. I only mention the citrus trees because Dadda had a feeling for citrus, especially oranges. He liked to bury his money-sack under a citrus tree, if possible.

Long before he began burying the sack, he occupied his time with the planting of lawns. The lawns were spacious and kept us boys occupied every Saturday morning, mowing them. Afterwards we would cut the lawn edges. Then we were allowed to go to football or some other sport. Some-

times we were allowed to box and wrestle on the flowing lawns. Dadda built fountains, pergolas, and the like. He trained climbing roses, whilst he trained us. Finally he ran out of lawns to plant, gardens to make, and ornamental devices such as pergolas, fountains and trellises. Dadda had used up all his land. At this point he became exceedingly restless, and but for an act of providence he might have developed an ulcer, but the providential happening came just in time.

This act of God was the burning down of our neighbour's house. Fortunately the neighbour was away. He and his wife had left the day before the fire. At least that is what we were given to understand. It was night-time when the happening took place. We were having a wonderful time playing the mechanical pianola, and so did not hear or see the beginning of the event. Also we had thick venetian blinds made of Californian redwood, and they effectively blotted out both the flickering light of the flames, and the muttering of the attendant crowd. By pure accident Secundra lifted a blind, and then there was pandemonium. As he announced the fire, we pulled up the venetians and the glare flooded the room. Dadda was out in a second with the hoses he had prepared for such an eventuality, and without one thought for the burning house he was dousing ours with water.

In the midst of these operations our local fire-engine came rushing up, toiling its shiny brass bell, and was greatly impeded in getting to the fire as the children crowded around it. Soon the hose was connected to the fire hydrant, and great streams of water gushed over the building. Finally, to the honest dismay of some of the onlookers, the rare spectacle was finished. Dadda was still hosing our house with a recklessness that was unusual for him. The firemen congratulated him seriously, rolled up their fire-hose and returned to their headquarters. The crowd melted away, and only the family watched the last wet embers steaming under

Dadda's torch and careful scrutiny. Finally we went to bed.

Dadda was the first to the scene next morning. He had a fork and a rake. Every so often he would give a faint cry of joy and excitement, and stoop to pick up something. Of course you will never believe it. Dadda had found sovereigns. As surely as I write this true story, he had found sovereigns.

That settled it for Dadda. He purposed to buy the property. Now, of course, it was worth little. The house was three-quarters burned. It would mean labour to take away the rubbish. It required some clearing and cleaning. Land in any case was cheap. Dadda would buy it.

The couple who had gone on holiday showed only faint surprise at what had happened. It was as though they had almost expected something like this might happen. I did hear that the Insurance people were puzzled by the event. They may have even been suspicious, but that sort of thing did not come to the ears of mere boys, and finally the land was sold to Dadda. We knew what it meant: more lawns, more fountains, a trellis or two, and a garden shed or so. Our prophetic instinct was justified. It was remarkable what Dadda constructed from the debris of that old house. It was also remarkable what he found under its burned-out floors. Here and there we children also found a stray sovereign, which Dadda generously allowed us to keep. True, they were quite tarnished, and could have been mistaken for copper coins. It was the unique size of them which saved us from dreadful error. I have no proof. I can only conjecture that somehow Dadda's leather bag was significantly larger in its contents. Secundra used to scoff at the thought, but Skillon somehow knew the score and he thought it was a remarkable score for one of Dadda's age.

Then the Depression came. It came suddenly, and when it happened it did something to almost everyone. It was very sad the way people were committing suicide. Most of these

had been very wealthy. Suddenly their investments were frozen, or their tenants could not pay rent whilst they themselves had to pay rates and taxes. No one quite knew how to handle this tragic event. Very respectable people had to work on the roads, and others humped their bluey around the country, looking for work. There, in our posh suburb, suddenly, in the bush tracts, were tramps setting up little humpies, hiding their presence between the large trees. There were so many complications that I had better not pause to tell you. It was the effect on Dadda which was most noticeable.

Dadda turned a little strange. At first it was scarcely noticeable. He just appeared to be less humorous, more thoughtful. Theft his humour seemed to have died. Perhaps he was disturbed by the number of sudden deaths, and the general gloom which had settled about our society. His greatest worry, from what, I can gather, was the banks. In Germany inflation had accelerated to an unbelievable high. I wasn't at all sure what inflation was, but I knew it troubled Dadda. Of course with five children and a wife, what else could it do? Dadda came out from his early retirement to do some dentistry, but then was dismayed by the cost of setting up surgery with the required equipment. He set it up, but it seemed to increase his trouble. Also his patients were for the most part poor, and he treated a lot of crisis cases, and I doubt whether he made much money. He seemed not to make any.

That was when he really turned to the leather sack of sovereigns.

In those days the lavatory facilities were at some distance from the house. This I disliked because our particular arrangement was within a vine-covered trellis. I was sure that for some reason or another a burglar frequented that area. I always sensed on my visits that he was present. He stood— so I imagined—behind the door. For this reason I never shut

the door. This caused certain embarrassing situations which I shall not describe. However, one night as I made my terrified pilgrimage to the outhouse, I saw Dadda on his knees under my favourite Valencia orange tree. He was peering into the earth.

When I said, 'Hullo, Dadda!' he leapt up as though stung by some night creature. I was alarmed. He spoke with a certain anger. 'What are you doing out here, Francis?'

'Going to the lavatory,' I said meekly, and with some fear.

He nodded. 'Well, just go,' he said hastily. 'I'll just see if there are some more snails here.'

I thought it strange that he had both a fork, a hoe, and a spade to hand just for a few snails, but then it was none of my business. Dadda had his own special ways.

Children talk. They pick up strange details around the home. They notice slight eccentricities. Unusual things they never miss. They talk among themselves. Pretty soon it was established that Dadda was hiding something. Not long afterwards we knew Dadda was hiding his bag of doubloons. That is when we began to call his hoard of gold by that name, that is 'Dadda's Doubloons.' Mind you, the reference was kind, even affectionate. We were quite proud of Dadda. After all, who had gold at this time when countries were going off the gold standard? Although we knew it was not strictly correct for Dadda to have this hoard, we thought it just fine that he had an edge—so to speak—on less intelligent and thoughtful men. We left Dadda to bury his treasure when and where he wished. We made sure that when we visited the special outhouse that we sang, flickered a flashlight, or made loud coughing noises. It was more for our own sakes than for Dadda's benefit.

There would have been nothing to it, but for Dadda's amnesia. This came suddenly to him. He had suffered some unusual turns. First he became giddy, and then collapsed.

Our family doctor was a fine, if taciturn, man. He had a high regard for Dadda, and admired his dental reputation. On one occasion Dadda had made him a set of dentures, with plenty of gold in the teeth, and had charged him very little. Whatever the reason, the Doc insisted that Dadda rest. He was not to do gardening. He was not to make trellises. He could feed the fish if he wished, but fountain-making was to cease. Dadda accepted this, even if a little uneasily. He watched the roses bloom and wondered who would prune them. We said we would but he doubted our abilities in that area. I think he brooded a little about the pruning and this may have brought on the amnesia.

Whilst he had the amnesia he seemed quite cheerful. It was as though Nature had pulled down a blind for a time, not letting him see the things which had troubled him. This gave him some relief, but then one day he asked Mumma about his sack of coins'. She looked at him blankly, shrugged her shoulders and said, 'However would I know?' I tell you, Mumma was a rare one. For a small woman she carried an unusual weight of character and personality.

At first Dadda was only faintly alarmed. He rarely failed in anything he attempted, and probably thought he would remember where the sack had been placed. As time went on he did not remember, and he became desperate. He let no one know, but singled me out to do a bit of digging for him. I did this quite happily, but wondered why I should always have to dig so deeply, and then always under Valencia orange trees whose branches mostly touched the soil. Skillon soon put me wise. 'Dadda's looking for the doubloons,' he said. Because of that information I did a fair bit of digging on my own, but never a thing did I find.

From here on I am confused. I must admit it: I am confused. The events were very strange. Dadda would be found at night, wandering around, a spade in his hand. Often we would lead him back to bed. We were never sure whether he

was walking in his sleep or trying to find the gold by himself. Anyway his fine sense of humour had thinned out considerably. Often he was melancholy. Then he began to be suspicious of folk who visited us. I think he believed they were after his treasure. His native sense of hospitality deserted him. He sometimes was morose. Also he became concerned about his bank account. He was talking of withdrawing from the bank because one State bank had collapsed. I never was one for economics and tried not to think about it.

Suddenly Dadda changed. I will not say he became his old cheerful self. No, that was not so. Yet he had in some way changed. He was now a strong man. Obviously he had dug up the treasure. He decided we must sell the place and go on to a farm. He wanted to breed stud cattle and prize pigs. He saw us all living together on the farm. We would be a warm and happy family. Whilst this was a fine idea and a high ideal, Skillon on the one hand, and Silas on the other, had no desire to be farmers. Secundra thought he liked the idea but wasn't sure. I liked the idea, and in fact had been training at an agricultural high school. The upshot was that: Skillon left home to work elsewhere. Secundra and I agreed to help Dadda, and our little sister said she thought she might like it. Silas thought he would give it a go, at least for the time. Mumma was most agreeable. She had never liked the city much.

I imagined Dadda had realised on his gold sovereigns, which by that time would have been quite valuable. However, to our surprise he placed the leather sack in the boot of the car, where we could all see it.

'Dadda,' said Secundra. 'You still have your old leather sack.'

Dadda laughed a bit at that and nodded, and said yes, he did have his old leather sack. He said he thought that was a good thing. He wondered aloud why Secundra had made

the remark, but we could all see that Dadda was pleased. He was pleased to the point where he chuckled continuously.

When we went to the farm, Dadda let it be known he wanted none of us to leave. He said he was getting older. He needed us. Until we were married it would be good for the family to work together. We needed one another. Then, for some reason, he threw the sack of sovereigns to the floor, causing a strange silence amongst us. While we were looking at it with surprise he said, 'That, my children, will always be there for you. I am keeping it for you all.'

We understood his message. 'Stay with me, and you will share in this.' There was also the other side of the message. 'Don't stay, and you won't share.'

This was not like Dadda, and I know Secundra didn't give it a second thought. Our mother seemed a trifle cynical, I thought, and I at least felt a little angry. It was quite out of character with Dadda. However, after a time we forgot the matter. I think Silas had an idea or two about the sack, but Natalia only giggled if it happened to be mentioned.

One day Secundra had an earnest talk with Dadda. He said farming was definitely not for him. He thought he would like to join the army. Dadda was quiet at first, and then slowly he became angry. For some days he said nothing, but finally expressed himself. 'I bought this farm for you all,' he said. 'What of that, eh? Will you now leave us?' Before Secundra could say anything he added, 'And what of the sack and its gold sovereigns?' he asked.

Secundra looked Dadda in the eyes and said slowly, 'Dadda, sovereigns mean nothing to me. Money means nothing. Somehow I have to live, and I think the army is where I will be best.'

Dadda was stunned. Also I could see he was angry. I was not sure whether he was angry at Secundra's indifference to the gold, or to staying on the farm. For some days he walked about in a silent mood, but finally he let Secundra

go. The parting was a subdued one, but Dadda had no anger. He was simply thoughtful. After our brother left, he gave us a long talk about loyalty to the family, staying with our parents, but he did not mention the gold.

One day he canoe to me. 'Francis,' he said secretively, 'I am telling only you where the gold is hidden.'

'Yes, Dadda,' I said obediently. Then he took me to the round-house, and showed me under the wood beam and slats of the barn floor where he had hidden the bag. I wondered why he had told only me. By a strange turn of events, in other conversation, I found he had also told Silas and Natalia. They were likewise informed that they alone knew. I thought Dadda must have been getting some more amnesia, for I never suspected him of duplicity.

I apologise for seeming to draw out this story, but the details are important. Also they serve to show why I am at this very moment very, very restless. As I said, money means little to me, but then gold seems to be different, especially at the current high prices for it on the world market. I will hasten then to relieve your curiosity by bringing the story to a close, as quickly as possible.

To be brief, Secundra joined the army. 'After some time he received his commission, and we were proud of him when he came home. Dadda drew him aside on one occasion to talk privately. Secundra told me that Dadda had promised him a share in the doubloons. He even took him and showed him where they were buried. This time Secundra was shown an empty silo pit which was about twelve feet deep. There was freshly disturbed earth at the northern end of the pit. Dadda told him that even if the pit was filled with ensilage that Secundra, as the oldest brother, was to uncover the treasure on his—Dadda's—death. Secundra, not having much time for gold, simply shook his head when he told me. I told him about the round-house, and he shook his head again.

When war came, our sister joined the WRANS. Secundra was in the first batch of infantrymen to go to the Middle East. Skillon and Silas also joined an infantry unit, and they went to Malaya. I followed them as a reinforcement, much to their amusement. Dadda and Mumma remained to work the farm. They had some help from migrant youths who soon learned the skills of milking, feeding pigs, and growing green crops. In this new situation Dadda came to life. He and Mumma found great purpose in making the farm yield produce for the war effort.

There I should leave the story, for with Dadda's sudden rehabilitation all point in mentioning the sack of sovereigns is lost. Doubtless Dadda had tried to use it as a lever to keep us with him, but then a war had first defeated him, and then liberated him, and one ought to be grateful for that.

Often, during the war, especially when the three of us were incarcerated in the Japanese prison camp at Changi, we would think or talk about Dadda's sack. It was, of course, the family joke. We wondered whether Dadda might be patriotic enough to surrender it up for the war effort, seeing his farm was financially stable. Also, as we knew, Dadda and Mumma were benefiting financially from the war.

I remember one night talking to Skillon and Silas about the sack. 'Did you ever see the sovereigns?' I asked. They both shook their heads, and we laughed together. 'Seems no one has actually seen the coins,' I said.

Skillon nodded, then said, 'But Secundra saw them in the strong-room. He said, "Dadda had plenty of gold coins in that old room." We laughed again, but there was an uneasy thought in my head, and it would never go away.

By some wonderful stroke of luck the three of us returned from those dreadful days. Our little sister was grown by this time, and married. Secundra was also married. When we berthed they were there to meet us, and Dadda and Mumma

were also there, looking quite old and frail but very happy. We embraced and cried and wept and laughed, and after the little bit of red tape was tied, we were free to go to the farm. Secundra drove us all there, as Dadda had given up driving.

It was a wonderful evening. Mumma had prepared a great feast, much of which we could not eat. We all had great joy. We poured out our strange tales until Dadda and Mumma called a halt. 'More tomorrow,' they said. 'Tonight we give thanks that our whole family is back at home.'

I looked at Dadda to see whether he was expecting us to remain at home, but no, that was not the case. He somehow knew Secundra, Skillon, Silas and Natalia were not for the land. However his eye was on me, and me alone. I sensed that, but also knew he would not try to force my hand.

The next day he took me for a stroll, and proudly showed the huge dam he had caused to be made. He showed me the dairy shed with the latest milking machines, and special arrangements for keeping the cattle moving into, and then out of, the bails. When he had showed me all things he said gently, 'Would you think of coming back to the farm, Francis, and working it for yourself?'

I flushed at his generosity. I knew Secundra would not mind. Probably none of the others, either; but there was a misgiving. I could not quite crystallise it. Then I knew it would not work. I shook my head slowly. 'No, Dadda,' I said gently. 'I think I will apply for a Soldier Settlement block. Somehow I think I had better try myself out on a new venture.'

'Francis,' he said, 'if anything should ever happen to me, you help your Mumma.' He looked directly at me. 'You remember what I told you before the war. Well, if ever Mumma needs anything, it will be there.'

We walked back to the house in silence. As we neared the house he said, 'If Mumma and I go together,' he said, 'it will be there for you. Do what you will with it.'

I wasn't too sure, at that point, whether he meant the farm would be there, or whether he was indicating the sack of sovereigns. I was tempted to ask him, but felt it better not to enquire. When I was going he took me aside, and said with a curious grin, 'I have heard a saying about "Dadda's Doubloons." He looked at me mischievously and asked, 'Do you know about that sack of doubloons?'

I laughed with him, gave him a hug, and said I would be off to the Rehabilitation Centre, making application for my returned soldier's farming block. He squeezed my arm and chuckled. 'I liked it,' he said, 'when I heard it.' He gave another chuckle, ' "Dadda's Doubloons," indeed!'

It was a shock to us all when Dadda suddenly died. We received telegrams and came at once. Mumma was tearful but brave. 'Dadda had much pain in these later years,' she told us

The funeral was quiet, but grand. I could write a story just on it, if we had time. When we came back from the funeral, Dadda's solicitor read the will which told us that all Dadda's estate was for Mumma whilst she lived. After her death it would go to the children in equal portions. We nodded at that.

By this time Skillon and Silas had married. I was hoping for something like that too, but had not met the person who levelled with my ideals, so I was waiting. I stayed with Mumma for some time whilst she was recovering. Of all the family I was the one who could spare the time.

One day, out of curiosity I said to tier, 'Mumma, did Dadda ever sell his sack of golden coins?'

She looked at me, squarely. Then she gave a throaty laugh. 'What coins?' she asked.

'His golden sovereigns,' I said.

She snorted. 'He never had any,' she said.

'Mumma,' I said, 'what was he always burying when we lived in the suburbs?'

She shook her head. 'Blessed if I know,' she said. 'He said they were his gold coins, but I doubt it.'

I was stunned. 'He never showed them to you?' I asked. 'Never,' she said.

'After that amnesia,' I said, 'did he find his sack again?' She shook her head again. 'Not that I know,' she said. Then she sighed. 'What a dreadful time that was. He hardly ever slept, or if he did then he would walk in his sleep.' She snorted and then said, in a voice that sounded like that of her son, Secundra, 'Fat lot of good that old sack did him! I'm glad he never found it again.'

I could scarcely believe my ears. 'But Dadda had it when we left to come to the farm,' I said. 'We all saw it.'

'You all thought you did,' she said. 'There weren't any gold coins in that sack, I can tell you.'

'How do you know?' I asked, brimming with curiosity. She just tossed her head. 'I know,' she said. 'I just know he didn't have gold coins.' She turned to me. 'That Dadda was a scamp,' she said, and she had a fine grin on her wrinkled face. It reminded me again of Secundra. 'He made out there were gold coins,' she said, 'although he never actually said so.' She gave a chuckle. 'Wanted to keep you all home, he did,' she said. 'He thought you would stay if you knew there was gold.'

She rattled a couple of saucers together in the sink. 'None of you ever was much concerned about money,' she said. 'But that came from my side. Your Dadda was a cute one all right, except of course for that there sack he never found.'

She went off into gentle subterranean chuckles. 'Oh, he was a one, that Dadda,' she said, and wiped her hand across her face, brushing back a wet line of hair.

'Mumma,' I said, 'if there wasn't gold in the sack, what was in it?'

Her eyes shone. 'Maybe,' she said, 'there were metal washers or something like that.' After that she chuckled for a long time.

I went for a walk. I was a bit stunned at the revelations. Part of me wanted to believe Mumma, whilst the other part didn't greatly care. I thought I would look silly if I went to the round-house and dug up where Dadda had once told me the sack was buried. Then again, if I went to the silo I would have to take out tons of ensilage, for it was packed full. Mumma would really laugh at that. She would laugh at the whole operation.

You can understand, of course, my great restlessness in these days when the price of gold is so high. As a matter of fact, after Mumma died we sold the farm, and before we did I was greatly tempted to do a little digging, but then I was ashamed to talk to Secundra about it. Skillon, had he been there, would have understood. He would have pitched out the whole of the ensilage. We would have soon found out what was really what. With Secundra alone as the executor, I had no encouragement to dig.

It is Mumma's chuckle which disturbs me when I hear of the accelerating price of gold. How could she be so sure Dadda did not recover the gold? Did she, in fact, discover it? Did Mumma do something with it in those Depression years? This last thought has sometimes haunted me.

I tell you the matter swirls around and around in my mind. It is as though I will never be finished with it. What is more, I have calculated the weight of that bag to the number of pounds it must have weighed. At the price of gold per ounce today on the world market it would represent an enormous fortune.

This other thing I will tell you before I close the story. I went back to our posh suburb. When I came to our old home I was amazed. I had decided that with the price of gold being what it was, I would buy the house and risk

whether the gold was there or not. I could not lose. Imagine my surprise, indeed shock, when I saw it had two high-rise sets of home units upon it. Buy it? Why, I guess they would be worth almost the amount the gold would fetch. You just can't pull down high-rise units with a view to seeing whether that gold is still there. You just can't do that. Also you can't buy back a whole farm, especially when you know the farm itself has been sold for building lots and the lots are built upon, so that you would never discover an old ensilage pit, or the location of an old round-house. Even were you to discover the site, you would probably find a house built right over it. These days they even build over silo pits.

I tell you it is not a simple thing to bear. You wish either that the price of gold would fall, or that somehow you could exorcise from your memory the gleeful chuckle that Mumma uttered the day I talked to her about Dadda's doubloons. I can still hear Mumma's snorts, and what is even more painful, the sly look Dadda gave me when I refused the farm.

I can feel his hand squeezing my arm and hear his chuckle as he said, 'I liked it when I heard it.' Then his second chuckle, ' "Dadda's doubloons", indeed!'

## *Man Abed!*

**H**E must have been a tot. Maybe six years: no more. The memorial near the station, on the edge of the green park, had always fascinated him. Perhaps 'intrigued' would be a better word. There it was, with its tall obelisk made out of granite, green granite, shiny and solid. And very, very silent.

At the base there were steps, wide steps where they laid the wreaths 'each year. He had seen them do it once already. A solemn time it was, to be sure. He knew it must be solemn because the clergy were there in their white and black robes, which always lifted a bit in the breeze. There also were men in uniform, some with many medals. The most solemn part was the bugling. The bugler produced the quivering notes which evoked a deep sweet sorrow in him—the kid of six. He could hear it quaver across the park, and the tall poplars seemed to shiver in their leaves.

When they had gone was the saddest-moment of all for the boy. For another year the place would be bare and lonely. Only he and some of his curious friends would visit it. They never touched the dried wreaths of leaves and flowers, but they peered down the four gratings.

'Can't see anything,' they would say repeatedly, one to

another. 'Can't hear anything either.' Sometimes when they were not with him, he would creep up to the gratings and listen. Maybe one of the soldiers down there might still be alive. He knew this was nonsense, but he wanted to cry out to them and say, 'Hey! What happened? Tell me what happened.'

In later years he was ashamed of his naivete. He never told another person that he had thought the dead soldiers had been buried under the memorial. If he had known they weren't buried there, he would have been puzzled. Why have a memorial if no one was there? It would have made the whole thing seem empty to him. Now, looking back, he realised how indelibly the matter of soldiers had been imprinted upon him. It all had to do with that obelisk, that green granite memorial.

The nursing sister looked down at him. It seemed his head had sunk into his chest. Both were the one. Something stirred in her. He looked so immobile, and there was something about the set of his head and shoulders which made her admire him. Then she resumed her simple no-nonsense line of thinking.

'Mister Bremen,' she said, 'it's time for your medicine.' Her voice was a bit sharp. When he didn't stir, she came across to the side of the bed. 'Medicine,' she said curtly.

It was then he looked up, and she saw something of the imp in his eyes. 'Put it down here,' he said, pointing to the bedside locker.

She deftly measured out the pills, pouring them into a small plastic container. 'With water,' she said. They both knew the tablets had to be taken with water.

She noticed how fine was the face, wrinkled as it was like old leather and as darkly tanned. 'See you do,' she said abruptly, and left him. Something about him always stirred

her. It also left her uneasy.

He watched her go, looking upward at her through his long eyebrows. He had never put scissors to his eyebrows. He had always thought that a bit effeminate, yet he shaved his face daily.

The man opposite him was staring down at him, face crinkled with curiosity. Their beds faced each other. 'Very strange,' said the patient, 'that we should be like kids to these sisters. We're old enough to be their fathers.'

He nodded faintly. He was not one for conversation. He got up from the bed, put on his dressing gown and slippers, and shuffled off to the bathroom. The other man looked after him. 'Must be from the First World War,' he muttered. Ossie Bremen heard his mutter and grinned. He knew he had only been in one world war, but it didn't much matter. Wasn't worth talking about. He knew his disease had made him look like an old man long before his time. In no way did he mind that. He swallowed the pills in the bathroom, his palm opened under the tap, stooping to drink the water..

Back in bed, he let his eyes drop. Didn't want to talk to the other fellow. He guessed the man was about his own age.

He had always thought moonlight to be very beautiful. Out on his property, that is out on 'Billaway,' he had always loved to ride in the moonlight. Sometimes Marie went with him—at least until the children began coming. Only occasionally would she go with him after the babies were born. Even so, she too had loved the moonlight. It was when he got into bed that he couldn't handle moonlight. He would pull down the blind to get its light off his face. Now, lying in the bed, eyes closed, he realised why that had been. It had been old Anzac Smith's stories about Flanders and the

moonlight. He had never forgotten those stories.

'On moonlight nights,' Smithy had said, 'some of the returned soldiers go lunatic. They just go mad.'

The kids at the country primary school had asked 'Why?' and Smithy had told them. Smithy wrote for the *Bulletin*, the Sydney journal, the same one as Henry Lawson and Hugh Macrae had written for. The Lindsays, too, contributed their pan to it. Smithy was a fascinating storyteller. Doubtless he embellished a bit. In fact he must have exaggerated quite a bit.

The kids had watched his staring eyes. 'On moonlight nights they would go looney,' he would tell them, 'because full moon is the time for that.' At this point he would shake his head in sorrow. 'The returned men would see their mates, all getting up out of their graves and walking about a bit, or they would see them dead, eyes staring, legs and arms maybe sticking up in the air, but no noise, no noise at all.' At this point Smithy would shake his head as though no noise was remarkable. Then he would tell them of the barrages and the Vickers machine-guns, and all the noises that could happen and the Veray lights that would burst brilliantly, especially on non-moonlit nights.

It was the moonlight that scared Bremen, young Ossie Bremen. He was scared of what he might see, so he kept his eyes tightly closed. Even later, in the war, he liked moonlight, but not when it came to sleeping in it. He would put his slouch hat over his face, or pull up a blanket, if he had one.

It was curious now to remember how he had skirted the memorial obelisk on moonlight nights. He was sure the dead soldiers would emerge from it, even in spite of the grating. He kept remembering the staring eyes on the muddy fields of Flanders. He also remembered the red poppies. They contrasted so much with the pale corpses scattered about in different positions.

He was no longer in a dream. He heard someone striding down the ward. He knew in a moment that the man was an extrovert. He kept shouting. Ossie opened his eyes a trifle, but not wide enough for the man opposite to catch him into a conversation.

'Call this a hospital!' the man was shouting. 'My foot it is a hospital! Thirty years ago I was here and I vowed I'd never come back. Well I have, eh? So that's that. I'm back again.' He stared grimly around the ward. 'This time no sister's going to get on my knocker.' He laughed coarsely. 'Oh, no!' he said in a definite voice. 'This time it's going to be treatment, and me getting well quick and back to Lois and the family.'

No one cared to debate with him. The sisters, the young nurses and the aides all seemed busy with other things. Everyone knew that everyone had heard, but no one was saying anything.

That seemed to enrage the newly admitted patient. He rushed over to the windows that once had opened out on to the verandah. In those days—just after the war—the verandahs had been stacked with beds and patients. Now they served as a sort of walkway. 'Just as I thought!' he shouted. 'Nothing has changed. I stuck that paper there to stop the windows rattling. It's still there.'

Those in the wards listened now. They thought that was rather curious, paper being there for thirty years or so, stopping the windows rattling. After that the man shut up, and went off to change into pyjamas. The man who seemed so old went back to his meditation. He was watching the kid of six evading the old country park and its soldiers' memorial. After a time he slept. When they wakened him for the evening meal—so early in the evening—he opened his eyes but kept them on the food. The man opposite him was really curious, bursting to ask questions.

After the tea he closed his eyes. He was curious to see

what would shoot up in his memory, and fairly soon it was

Uncle Jack and Uncle Frank. They were there with their secret looks in their eyes. He knew they had a secret which he could not understand. They had been in Flanders and that sort of place, and like Smithy they had come home. His own Mum thought very highly of them, although she was always mystified how they could be her own brothers and she not know them. It was on the annual Anzac Day and an occasional Armistice Day that they all got together, and then they were very alive. Nothing strange about them on those days. However, if ever the family got together for Christmas, then they would eat and drink for awhile and then opt out, walking all around Grandpa's special croquet lawn and talking special language no doubt.

The lives of the two uncles had done something for him. Set a pattern, no doubt. Later he could see that was why he himself had joined the army—when war broke out, of course. They had never been in the Regular Army and didn't seem to have much time for it. They had more time for other things, like heavy drinking, and not marrying but getting around with what they called 'the sheilas.' By that time, Ossie's Dad—who had not gone to the war for certain good reasons—had taken them—the children—down into the city. The whole family was now in the city to have good education. The uncles seemed a bit foreign to the rest of the family, yet without doubt they were greatly admired. Only old Grandma was worried about them. It must have had something to do with what she was always calling 'morals.' Certainly their drinking worried her. After a time Grandpa came up with some money, and they went on the land. Uncle Frank married, but not Uncle Jack. Even so, he seemed to like sheep-farming. Later he went in for raising fat-stock cattle.

The medals had stirred Ossie. Even at the age of six he had wanted to know all about them, and they had joked

with him. Maybe they liked to see his serious face lighten, because they joked a lot and made up stories about the action which happened first at Gallipoli and then in France. Sometimes they stopped joking and their eyes looked quite sad. It was that sadness which stirred him. It left a lasting impression on him.

The sister was back again. 'We want your weight, Mister Bremen,' she said. 'We need to check it out.'

He made his way to the duty room and stood on the scales. One of the sisters made a joke about his weight. 'You could box flyweight,' she said. He thought about that, and decided not to tell her that once he had boxed heavyweight. In the army that was. He could handle the gloves a bit in those days. That was before the disease came; long before the disease came. He looked at the small nurse and thought that she lacked a sense of human dignity.

When he lay down, he had a negative bout of thinking. Marie had told him not to go down to the Repatriation Hospital. She was a genial person, but on this occasion she sniffed. 'They call it the Veterans' Hospital now,' she said. She shook her head. 'Nearly lost you once, there. Now you want to go back again. Suicide is what I call it.' Her eye was gentle on Ossie. 'You can afford to go into the best hospital in the land,' she said. 'You can pay for the best treatment too.'

It was just that he had two things in mind. One was that he would go back into an army atmosphere, and the other—well, he kept that one from Marie. He didn't tell that to anyone. That was his own personal business. It was that which made him proof against the hospital staff. For the most part they were uneasy with him. He was proof against the things which made some of the older patients angry. He could pick out the battle-axe sisters easily. In wartime they had been great. Now, in many ways, they were shells. They could only be themselves in wartime. Maybe they had had a

break when the Vietnam fellows had come back, especially when they came with their wounds.

Marie had refused to come with him. She could have gone to the best hotels, or stayed with relatives, or even taken off time in a comfortable motel. No way! Marie was not going to that hospital; not in any way. He knew she was no snob, but she was angry about him going back into that old hole. He grinned. He had his own reasonings and his own likings. At the same time he had no illusions.

After leaving school, he had become a jackaroo. By the time war broke out, he was beyond jackarooing. He was part of the 'Billaway' staff. Old Corrigan would have no one working for him who wasn't an expert. They had to know stock. They had to understand feeding. They had to be hard, too—tough with the stock, and tough with men. Corrigan knew he was training them whilst he was paying them. One day they could launch out on their own, but by that time they would understand good horse flesh, and horse breeding. They would know good purebred cattle, how to look after it, and how to show it. The same went for sheep, especially for merinos and cross-breds for lambs and good wool. You just had to be tough to be with Corrigan, but it wasn't that which made Ossie join up. It was something to do with an obelisk near a park, the quavering notes of 'The Last Post,' and the Anzac Day marches, medals dangling from his uncles' khaki tunics. Maybe you could call it a cult, but if it was, then, so what? He had scarcely looked back at 'Billaway.' It seemed suddenly that life had come to life. He was going to find himself in the mystique of war.

Not even the crude days of rookie training shook him out of that. He had joined the foot-sloggers, and sat with them for hour after hour in the Training Depot, doing nothing! This was supposed to be part of the training, learning

patience. He learned things other than patience. He learned the use of weapons: .303 rifle, and bayonet, machine-guns of old and new vintage—Brens, Tommy-guns and others—mortars and hand grenades, and a bit of Morse, helio, and Semaphore. He liked the bivouacs. The only thing he found difficult was authority—NCOs and officers. Even there he coped. It wasn't all that much time and he was off to the Middle East. They suggested he might like to be a corporal, but he knocked that back with a grin. He was biding his time. He wanted experience. He wanted to be competent. One day he would lead; until then he was content to be led. At least they thought they were leading him.

A new sister had come on. She was young, but gentle. Also she had a certain view of nursing that was different from that of the older sisters. She came on for the night shift. She sat beside him, knowing he did not like to look up. She asked whether he was comfortable for the night. He knew she was asking whether he wanted sleeping tablets.

'If I have any pain I will ask,' he said, 'otherwise it doesn't worry me if I don't sleep.'

'You know what your trouble is?' she asked him. Very gently, he thought. She was much more gentle than Marie, and Marie could be very, very gentle. Those memories, in fact all memories of Made, were good, but now he was not remembering Marie. He was interested in the sister.

'Sure, I know what is wrong,' he said, 'and I know it could be curtains any moment.'

He was amazed at the softness of her eyes. He thought, 'She is a rare gentle person.' He knew Made was gentle underneath, but on the surface she was brittle enough. She knew too about the sickness, but rarely referred to it. They were not—both of them—stoics, but for that matter they were not sentimental. Going out to get 'Billaway' had not

made them soft. You had to have some hide to try to get a place like that.

She sat with him for a moment, and he realised she was a person of great sympathy. He liked that, but was alert in himself. He could not afford to let self-pity awake. He had had more than he needed of that at the time when he had been wounded. It wasn't in the Middle East that time. He had been out of Tobruk before the wounding had come. It had come to him in New Guinea. He often wondered whether being wounded was worth it, worth the decoration that followed, even if it was the highest a soldier could obtain. They told him later that the stomach and intestinal wound had laid him open to the sickness which had eventually come to him. Even now it seemed strange to him. Going back to Queensland and taking the young bride with him had not affected him. The years of struggle and work on the soldier settlement had never unmasked the weakness. They had been hard years but had ended in his marvellous purchase of 'Billaway.' It had been many years later when Dunkin his local G.P. had sent him down south, and they had passed him on to the repatriation hospital. He remembered the grave face of the specialist and his dismal prognosis. 'You haven't got long, Bremen,' he had said. 'You're only hanging on because you want to, anyway.'

That had been true. It had been true when he had gone back into action six months after the event.

The gentle nurse had held his hand for a moment or two and then gone, after giving her soft smile. The patient opposite was determined to communicate. 'Still got yer eye in for a good-looker, mate,' he was saying. Ossie refused to react, or even respond. He closed his eyes. The other man was angered. He began talking rapidly to the man on the left of him. Ossie could hear his protest. Protests had long ago ceased to figure with him, and he soon drifted off.

The man opposite did not see the face smooth out, almost

losing its wrinkles. The veteran was dreaming, although not asleep. He was seeing the days past in the glory of a vision. He kept asking himself, 'Why did I join up? Why did we all join up?' That was funny, really, because he could remember in the desert, and later when it seemed the Japs had them hemmed in off the Java coast, the men who groaned, 'Why did we join up?' On the Kokoda trail they had asked the question. They asked it when they went for hours in rain, dragging one foot out of the mud and putting the other in; fighting the mosquitoes day and night, moving along in the dark, and never sure when the Japs would silently move out of the jungle. In it all he was never uncertain. That was where he ought to be.

It was not that he had not seen the horrors of war. He remembered the first time in action, in the desert. That was when his best friend got it. Clem had had his face blown off. Strangely enough, Ossie had not reacted with anger. It was true that he wept a bit for Clem, but somehow he knew that was how it had to be. Curious, that—knowing that things that happen are as they will be; nothing will change that. Somewhere behind it all was a plan. It was curious, yet it was also sane.

In the morning the old sister—the battle-axe—came on duty. She was getting past her prime. He had thought the race she belonged to would soon have died out, but was mildly shocked to find one morning a younger sister who outdid the battle-axe. He concluded she was plain bitter, and had mixed her bitterness with cynicism and power hunger; a frightening combination. He could hear her moving around the ward. She was cruel to the little probationers. She confused even the trained sisters. And she was goaded to fury by Ossie's quietness.

She rarely addressed Ossie in the days of her shifts, but

she talked to the other sisters, the nurses and even Ossie if she was unable to take his silence.

'Just an old lag,' she would say, 'like most of them here. Get what they can. Try to increase their entitlement. Look at him. Says he's sick but he looks pretty good to me.'

One of the sisters entered a protest on one occasion. 'Have you read his file, Sister?' she asked. 'Seems to me that he's quite ill.'

'It's those GPs,' the ward sister snorted. 'They work together with these old lags.'

When she had gone on this occasion, the patient opposite sought conversation. He swore about the sister. 'Old bitch,' he grumbled, 'puts us all in that class. I wonder why we come here?'

Ossie did not respond. His mind was off on the old question. He wasn't wondering why he was there. He was wondering why these things did not affect him. Maybe he was just callous. Marie often told him he was, but then later she would take it back. 'You just know how to handle life,' she would tell him. 'I've never seen anyone like you.'

She had loved 'Billaway,' and the success they had achieved in getting it. Strangely enough, he had not thought of it as success. In the army days he had not thought of it as a success when recommended for a commission; not even when they had made him a Major. It never seemed to touch him. The local R.S.L. Club had turned it on when he had come back to 'Billaway' to take up a job until he was able to ballot for a settlement block. Later, when he had bred the State Champion Hereford Bull, he was not greatly moved. He had, however, enjoyed it all.

By the same token he had enjoyed his time in the repat. hospital those many years ago, on his return from New Guinea. That was when he met Marie, and he supposed that

was why he liked the hospital so much. So many of the men had married nurses who had cared for them. Those nurses had set their caps at the fellows, but not Marie. She moved among them quietly. Because he had never flirted she was intrigued, and he caught her in the midst of her puzzlement. He could think of those days with almost more pleasure than any other time in his life.

He could also think of the pleasure she had given when they had come to their new settlement block. For two years they had lived in an old hay-shed. He had set it up like a home, but it was pretty crude. The bank manager had been pleased and they had built their home.

He was really tired now and glad to be lying back. He opened his eyes slowly. The man opposite was listening to his radio. The man in the next bed was watching TV with earphones. There seemed to be a general and unusual silence in the ward. He felt his weakness and scarcely knew what to do about it.

The ward had begun to call her 'The Bitch.' In a way he felt for her, sensing her insecurity. It made him feel grateful for the security he had always known. His mind drifted, and he knew his rationality was going. The sickness was apparently moving up to his brain. Time was foreshortening itself. This did not really worry him. He wondered why Marie had not come down, but then he was glad. She would remember him as she had seen him at the last. They had both known this might be terminal. She had been sharp about his going into the hospital. She would have visited him. dally in one of the big hospitals north. Was it because she couldn't afford to break the old memories, their meeting at this very hospital? Was it her nurse's judgement of the post-war atmosphere of the place? He did not know.

The visitors began to arrive. They seemed to flow along

the walkways, turn into the wards, and set up a stream between the beds. Then they would be seated beside the patients, or remain standing, talking. Others would sit a bit on the beds, keeping an eye out for a grim sister. Some would weep over the men, especially where illness was severe. Others would be looking at the TV screens, relieved to have a distraction from visiting. There was a general rumble of noise. He closed his eyes again. The noise did not trouble him. He just wanted to think, meditate, dream. Reality was beginning to flow into unreality; the past was catching up to the present.

He heard the voice. 'It must be the gentle sister,' he thought. Even so he would keep his eyes closed. Then something stirred at the back of his mind. He peered through his lids. It was like old times, the times he had known in Marie's nursing days. A thought struck him and he opened his eyes widely. Good God! It was Marie!

He sat up. For a moment neither spoke. Then he said quietly, 'Thought you would never come.'

'So did I,' she said quietly. It was then the sister came striding down the ward, her white starched uniform rustling with every step. She did not just bustle. She bore down upon them like a battleship. Her first look at Marie sobered her. She picked this visitor out as a person of quality. So much so that she gave a little bow. But the quiet man she would not allow to escape.

'Have you had those tablets?' she demanded fiercely. He looked at her, saying nothing.

'Well, have you?' she asked, her voice rising. Marie was watching her. Then her eyes went to Ossie. She saw a glimmer of humour in them.

'They haven't brought the tablets yet,' he said quietly. There was a faint grin when he added, 'The other sister is in the next bay. The gentle one, I mean.'

Marie thought, 'She drinks. She is bloated. Something is

wrong.'

The sister said angrily, 'He's a lag, this man. I don't know why you visit him. He's like the rest of the old ones. He's in here for what he can get. Why, he doesn't even need the medicine.'

He saw the anger leap to Marie's eyes. He looked at her, and it died. She could easily have said, 'He's my husband. He's a VC He's a successful farmer. He has a station worth a million dollars,' but she said nothing.

He was thinking, 'She's a jewel, that Marie. She understands the woman.' He knew she would not vindicate him. She would just remain Marie, as calm about things as was he. It had not always been like that for Marie, and not even 'for himself. Slowly they had both come to it, each at his and her time. Now they knew that in the ultimate nothing was irrational. It only seemed so at its time of happening.

For some moments everything was blotted out, and then a fleeting film passed before his eyes. No one had to tell him that war was wrong, that it was frightening, horrific and evil. It was so wasteful. Nothing could rationalise it. Even in those early days, standing by the obelisk and peering down the grates, he had known it was wrong. How come then that there had been something magnificent in the midst of it? How had there been greatness as men seemed to pass from the blandness of civvy street into a realm where character was suddenly tested and then a man was seen clearly for what he was? Why did some emerge with greatness, and others were unmasked in their failure? Yet even in failure, some came to see the dimensions in which a man can live. Until now it had puzzled him. He and Marie had never thought of 'Billaway' and their possessions as anything noteworthy. They had been deeply moved as they watched their children battle out the matter of life, prior to marriage, then in marriage, and in the training of their own children. They had watched the pain the young ones had suffered whilst

they made up their minds about life and morality, and even spirituality. He had seen—with some amazement—the things Grandpa and Grandma had stood for, now filtering through to these children, maybe even via Marie and him.

The film passed quickly, and he felt very tired. He knew what this was all about. He heard the sister ranting at him, and he was proud of Marie for her gentleness.

‘Why don’t you get out of that bed?’ the sister was saying. ‘You are not as ill as you make out.’ When he said nothing she turned and saw the other sister coming with the small plastic container in which there were the tablets. The battleship of a sister was saying, ‘At least take your tablets.’

He was smiling at Marie. She took his hand and bent down over him. He felt her lips brushing his cheek, and then on his own. His sigh was almost unheard. He could hear the older sister urging him to get up and take his tablets.

He shook his head faintly. ‘No, I shan’t,’ he said, and there was no rebellion in his voice. ‘There is no point,’ he added. There was the smile that passed from him to Marie, and Marie to him. Then he closed his eyes. All he knew was that he was contented. This, he thought, is a good place, This is how I always wanted it.

Marie knew he was gone even before the sister. It was not only because she was a nurse. It was something a wife like Marie would know with a man like Ossie. She bent down and kissed him again. She smiled at the two sisters. ‘No point in trying to revive him,’ she said. The two sisters stared at her. ‘Yes,’ she said gently, ‘he’s dead.’

She turned and walked down the aisle between the rows of beds. She remembered there were always thirty-two beds. Those watching the TV or talking to the patients, or just hoping to get away before the bell rang, scarcely noticed her as she walked away.

The two sisters watched her, for they were still caught in their astonishment. She seemed so regal as she walked.

Something was breaking through to the gentle sister, a dimension she had not known before. It puzzled and excited her.

As for her co-worker—the older sister—she could feel the unaccustomed tears pricking her behind the eyelids.

## *The Raymond Connection*

**R**AYMOND came to me last night like a wraith. He hung there in the back of my mind like some kind of vision. His clothes were fairly tattered, and in a way he was like a tatty doll, but he was human all right, and real. Nothing more real than that happens to me.

I suppose I should have expected Raymond to come. These days I have been doing a bit of delving into the past, and memory is a strange thing—anyone will tell you that. So when Raymond appeared, suspended there against the background of my mind, I wasn't surprised. I took it as it happened, and was not dismayed. Dismay would have been the last thing for me, especially in the mood that I was living at that time.

One of the reasons I partly expected all this was that I had been reading James Clavell's *King Rat*, his brilliant account of Changi prisoner-of-war camp. Having been in that camp for some years, his story rang true and was pretty poignant, to say the least. After that—and as a kind of antidote—I was reading Ernest Gordon's *Miracle on the River Kwai*. I think you need to read both books, rather than one or the other.

So my whole being was in the mood I mentioned, but for

the life of me I can't describe that mood. It was something of sadness, and something of joy, with a lot of inner weeping and a modicum of laughing. Where I stood in it all was what mattered to me, but then it doesn't matter to others. Not a bit.

So I began to talk to Raymond, even before he began to talk to me, although his hanging there was itself a pretty vocal thing. You cannot see a man whom you may not have met before but who is the synthesis of all you saw and knew in your time of imprisonment, and his very presence not talk to you. I talked—there is no doubt about that—but then I wanted answers and I wanted conversation, and today there is no one around like Raymond, because he is both the past and the present. He may even have something of the future in him.

Some who were there in the past just won't talk in the present. Some of them who might have talked are now dead. Many of them who are still alive are too angry: they burn inside from some slow consuming fire, and the years have just about eaten them up. They've had to build up the outside so that it looks like some authentic exterior. They've had to make it look modern. It's always been modern in its own time—the 50s or the 60s, the 70s or the 80s—and maybe it will become so in the 90s. You know what I mean. It has changed with every decade, and in every decade. It is as though you learned nothing from that critical experience, and what you thought you had gained, you have lost. You just become like the age you are in, but in memory you just can't be that. Memory is a powerful thing. Try to kill or lose memory and you lose yourself. I repeat that so that you will remember it: lose memory and you lose yourself.

Ernest Gordon said something like that. He said that when the Japs had used cruelty and degraded the minds of men, they made them forget the past, and it was then that men forgot themselves. They were just blanks, or empty

holes, or existent nothings. When memory is killed—and who outside us can really kill it?—then you lose identity. I think you may understand this, but you can't if you have never killed your memory. Some are trying to do that and it is suicidal, and like most suicide is without great point.

So I wanted Raymond to talk, and talk he did. I cannot remember all he said. I'm not a good reporter. Every report I've ever given has been flavoured with my own thinking; it isn't objective reporting. But then, I say 'To the devil with objective reporting!' What are we here for but to see life, and we see and then tell about it. That's the job of every artist, every poet, composer and writer. So I listened to Raymond, and when he talked I kept absorbing it and ranging it up against my own mind and life and thought. It kept coming through that way, and it was gathering pace, and something within me was singing in high spirit, whilst something else was sobbing and sobbing. I'll tell you how.

A couple of years ago I went north in Australia to Darwin. I was on the track going towards Katherine. We stopped at the Adelaide River, and there was a notice saying, 'To THE WAR CEMETERY.' I went down a narrow road to where there was a grove. It was unusually beautiful, with high coconut palms, other palms and trees, and a lovely stretch of green lawn—quite something in that bit of the Territory. Then we went into the war cemetery. There was a plump girl in shorts who was sweeping away fallen tropical flowers, keeping everything neat. She seemed interested in the flowers on the asphalt. Maybe she was also interested in the graves: I don't know.

When I went in, I saw hundreds—maybe a thousand or more—tombstones. They were in good marble. They had crosses, except for one or two Jewish and Moslem insignia, the Star of David, and the Crescent. All these men had died in the war.

I looked at the stones, the translucent marble headstones,

and I read the names of the men who had died over forty years ago. Most of them were young. Here was I—over forty years later—hale and hearty and living life, and they were dead. They never grew up. They never had the chance to grow up. Some of them had been married, and their wives had had their feelings and wishes inscribed on the headstone of their particular husband. Some of the sayings were sweet, and some sad, and I had no way of knowing how sincere or how insincere were these inscriptions, and how many of those wives had since remarried.

In those moments, I remembered young men—mere boys—I had seen killed or who had died in POW camps, and suddenly I began to weep. I was with people, so I did not weep outside, but inside a whole stream of tears was flowing, and I was crying for the young men and the sincere wives, and their little children. I just kept weeping, and yet all the time I knew there was something wistfully wonderful about it.

When Raymond came, it was something like that. He was clad, of course, in his unkempt prison garments. I mean, service khaki which has worn down with the years, until it seemed natural, and he, hanging there at the back of my mind, was clearly seen and understood, and he had a touch of quiet joy at being received, at being one with me. It was as though he had been searching out a like mind.

Not that I had ever met Raymond, at least not that I could remember. I have to say that, but then in another way I had met him, for he was a composite of all I had known in past days, even though he was himself, and probably a person in his own rights. I just do not know. He was real enough as I stared at him, and as he looked back at me.

I just want to refer again to this thing called 'memory.' Our minds are both strange and wonderful. They store every

bit of data they receive, both seen and known from outside our person, or felt, imagined, and thought about within our person. Associations are always there, strong as the day the events happened and the associations began to cluster around their objects. When we let memories meet, there is a curious communication as we expose mind to mind, person to person.

This is what happened. It wasn't just telepathy, which after all is simply a name we give to mental communication. It was more than that. I've always held the view that any two people can have immediate and full communication—if they want it! Some like it for a while but then get scared and draw back, or cut off when they feel they are being exploited. With Raymond and me there was none of this. It was as though we were looking away from ourselves to others, and to a mass of incidents and accumulated information which we felt could help each other to sort out our thinking, as though conclusions about all these things really mattered. Oh, they mattered all right. Down through the years I've known they mattered. It was just that I had needed help to sort them out.

You see, you just can't talk to anyone.' Some have self-justification as their driving force in life. They want never to have been wrong. Now how can you discuss anything— especially about a common past—if others have always had to read it the self-justifying way? They never could afford to make mistakes, but then why? Self-justification did not begin in their POW days. It must have started before that. Maybe prison conditions intensified it, but they never initiated it. When then did it begin? I think it must have come with their mother's milk, even if it were not actually in the milk. I mean, every man shapes his own destiny.

Raymond was a wonderful man, a quiet man, and a patient man. He was not on to prove anything, and he seemed too tired to waste time and breath on romantic,

sentimental or patriotic ways of thinking. Nor was he merely a stark realist. Certainly he was not cynical. Like me, he wanted to get behind things and happenings and know what they were all about. That was why we could converse so simply. As I said, I am not quite sure whether we actually and audibly verbalised our questions and our thinking, but I know it was as though we did; as though we surely did.

And what was that discussion, that meditation, that beautiful, sad and wonderful communication? It was about us. If Raymond had not said anything, then Clavell's and Gordon's writing would have been enough, for both came at the same thing from different vantage points, and maybe Raymond was just Clavell and Gordon come together in my mind. Maybe not. There was something about Raymond which was more gentle and understanding than even those other two brilliant writers, but I have to confess I just don't know.

Let me tell you that for years I have had to talk to myself about many of these things. There really hasn't been anyone else to talk about the things I needed to understand. When I meet someone who was in one or other of the camps, I soon gather that he has worked things out his way, just as I worked them out my way. So we either cut off from each other, or we clash, or one or other will not speak. Some men just have painful memories: as I said before, fires of bitterness are burning within them, or fires of anger, or both. They cannot read their years of suffering aright, and I for one have no criticism of them; only pity, and pity that is without patronage. I guess, in my heart, I have been just as dogmatic in my conclusions about those years as they are.

Not that I have not met humble men, and gentle men, men who have forgiven the Japanese and men who have sought the forgiveness of God. I have, plenty of them, but even so I have wanted them to say more, to go beyond forgiveness and vocalise love. It has been like standing in that

cemetery and weeping for lost years, when in fact no years are lost years when they are spent on this earth or beyond it, in eternity.

Now I come to what Raymond and I discussed, but I have to warn you that you may not understand. This is not because we two are brilliant, or your mind dull. It is because you must have had something similar happen in your life before you can have affinity with us. Suffering is the key: suffering is the true connection.

Clavell's *King Rat* I saw many years ago as a film. It was an excellent film, but having seen it I felt no inclination to read the book. I am sorry I didn't. In the film the main character who is 'The King' was portrayed as a self-saving, self-seeking person. He was all of that, but the book shows he was not only that. It also helps us to understand why he was interested only in Number One—himself! Even so, he did some fine things, but then you could not be sure that in the ultimate they were not acts of enlightened self-interest and that one day they would bring him dividends.

Ernest Gordon in his book goes much further in describing the utter degradation of the prisoners. It is true that he shows this demeaning of the human spirit was a deliberate measure of the Nipponese guards, and that that did not excuse the depravity of the men. I can remember saying to myself, 'If I don't write this down I will never believe how low human beings can sink. I must write it down for later memory.' And so I did, but then later I burned the writings I brought out of the camp, so that I would not keep reminding myself. I had not counted on memory. It is all stored there in our memory data-banks, and will never go away.

Neither Raymond nor I want it to go away. That was why we talked. We wanted to understand *why* it all happened. *That* it had happened we well knew, and *how* it happened

we also knew. There is no point in going endlessly over this kind of thinking as though incessant thinking will bring some explanation. Raymond and I talked so that we might set to rest our minds and hearts on the matter of *man*. Raymond and I are men. You and I are men, and I mean *men*, even if we are women.

'At first,' said Raymond, 'I could not believe what I saw. When I saw men cheating, men getting angry and bitter, men dying because they were too crushed to live, and men living because they were too scared to die, then that made me angry and depressed. I felt sick at heart. I wanted to vomit. I wanted to opt out of the human race.'

'When I saw that,' I said, 'I was miserable, but then I had a theology of man. It was stern theology. It told me all men are, at heart, depraved. I thought I believed that, but depravity in the concrete is vastly different from depravity in the abstract. I kept thinking that men couldn't really be like that, and then it was only some who were. Somehow they were the ultimately unregenerate: they were the lost ones. Then I saw that wasn't good enough. I saw those whose theology was the same as mine, and they failed too. They were even worse for failing. So I was bereft.'

'I kept trying not to be like that, like them,' said Raymond. 'It was difficult but I stuck it. When I heard about soldiers trying to get away on ships from the Japs, and herding back women and children on to the wharves so that they could find a place on the ships, that horrified me.'

'When I heard some had raided the hospital rations and drugs, and some of them were officers,' I said, 'I felt the good world had ended.'

'I used always to think it was a fair enough world,' said Raymond. I thought I saw him shiver, and look cold and thin and

lonely, but that may have been my own inner impression. Raymond, when he spoke to me, was a richly mature person. Perhaps he was momentarily living his past experience. Then I remembered how I used to be swamped with loneliness. I kept thinking, in those days, 'There mightn't be one in all the world who is really trustworthy. Not even your closest friend, your parents or your wife.' I kept thinking what a frightening world it would be—'Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost.' 'Blow you Jack, I'm all right.' I shuddered at the memory, and I knew what Raymond might have been thinking.

'I was always an idealist,' I said. 'I expected—in spite of my theology—that man would turn up trumps. I had been reared on men like Kipling and Studdart Kennedy. In them, man always rises to the occasion.'

We cleared those things with each other. 'One day,' I said, 'they brought a Dutchman into our camp. They put him into the mental ward of the hospital. I would hear him day and night—especially at night—crying pitifully that he hadn't wanted to betray his mates, but he had. Under cruel Kempei Tei torture he had done that. The secret police had, wormed the matter out of him. Now—forever—that would be on his mind. He had gone mad.'

'So scrupulous,' Raymond murmured. 'So scrupulous are some of us.'

'Underneath it all,' I said, 'we are all scrupulous. That is where I made my biggest mistake of judgement. I thought some men were only evil: were evil only. So few there were that showed no evil.'

Raymond, quiet and hanging at the back of my mind— wraith of a body in khaki tatters—nodded. 'My greatest mistake,' he said, 'was that I used to think we differed from person to person. I have found that underneath all, we are all scrupulous. It is just that we cannot keep to our standards, our ideals, and our knowledge of the truth that worries

US.'

'Otherwise the Japs would have had no power.'

'No power,' Raymond agreed gently, 'no power at all.' He penetrated my spirit and we both met. 'Men do not give up unless they feel they have failed. They do not become like ravening animals unless they are disappointed in themselves. It is at this point that evil can destroy them, or make them destroy themselves.'

'The madman in that prison—the one who betrayed his mates—was witnessing to his scrupulosity,' I said. 'In his crazed state he was saying, "I have failed. I have failed myself as a person, but I cannot accept this: I must go mad in my mind to evade the reality. I, a man—the highest creature upon the earth—have failed." Maybe all crazed people come to the matter like that.'

'We all failed,' Raymond said simply, 'but we just failed in different ways. Some went straight to self-saving, but then they had always been that way. Others pretended they didn't, but they still did it by stealth. Others suddenly realised they daren't die, and so they clung to life even through cruelty to others.'

I was suddenly remembering the cruelty of 'The King' who fried eggs until the torture of their smell, their desirable fragrance, almost drove the starved men to despair. I remembered Gordon's graphic picture of the rush to the offal-cans of the Japanese guards, and how the guards relished the sight of white men, scabbling creatures who fought like pariah-dogs for the offal slops. I thought about the Japs too, how they *had* to have the white man degraded, since he had—in his mind and attitude—degraded the coloured peoples of the world. The degradation of one person by another is unforgivable in human eyes. No human being forgets denigration. We can't afford to be inferior. We are all scabbling towards the top, but then we all have some memory of the time when man was all glory! That is

when degradation crushes us.

Raymond said, 'I remember watching men wait for their fellow men to die so they could get the food they were unable to eat.'

I said, 'I remember the men who came back from the Burma-Thailand Railway to Changi and Kranji. They were just skin and bones. Their skin was pellagrous—like that of an elephant—and their eyes were sunken back into their heads. Teeth had fallen out and hair was just weak faint fluff, like that of babies. They couldn't look you in the eyes. They were dead while they were living.'

'Whilst they existed,' Raymond echoed. 'They weren't living.'

'How had they died?' I asked. 'I often used to ask myself that question.'

'You can die anywhere, at any time,' Raymond said. 'You don't have to go to a prison camp for that.' I sensed his sadness. Then he said, from his place in my mind, 'Why in our history do we do a great cover-up of man's vileness? Why don't we face it, and come to terms with it?'

I looked at him. 'Maybe it is because that isn't all that we are. Man isn't all muck. Somewhere he has glory, too. He's a contradiction. He's a puzzle.'

Raymond nodded. I could feel his silence, and his gentleness. 'I think we were crushed by what we could be, the evil we could think and do,' he said. 'But then men did incredible things, suddenly, unexplainably—things that seemed like pure gold.'

'People who seemed utterly dead came alive again,' I said. 'They came to life out of death.'

We were both silent, but it was not from despair. It was because we knew about living again.

'Not everyone knows about living again,' I said.

Raymond nodded, and his voice was now sad. 'Throughout the world, we—the human race—keep punishing our-

selves. That is because we have consciences. It is because we have memories. The past is just as vivid to us, today, as it was forty and fifty years ago.'

I nodded. 'Then we both know the same thing,' I said. Raymond nodded almost impatiently, as though, of course, we both knew the ground rules for this discussion. We weren't merely speculating. We were passing information to each other, the information that we needed, all tintured with the wisdom we had gained.

'It's forgiveness that counts,' Raymond said. He went on, 'We fight forgiveness, saying we don't need it. Forgiveness is not needed by those who don't fail. Men persist in saying they didn't fail. They try to cover it up. If only we would come clean and admit it, we would be free. Our memory would not haunt us. It would only encourage us.'

'Admission of guilt seems to humiliate,' I said, thinking of the many people I had counselled over the years.

'Admission is good if it brings humility,' said Raymond, 'but it never humiliates. Humility is beautiful for a human being.'

For some moments we were silent. Somewhere along the line we had had to be forgiven. Not becoming crushed and not being defeated by stresses, circumstances, hunger and fear, had not made us better than others. Not being cruel or bitter or deliberately selfish had not meant we were good. Pharisaic self-righteousness lives always at our elbows, and its stench is greater than the stink of utter degradation.

Raymond said to me, 'I guess I'll be going soon.' He hung there, but I knew he wanted us to come to our point. His stare was patient and gentle. 'It's the matter of love,' he said. 'Love doesn't begin with us. It begins with God: let's be clear about that.'

'They thought He didn't love,' I said. 'That was part of

the thinking they had, and that was why their anger grew.'

Raymond nodded. 'Yet they were really angry because they didn't love. They excused their non-loving. They blamed it on to other things. That is why they were savage with God.' He sighed. 'If only we could admit it all.'

I sighed too. I saw a whole human race gripped in its anger against God, when they would have to receive His love in order to understand; especially to understand suffering. 'The pressures on our brothers were great. They were unusual and terrible, but that wasn't the only thing. The pressures today are great wherever human beings try to go it alone. That isn't man's true thing. He can't know love until he is forgiven, and then he can't love until he knows forgiveness.'

I thought about the whole world. I thought about the revelations that had come to men in Changi and at Chungkai on the River Kwai and some other places. I knew they had happened from time immemorial. I knew that Chungkai was not the first occasion where and when the love miracle had taken place.

'What is so sad,' said Raymond, 'is that many of those men are as bitter today as they were then,' and even more. To talk of forgiving their former captors angers them. They are men out for justice, and they despise love.' He hung there, very still. 'Yet they love those close to them, even if they find it difficult sometimes to express that love.'

'We said that dead men can come alive,' I said. 'I believe that. Yet some of them who saw life have sunk back into death. They live as they once did, before the great suffering. It seems it was all for nothing.'

'Grey enough death,' said Raymond, 'bright enough living. They have all they need now. No hunger; no captivity; no lack of food. But they have never resolved the matter.'

'And we have?' I asked him gently. I knew he was going. I could feel the tears flowing again in my heart.

He nodded. 'Yes,' he said, 'we have, really. We know the answer. We know they could all be free. Everyone could be free. We could all love and love all, if we would. Even if they won't remember, they know the difference. Deep down in the conscience they know the difference. It can't all really mean nothing.'

I hung on his words. I thought of mates who did not know they really hated themselves for their failure, and who desperately went on blaming others—and God, of course. They stick grimly to their anger and their hatred, as though they are justified in it, when in a trice they could be free. We all fail: let us all see that failure. Let none judge another. Let us understand the Cross, the place where God suffered with all, for all.

It was as though Raymond knew my thoughts. 'We battle all the time to believe it,' he said, 'but the battle keeps us free. If we give in to accusation we're done.' He looked at me squarely. 'We just have to go on battling,' he said.

I was thinking about that when his eyes drew away from me, and he was gone. Where he went I did not know, nor do I have to know. I am willing to agree that he may have been the figment of my mind, or even my *alter ego* (if there be such things), but that he was real—however you count reality—I do not doubt. I only know that at places like Adelaide River, and the great war-grave cemeteries I have seen at Kranji on Singapore Island, in Irian Jaya, Thailand and the Philippines, the same tears keep flowing, and I keep praying that my heart will remain soft and gentle and unjudgemental. I keep praying that the world may see that the cross it places on the headstone of millions of graves, is the one Cross where God Himself suffered, suffered with us all, and suffered for us all.

I hope all of us come to know forgiveness and love.

## *The Murder*

THE boy woke up to the sound of the voices. They came suddenly upon him in the night. There had been no time to prepare for them. They did not just lightly impinge upon him, as in some dream, so that gradually he awakened to them. They just suddenly thrashed about his ears, and he lay in his bed, trembling.

'You lousy rotten cow. I'll murder you.'

There was a responding shriek—that of a woman—and a, long high moan—that of a man.

His limbs were paralysed. He lay as though his body could not respond to his desire to get up and run away. It was an inert thing, an unfeeling object detached from his brain. His mind was racing but his body was dead.

Quarrels always stunned him. Fear would grip him and slowly spread through him—as it was doing at this moment. When violence came into the argument, his body would join him—as it was at this moment. It would begin to tremble. Sometimes it even shook. You might say he was allergic to violence. Somewhere, deeply down, it disturbed him. It brought strange emotions into play.

Not that he was a cowardly boy. To the contrary: he could face danger with unusual calm. Perhaps it was that he

loathed violence, that he despised irrational anger and felt it out of place in a good world of creation. It pointed to something that was not less than evil and then never truly human.

It was like a dark parasitic creature which had battered on the human race, depraving it, taking from it its natural serenity and high regality.

He could hear more than one voice. There were two main voices—those of men arguing bitterly. Often a shrill woman's voice would join in, trying to pacify the two. Once or twice there was another woman's voice. It seemed to be gentle, even pathetic.

His eyes kept staring up at the ceiling. He wondered why his brother in the next room did not come to him. They always talked every incident out to the fulness of their own understanding. How could his brother sleep through such vocal violence?

Also his father was doing nothing. His father always reacted to violence. He would have none of it. He would be violent about violence.

The voices sounded as though they were on the property, hundreds of yards away, near the creek. They sounded near the culvert on the road, through which the creek made its way. His father was zealous in keeping his property clear of mushroom pickers, and vagrant picnickers. How come he was not on the stone verandah, waving his powerful torch and telling the quarrellers to clear off?. How could he sleep through all of this?

As he listened, he began to tease out what was happening; why, the first man was threatening the second man with a gun!

'I thought you were my best mate, and you did this thing to me'. 'I trusted you with my wife and you took her. I'll kill you,

you bastard!’

‘I never thought the man who was my mate could do a thing like this. I’ll kill you, you rat!’

One part of the boy was a proud artist. He loved words, but violent as were-the words, he sensed the script was stereotyped. The man was a ham actor. He had no new lines. His were the words of nineteenth century melodrama.

But what was different was that his clichés were tight with reality, filled with menace. Underneath, the man was terribly hurt and angry. His mate had filched his beautiful wife. That was why the clichés the man uttered were not empty but lethal.

The boy sensed that the whole thing was far from light play. The other man was shocked, afraid for his life. You could tell that if he too had possessed a gun, the conversation would have been different. He would have traded word for word, idea for idea, accusation for accusation.

As it was, he could do nothing but remain fearful. He could only plead, trying to bring sense into this vast irrational violence.

‘Bill,’ he said, time and again, ‘don’t do anything you’ll regret. It won’t change anything. It’ll only make things worse.’

Fuel to Bill’s anger. Bill with a thousand answers out of his rage and heightened clever mind.

‘Nothing could be worse!’ Snarl after snarl. Hissed answers. Insistent monologue; the other man dropping into silence lest the man suddenly squeeze the trigger and kill him in the dark night by the bridge.

The monologue would sometimes become dialogue, and murder would first approach and then recede. Sometimes the boy held his breath, certain the next moment would bring an explosion, but the woman would scream and scream and the two men would turn on her.

‘Wilma, you’ll get yours when he gets his. You’re a bitch,

a lousy bitch, and I never thought it of you. You’ll get yours, my girl!’

‘But Bill, you don’t understand. There’s nothing in it. We haven’t done anything.’

Again the hot rage, words blasting out into the night.

‘Why doesn’t Doig do something?’ the boy kept crying in his mind. ‘Why doesn’t he come and shoo them off?’

In his heart he knew Doig—in his home near the culvert—would not move an inch where there was such stupidity being enacted. Doig was a noble person, a dignified man. He left foolish men to their own ways.

His trembling had ceased. His paralysis had gone. His mind began to accustom itself to the violent racket. He got out of bed. He put his slippers on and walked through the French windows. He stood on the ‘cold stone verandah, leaning on the wooden rails.

The stars were blazing in a dark sky. The silhouette of the great kurrajong was before him, with its enormous bole. Other trees were still in the frozen night. For some moments, the voices were muted below.

The second woman’s voice came with some melody. She was saying, ‘Joe! Bill! You are both wrong. Joe, you should never have done it. We were always happy together. Bill, you’ve been a fool. You never appreciated Wilma. Joe’s your best mate. He was only trying to help Wilma.’

There was silence. After a time, Bill broke it with a great roar. ‘You keep out of this, Jane! It’s none of your business. I didn’t bring you along to save your lousy husband. I brought you here because he did you wrong. He’s a rat. You watch him die.’

Wilma was at her screaming again—or was it moaning? The boy shivered. He expected to hear the explosion. Both women were sobbing and crying out. He imagined

they must be clinging together, for Bill shouted, 'Get away from her, Jane! I'm going to finish off both the bastards!'

It was only then the boy realised that the man was drunk. He could hear the lilt in the voice, the edges of the utterances thickened and slurred. He shivered again. Alcohol frightened him. It was another dark parasite.

The other man was saying, 'This isn't you, Bill. It's the drink talking. Remember the times we had in New Guinea. Remember mate, when we were helping each other. Bill, you can't do it.'

That was when the gun spoke. It cracked, it exploded, it reverberated. The boy felt his stomach heaving within him. It seemed the reverberation rolled not only over the gentle undulations of the pastured paddocks, but into his mind, ricocheting in its sensitive bowl.

His agony was intolerable. Brave by nature, he wanted to run down and get at the man before he killed the others. At the same time he was wondering, why his brother and father did not come.

He clung to the verandah rail. Sweat was breaking out on his forehead and face in the frosty night. He trembled, feeling the nausea keenly.

A long silence followed and then a pitiful cry. 'Oh my God, Bill, you've killed him!'

It was Jane, Joe's wife. She was sobbing.

The boy could see the man in his mind's eye. He held the gun and he was pondering.

'He had it coming to him,' Bill was saying, in a kind of mutter. The boy sensed some indecision in the voice, some sudden soberness.

Then the night was filled with cries and sobs and shoutings. The two women were wailing, Bill was trying to beat down their voices, and suddenly there was a high cry.

'You rotten scum, you lousy, two-timing son-of-a-bitch.' It was Joe's voice, and the boy knew he was drunk too.

'You'd kill your own mate! You'd kill the man who went through thick and thin with you.'

The boy was glad Joe was not dead. Maybe he was wounded, but not dead.

Joe was going on. 'I never pinched your sheila. You pushed her into my arms. You never looked after her, you rotten, lily-livered, drunken bastard! You neglected the best woman you'll ever have. Now you come killing me out of your guilty conscience. Give me that gun, and I'll finish you!'

The boy thought Bill would kill Joe for those words, but there was momentary silence.

Then Bill said, 'I never neglected Wilma. I always did her 'good.'

Jane and Wilma were at him. 'Bill, you never did. You've always been selfish.' The boy heard the two female voices, shrill and accusing.

Suddenly Bill went mad. Something fell into the creek. Maybe it was the gun, maybe Bill had thrown it there; but Bill was crying out into the night.

'Oh God! I would kill my own mate, my own best mate. Him that went with me through thick and thin! Oh God! Oh God! Oh God!'

The boy wondered whether it was Bill or the alcohol talking. His nausea had not gone. He trembled with disgust at the change in the man.

For a time he could distinguish nothing of the mixed conversation. The women were crying and weeping, and Joe was belting into Bill with heavy words, and Bill was counter-accusing, shouting about his wife and rotten adultery.

The boy knew the two men were fighting. He could hear them scuffling, then heaving and straining, and even their heavy choked cries and breathing.

His trembling began again. Violence affected him strangely.

It sounded as though both women were on to Bill. Somehow the two men were apart, for there was silence.

The boy sensed the real battle beneath it all: the battle of guilt.

He remembered battles between his mother and his father. They had generally fought with guilt tactics, accusation and counter-accusation. The sound of these stinging indictments was what troubled him. They brought on the sickening feelings in the pit of his stomach, the paralysis which spread through him and made him feel helpless.

There had been some of this with his older brothers, now married. He had seen them wrestling, jousting in some kind of joy, and then in a moment the anger behind the fun would break out. The lethal anger in their eyes had troubled him. He had cowered away from their rage.

Below him, near the culvert, the anger was petering out. He could hear the clink of bottles fetched from the boot of a car. He stared into the darkness below. A car came sweeping into the side road from the main highway. Its lights flooded the road and highlighted four figures perched on the rails of the culvert bridge. Even so they were black against the light, but he saw bottles up-ended. The two men were drinking; the women were just sitting there, crouched as they balanced on the rails. Then the car was gone and the night swallowed them up.

Bill was saying, 'You're not a bad old scout, Joe my boy, but keep away from Wilma, see?'

Joe was saying nothing. The two women were keeping silent. The boy sensed that Bill was uneasy.

The boy remembered back to Joe's craven, terrified pleading. All his life he would never forget the terrified moans of the man about to die.

Suddenly it came to him that Bill had really killed Joe. He had missed with the gun, but not with his intention. Bill was a murderer.

The women knew this, he was sure. Instinctively he knew Bill was finished. The women were dead to Bill, but alive to each other.

In a strange way, they were alive to Joe.

He could hear the uneasiness in Bill's nagging voice. 'Now don't you ever forget, Joe,' he was saying, but there was no heart in his words. It was as though he was mumbling to himself.

After a time he could hear bottles fall. There were murmured voices. Bill's was still a bit strident but more subdued than before.

The boy was still wondering why his father and his brother had not heard it all and come out of their rooms. Next morning he would ask them. He could see the surprise on their faces. They would say they had heard nothing.

Lucky for them—hearing nothing.

All his life he would remember. He shivered a bit at the thought. He wondered whether he would ever toughen up. He could not answer his own thought.

Even when the comfort of the warm blankets reached him he was not really comfortable. Tears kept pricking his eyes. He was coating his memory with indelible horror.

He kept staring at the unseen ceiling, his mind wondering about the race into which he had been born. As he faded into sleep, he wished he could solve this seemingly inscrutable mystery.

That was why he was puzzled when he woke the next morning with such joy in his heart. Staring at the frosted pastures and the cows moving slowly towards the dairy, he wondered whether he had imagined the whole thing.

## *The Frisbee Family*

THE man in the first family was a child psychologist. He worked in Family Welfare and his name was Frank Lyall. He was a bright-eyed man with grey hair and unusually handsome features. He loved children deeply, almost too deeply to be very objective about his work. However, far from impeding his work, this seemed to add to it, to enhance it. Parents liked the kindly look in his alert and sympathetic eyes, and found themselves listening to all he had to say. They would go away and act on his advice. Well, nearly all would act on the advice. Those who did found—for the most part—that it worked.

The Government was pleased with Frank Lyall. Least-ways, the head of the Department of Family Welfare was pleased, and he even filed a good report. In this sense, the future of this family counsellor was settled. For the head, Frank constituted a genuine joy. There was little about family life and relationships that he did not know.

At this moment he was making his way into Fairview Park. The park, as you may know, overlooks the Brisbane River. It is a well-grassed park with sweeping undulations. The grass is green couch, buttressed by excellent watering against the hot summer. The children love to run up its

slopes and then run pell-mell down them, or even turn on their sides and roll down, over and over and over again, shrieking as they do so, hoping the adults and others will notice them.

Frank helped Josie his wife with the cooler. It was large, made of white polystyrene foam, and with a close-fitting lid. In it were the goodies being kept cool against the Brisbane sun. Also he had rugs draped over his shoulders, and he was grasping in the other hand a heavy beach umbrella. Behind him trailed Ainslie, aged six. Ainslie was holding on to one pants-leg of his father. He was half-skipping, half-running. He had an abstract air about him. He might have been dreaming. He was also sucking a thumb.

Josie Lyall was a nervous, unhappy woman. She seemed perpetually distraught. Life was bitter no doubt. It had its problems. One problem was Ainslie and another was Frank, her husband. She knew it was her task in life to handle husband and son so that they fitted her models of fatherhood, husbandhood and childhood. The trouble was that she had never thought much about the origins of these models. She was a simple woman. She just knew what Frank should be and what he should do. Likewise she knew what Ainslie should be and do.

Both these males kept escaping. She would have them within the mould, even if only for a fleeting second. Then they would suddenly escape, forming patterns of their own. Her frustration would lead to anger and this to infantile pettishness. She would frown. Her well-formed features would compress into unnecessary wrinkles and her eyes would glower. At the moment, this was what was happening.

She was chiding the boy. 'Don't cling to your father! Let go his trouser leg! How can he walk and carry those things with you holding on to him?'

The two males, being used to this sort of talking, had developed a protective immunity to it. They were impervious

to it in a gracious, kindly way. Without agreeing, they would generally humour her. However, this morning the little boy felt insecure. Other families were also making their way towards the barbecue area. The little boy felt threatened by so many children and parents. In a few moments he would have to relate to them all, and he knew he had neither the ability nor the desire. His hands gripped his Dad's pants-leg more firmly, and he sucked deliberately and juicily upon his thumb.

The latter action enraged the fretting woman. 'Stop sucking your thumb,' she said sharply. 'It's disgusting for a boy of your age.' It was as though he had not heard. He kept staring at the impending crowd.

There was not only one picnic, but many. One group had set itself up with a large marquee. Also it had tables and chairs set around the western side of the barbecue area. Some adult males were showing their natural competency in collecting twigs and branches of the eucalypts. They were also fragmenting the :dried bark, making it into excellent kindling. It was too early in the day for the barbecue, but in an hour or so they would light it.

There were two clowns, one male and one female. They kept joshing each other in a friendly manner, and saying things which caused the children nearby to go into shrieks of laughter. Someone was handing out wedge-shaped ices on sticks. The children were lined up to receive them, and behind them were the adults.

The boy would have liked to surrender himself to it all, but he did not know how. He knew the worth of his father, and was puzzled that such fatherhood could not come through fully. He was dimly aware of his mother's insecurity. Somehow it impeded the flow of his father to him, and of him to his father. He knew that underneath her angry impatience his mother loved him, but then he feared her love. In rare moments she had grasped him, hugging him to her-

self, breathing fiercely, only to let him go as she hurried off to some imaginary task.

They settled on the side of the hill. Rugs were spread. The cooler was set down. The beach umbrella was slotted into the firm turf. Everything was made orderly because that was the way Josie wished it to be.

Then the man and the boy began to play. They played tag together. The father would run after the boy, never quite catching up to him, and the boy would shriek with the sheer delight of being missed time and again. Suddenly father Frank would whip around a tree, his bright eyes shining, his hands held high like some predator, and the little boy would tremble with delicious terror. Almost, almost his father had caught him. Off they would scamper, his father shouting with huge threatening, 'I'm after you! I'll catch you!'

There was an end to Josie's tolerance. When they knocked over a carton of milk she told them to stop it. They were somewhat exhausted so they lay down on the rugs, breathless and panting.

After a time they sat up. Others of their group had arrived, and they greeted them cheerfully. Even Ainslie ceased to feel threatened. He was warm and relaxed. The fun had stirred his blood. He smiled at the other children.

Suddenly he saw the billy-carts. There they were on the flat, three of them, and they were special billy-carts at that. The fathers had helped the sons to make them. The one painted in gold was almost a miniature car, but even so it was a billy-cart. Like the others, it had large wheels so that the chassis was well clear of the ground. It was also long, built so obviously for speed. It may have been light, but it looked to be strong. There was another painted blue, and one painted letter-box red. The boys were pulling them here and there, showing off in their pride of possession.

Frank thought, 'He's old enough now for a billy-cart. We'll build one together.'

Josie could tell by his eyes that he was thinking this. She said sharply, 'We'll never have one of those things around our place. They're too dangerous.'

The man and the boy sat in silence. They did not know whether or not she was sincere, so they let the nagging flow over them. They just kept looking greedily at the billy-carts.

Then the event happened, the event that the man and the boy were never to forget. The woman did not notice it. Of course, she could not avoid seeing it, but then it did not register in her mind as anything of significance.

The happening was quite simple, really. It was merely a family throwing a frisbee. Frank knew the family. They were a run-of-the-mill family. Mum, Dad, and five children; two of the children were girls and of course three of them boys. They had formed a fairly large circle. They were tossing the frisbee to one another. First they tossed it around the circle. It was quite breathtaking. The symmetry was superb. The throwing was effortless. They stood erect, but gracefully. When the yellow disc reached each one, they would flow towards it, receive it simply, and then send it flowing out to the next member of the family. The father had exactly the same rate of thrust as the others. It was a circle of equal action. Although their body-heights differed, their abilities were parallel. On and on went the frisbee, from one to the other. None ever dropped it. No hiatus impeded the remarkable flow. None fumbled. On and on went the frisbee.

Frank Lyall watched it with incredible joy. He had never seen the true unity of a family more clearly demonstrated. But then this was no deliberate demonstration. The real beauty of it was that it was wholly unconscious. It was a perpetual rhythm of unselfconscious unity. It was a quiet, gracious harmony.

Nearby, Josie was giving vent to her tired sighs. Her hands were straying nervously across the rug on which she was seated. She looked out, staring blankly, seeing nothing. In

fact her look was bleak and negative. By contrast, Ainslie was watching, his fascinated gaze fixed on the family, and it seemed his stare would never come unstuck. His head unconsciously turned, moving with the flow of the frisbee, he was sensing the intimate harmony of the family.

Something broke the spell. His gaze shifted to the billycarts and the magic of the frisbee dissipated. His eyes looked longingly at his father, who was still spellbound by the hurtling frisbee. He watched with admiration, and something of family hunger was in his eyes.

The boy said wistfully, 'Dad, can we go to the billy-carts?'

He heard that—the father—and said, 'All right, son. Let's go.'

Josie complained. 'Why don't we sit together? Why let the boy hurt himself?' Her negativity had reached out to the billy-carts and the boys on the flat.

The two slipped away from her and the imprisoning words. They sauntered at first, and then as though at a given signal flew down the hill, their bodies leaning as they went. Their arms were spread outwards and upwards. If their bodies were not flying fully, then in their minds they were flying.

They were greeted with shrill cries by the other boys and adult nods of recognition by the fathers. As yet, no one had pulled the billy-carts up the hill before their run down to the flat.

The two of them surrendered to all things of this picnic day. They could hear the two clowns shouting at each other through hailers. Children of the other picnic were gathering for races, skinny-legged in cloven shorts, or chesty in their skivvies. At the barbecue centre, men were beginning to light their fires. A few had donned aprons. Some were of white material. Others were green or grey, and one man had a brilliant red apron. He also wore a Coca-Cola cap, but back to front, its peak sheltering his neck.

They watched the billy-carts dragged to the top of the hill.

They heard the sharp command of the racing steward. The next moment the machineless vehicles came down the hill, thrusting themselves with their own weight and the gathering momentum. The white-tired wheels spun merrily and the drivers steered as the vehicles swayed from side to side. Below, on the flat, the watching children were screaming themselves hoarse, whilst fathers were watching anxiously, trying to cover their natural pride. They were hoping, each of them, for family victory.

Ainslie was wistful. He would have loved to own a billycart, but he knew he was too small for that. He gripped his father's hand as the hurtling carts thundered towards him. Then they were past, splaying out from the centre of the grass track. Then they had stopped and other children were demanding a chance to drive them. Somehow the confusion resolved itself, and different fathers were dragging the vehicles up the hill.

Miraculously it became Ainslie's turn. He had watched for an hour, refusing to budge from his standing position. His heart pounded when they offered him the golden billycart. His Dad's eyes glowed with his. They made their way up the hill, he panting to reach the top.

The men settled him in, giving instructions. He kept nodding, for he understood fully. The boys in the other two vehicles were older and impetuous. They were impatient of the advice, wanting only to get away and be in the glory of the racing. The steward smiled at them in a kindly way, raised his right hand, and with a flick of a thumb and finger gave the sharp word of release.

Away they went, merrily, the spokes twinkling until they became a blur. The carts rolled and rattled and gathered speed. Their front wheels were like revolving eyes, staring out at the grass as they raced over the sloping turf.

Frank Lyall tried to keep pace with the boy's vehicle, and he had to run quickly to effect this. He had forgotten the

watching woman on the hill. He was in parallel with the hurtling cart, and as he ran he was like the father with the frisbee. He was one with his son. They were both voiceless, but beneath it all they were holding a conversation in harmony.

The woman on the hill was beating the grass with both hands. Hysterical fear had gripped her. Suddenly, idiotic ally, she was shouting to them both to come back to her. This they could not do. She knew that this was what they would not do. She hated the competency of the grey-haired father. She had tried to imprison him within herself but had not succeeded. Long ago—loving her—he had seen she was her own prisoner. Now they were both escaping her forever, fleeing away over the sloping turf.

'He'll get killed!' she screamed, and in a strange, quick moment it seemed she were a prophetess. She had risen, her hair flowing out from her shoulders, her regular features tensed and stern and wild. Her arms were up in the air, and folk looking upwards saw her silhouetted against the pure blue of the sky.

She shouted it again: 'He'll get killed,' and in that moment one of the carts—the blue one—slewed and touched the golden vehicle. It slewed also for a moment and then tipped, its momentum carrying it on its side for a few yards. Then it fell on its driver, and slid over him, coming to a stop, its white wheels spinning freely.

The man rushed across, lifting the vehicle as though it were paper. The boy lay still.

Men began running uphill. The steward threw himself down the hill. Idiotically indifferent, the two clowns went on hailing each other, running it to the laughter of the children. The children of the billy-cart picnickers had no laughter. Some of them stood frozen. They were one with the rest of the human race, anticipating tragedy.

The woman would not come down the hill. She stood beat-

ing her hands together. She was crying out to her husband, castigating him. He heard her words as he rolled the boy over, feeling his body, trying to restore consciousness.

It was a moment only before the boy revived. His eyes stared in bewilderment at his father. Quickly he looked around, and joy shone in his eyes as he saw the golden cart.

Someone had restored it to the upright position.

‘Can I have another go, Dad?’ he asked.

He knew he couldn’t. He knew that was not allowed. He was not deeply disappointed. He smiled, rubbed his head and stood up. A sigh was released from the anxious crowd. Some of the men nodded their heads. The children were clamouring for the three billy-carts. Suddenly there was no tragedy. Everyone knew that tragedy was only temporary anyway. Life was what was permanent. It alone mattered.

They made their way up the hill. The boy was six years of age, the man forty-two. Both knew what was ahead of them, but they also knew how to cope. They accepted the alarm, the vituperation, the self-pity, the tears and the wild look. They loved her—come wind, come weather—but she could not see this. She was unable to understand.

He understood. He knew her parents. He knew she could never receive a frisbee from her father or mother. They would not know how to throw one, much less receive one. He wished he did not know the ‘why’ of her condition. Perhaps then he would be able to help her. The others were not difficult to help.

They sat under the tirade. After a time, they helped to set out the meal. The man went down with the steak and the beef sausages to the barbecue. Other men cooked the meat for him, adding some special sauce as the meat turned brown and then almost black. He took the meat up the hill on paper plates. They set salad about the three plates, and began eating.

Folk came and offered sympathy and help. The woman

took a couple of Disprins. She seemed to enjoy the concern of the others. That was until Frank slipped back and knocked over the carton of milk again. She sobbed with anger and would not be consoled. She refused a fresh unopened carton offered by a large and sympathetic woman. Her tears blinded her as she stumbled up from the rug, half-running towards the car. She sat in the front seat, next to the driver’s place. When the tears dried she just sat, staring ahead, seeing nothing. Even her thinking was anaesthetised.

The boy and the man sat on the milk-stained rug. They chewed quietly on their steak and sausages. They drank orange cordial. There was nothing of resentment in their spirits. There was some sorrow for the woman who was both wife and mother. They knew she just did not understand. One day, they hoped, she would understand.

The frisbee family had broken up. That is, they had ceased their game in order to have lunch. They had cooked their meatballs, Sausages and lamb cutlets at the barbecue, and had returned. They were a fairly quiet family, saying little whilst they were eating. After the meal they lay under the eucalypts. One or two of them slept.

The clowns were busy handing out icecreams. There was no need, really, to use the hailers, but every so often one of the clowns would put his lips to the instrument and call the stragglers for an icecream. These were in wrappers, of course.

The frisbee family woke up after a time and re-formed the family circle. The father was a quiet, thin man, dark of complexion. He rarely spoke. His wife was a fine-looking woman, and had kept her figure well, considering the number of children.

The father watched them take up their positions and then cried out, ‘O.K., everybody?’

‘O.K., Dad!’ they responded.

He threw the frisbee to the oldest boy, who threw it on to the youngest boy. So it went around the circle, skilfully passed from person to person. Frank and the boy Ainslie marvelled at the precision of the throwing, the skill of the catching, and above all the effortlessness which must have taken much practice and patience.

Back in the car, the woman was beginning to lose her sightlessness. Looking across, she could see the man and the boy sitting together. She noticed how close they were. She liked it, even in her envy. The two, she saw, were gazing at the frisbee family. She had not consciously seen them before, but now they roused her interest.

She watched the amazing co-ordination they exhibited in throwing and receiving. The frisbee was yellow and therefore easily seen. Between each two players it would rise and fall, establishing a rhythm as it passed from person to person. She was amazed that it was never fumbled, never dropped. In spite of herself, her admiration grew. The faint —almost frightening—thought drifted into her mind. What if she and Frank and Ainslie were to try it out, and even, practise?

The thought was retained. She leaned forward, peering. Frank and Ainslie, for their part, were watching with delight. They scarcely noticed the arrival of the woman Josie, as she came up to them and sat beside them. They had thought of her remaining in the car, sitting in the front seat, staring sightlessly ahead.

They marvelled, the three of them, at the symmetry of the throwing, the fluent movements of the frisbee, and of course the unselfconscious harmony of the quiet family.

## ‘*Old Psych*’

### *PART 1 The Irish Rebellion*

I want to tell you about ‘Psych.’ When I look at the word now, it seems a bit silly, and I am almost tempted not to sketch this character study. It is, in fact, of our old high school headmaster. We were pupils at his Agricultural School, where some were boarders, living in, and some were day students, living out.

Ag. School was quite a place, and had quite a history, and I cannot estimate the good it did in my life. Having some hundreds of students on campus, and it being a grand farm of sorts, life was rich for most of us. High schools in those days were not co-ed, and so we could be boys, young males, strong and sporting. The unfounded myth was that being agricultural, our fellows were more beefy than others. We did manage to win the Rugby Union trophy—year after year —and not only in First Grade. This helped to give us a reputation for toughness.

When it came to being tough, Old Psych outlived us all. Anyway, he thought he did. Certainly in the matter of psychology he outran every one of us. In those days, psy-

chology was quite young in the tooth, and a bit despised by most of us males. I lived in a city suburb where going to university was looked upon as a bit weak, and even 'sissy.' We were far enough back in Australia's history to think ourselves good enough if we made to 'the Leaving.' We reckoned it was about time we got into the ruck of life, especially in the farming world. Those were days before the Second World War. There was the Great Depression all about us, but there was plenty of fun.

I was telling you that we called him 'Old Psych' because he was somewhat of an expert—to our minds—on psychology. Now, I am not so sure. I think he must have dabbled in it, and perhaps for his time knew what there was to know. So we called him 'Old Psych.' Other times we called him 'The Boss.' He liked to be referred to as 'The Boss.' Maybe he heard us refer to him as 'Old Psych,' but I cannot be sure.

Looking back, I find it incredible to realise how much our schoolmasters poured into us. I can still remember our Ag. master, old 'Doug.' I remember the first sentence we wrote:

'Ager' a field; 'culture,' to cultivate.

I hope I have it right. Much of it was theory, but much of it wasn't.

Then there was our history master. I can still remember what he taught me. I had hated history, but through him I came to love it. I loved maths, but through old 'Echo' I came to hate it! In primary school I was quick with maths, but Echo's scowl scared me mute and quickly made me into a paralytic. Then 'Hughie' our history master had to sub for Echo for some weeks when he was ill, and my love for algebra and geometry revived and flourished.

You can see I am in my anecdotage! Stories come tumbling out of my memory. I could write scads about those men. And then of course I could write volumes about Old

Psych himself. Come to think of it, he was much younger then than I am now, but I still have a lot of awe for him.

He put the fear of hell into us all. But then not quite as much as did 'Old Min,' his wife. She could cow her husband in a couple of minutes.

'George,' she would say, and he would pretend he had not heard her, especially if she used that voice in front of the students. Then she would go higher and firmer. There would be an arch-insistence in her voice. 'George!' she would cry. There was no shriek about it, just an octave or two above the previous demand. George would know she was about to rise even higher, and he would say, 'Yes dear, what is it?'

It could be anything: a student she didn't like, an incident that had to be judged, a pupil who had to be punished, and all to do with her work as Matron. She never impinged on her husband George's areas. It was just that George had to punish the students who offended her. George could be quite objective about students she wanted punished. He would take them away to a quiet place and encourage them not to be so stupid in future. Old Min would follow up the particular case. 'Cane him, George!' she would cry with great gusto, and George would remain silent or look sideways at her victim.

When it came to offending Old Psych himself, the student had better be pretty careful. He could be a haughty and offended person, all in a trice. More than once I received 'sixers'—three on each hand—but at the same time I had the strange feeling that he didn't want to cane me, as though he knew it was some restlessness in life which drove me on to silly pranks. Sometimes I felt an edge of affection in his voice, and then I would come close to tears.

'My dear young friend Denny,' he would say, and although he flicked the cane in an alarming way, he would not be vicious in its application. He would laugh if he saw resin on our palms, brown resin they used in those days for

tensing violin strings. ‘Makes no difference,’ he would say abruptly, and then go on to prove his point.

The man—Old Psych—was a Tory. Looking back, I can see how much of a Tory he really was. Of course those were the days when we celebrated Empire Day on the 24th May. We sang great songs such as ‘When Britain First at Heaven’s Command Arose From Out the Azure’s Main,’ and went on to cry in holy chorus:

*Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves,  
Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.*

There were other songs like these, especially Kipling’s ‘Last Reccessional.’ We never really knew what the title meant, but we were in full agreement with its sentiments, such as:

*God of our fathers, known of old,  
Lord of our far-flung battle line,  
Beneath whose awful hand we hold  
Dominion over palm and pine—  
Lord God of hosts be with us yet,  
Lest we forget—lest we forget!*

That is enough, anyway, to give you a thumb-nail sketch of our headmaster. The unforgettable occasion was when he’ crossed swords with our history master, Hughie, over the North American rebellion against England. Old Psych was deeply hurt that those States, later known as ‘The United States,’ should have rebelled against the land where ‘The Divine Right of Kings’ obtained in uniqueness, in contradistinction to other lands where kings and emperors had fortuitously gained ascendancy. Something in George’s soul had never recovered from The Boston Tea Party, and great indignation raged in his breast. Hughie, on the other hand, had his own Irish rage against England, her Tories, and all her dastardly doings.

Oh, I remember the drama very well. Old Psych .came striding into the room, barging into the history master’s lec-

ture, laying about the Yankees as though no one could, or should, think differently. Hughie, who was normally a very pleasant and gracious man, grew very white in the face. Of this change in hue, Psych was blithely indifferent, but the students felt the tension mount.

Then suddenly it happened. ‘Out!’ cried Hughie wildly. ‘Out of this room.’ Old Psych stood dumbfounded. He listened with strong unbelief: no master had ever dared front him in all his long years as an educationist.

‘Out!’ shouted Hughie again, ‘and never come back into my room. Never again!’

If Hughie had become white in the face, then Old Psych was red, a deep Scottish crimson-red. His great hamlike fists clenched and unclenched. In a battle of fisticuffs he would have won hands down, but this was a battle of words, and I’ll pit an Irishman any day against a .Scot, when it comes to words. To be accurate, both were Australians, native-bred on southern soil, but only one generation removed from their fierce ancestors.

Hughie was wound up now, and having done what every other master had dreamed of doing to this lecture-invading Head, he continued in reckless abandon. ‘I teach these boys true history—without prejudice,’ he cried, ‘and you come in with your Tory politics and corrupt their minds!’

If Old Psych had been unbelieving before, now he was supra-unbelieving. His body seemed to shudder and his prominent eyes became even more prominent. The crimson crept up amongst his silver locks. Then he became articulate.

‘Tory!’ he cried; ‘Politics!’ he roared; ‘Corrupt their minds!’ he hissed. Each statement was a question and a reply, an accusation and an indignant assertion.

Now he turned to us, the simple pupils, the gloriously happy and yet apprehensive students. ‘Boys!’ he cried, and pointed to the white-faced, silent

history teacher, 'he is from a different tradition. He has Irish in his blood. The Irish have always been rebels, and he does not understand the tragedy of British rebelling against British!'

We could scarcely believe our ears. Old Psych had always stood solidly for his teachers, supporting them to the hilt. Martinet though he was, he had never questioned their discipline. This they knew and appreciated, but his intrusion into their periods was bitterly resented, not only by the masters but also by the pupils. The boys did not, of course, mind the diversion, but Old Psych really bored them with his little bit of knowledge about everything, and his maximal knowledge about nothing. Looking back, I think we misjudged him. He was, in fact, quite remarkable for his wide range of interests, but on this occasion it misfired.

Hughie did not attempt to answer The Boss. His unwavering stare was one of contempt. Then he turned on his heel and walked towards the door. He had to pass the headmaster on the way. 'You have my resignation,' he told him, and we saw Old Psych flinch at that.

There was silence for a time after, and then Old Psych began part of a lecture on North American history. It was quite hopeless, not because of the material he produced from memory, but because the students knew an injustice had been done—whatever the merits of the two men who had stood before them.

What impressed me about Hughie was the fact that he looked Old Psych in the eyes and did not flinch. The assurance he had as to the rightness of his teaching, and the justice of the American Revolution, held him in some kind of integrity. I knew too, that Old Psych must have admired him for his stand. It was precisely what he, the Head, would have done under similar circumstances.

We never did find out what had happened in the master's common-room. We knew that Old Psych had talked to the

staff,—that he had refused to accept Hughie's resignation, and that he had made something that came very close to being an apology. The two agreed to take two periods apiece to present their views of the war between England and the United States.

The boys in our class let it go at that. They asked no questions, and they took no sides, but the moral victory went to Hughie; of that there was no doubt, but then he was never again the old Hughie as we had known him. The rich humour and irony were still there, but natural ebullience had departed. Not that he was a cowed or beaten man. It was as though he could never quite comprehend what had happened. Curiously enough, both men had high views of justice, and their clash with each other—I see now, in retrospect—was unfortunate. However, what it did to us must be—to say the least—both rich and exciting. We were awakened from the dull sloth of our historical ignorance. To that point, history had been dates, events, kings being crowned, dethroned, and crowned. Dreary parliaments enacted legislation which we had to know. Nations broiled ceaselessly, thus adding to our burdens. Then—hey presto!—suddenly it was not like that at all. Well, if not, then how was it?

Well, it was like this: the people of North America were suddenly very human, very resourceful, and very taxed. The British were their oppressors when they had come from that very race. On the other hand, the British had settled them, and the British themselves had settled. The blood ties were deep and strong. How then could they suddenly be the cause of incredible strife and rebellion, oppression and returned hatred? It was all very bewildering. We were having our first conscious and tutored glimpses into what mankind was.

I can remember I dreamed at nights. One of my terrible dreams had been of the R101 dirigible (balloon) catching alight, and hundreds of people plunging to their deaths. I had heard the news as a child and could not get it out of my

head; that is, a sudden circumstance destroying man. But here it was different: out of the one nation had come another, and the division was a bloody one, and one filled with hatred. One side saw ingratitude, the other oppression. I began to wonder what human beings were.

Hughie, unwittingly aided by Old Psych, had broken our minds open to new dimensions. Man's history was becoming man's story. The principle we had grasped was opening up all areas of that story. We were moving out into the world which was now ours—in this generation! Many times since then—if not most times—that has come back to me. I tell you that I am deliberately in the business of making history myself, although—to tell the truth—I've accomplished precious little.

Now that, of course, is the whole point of this story, for story it is. Something changed in our Ag. School. After that, Old Psych was never quite the martinet, never quite the belligerent old man. Sometimes he would look sideways at the teacher whose period he invaded. He knew, I am sure, that we were eagerly awaiting another confrontation, and he wasn't out to satisfy us. By the same token, the masters, seemed to have stood a shade more erect, a trifle more conscious of their inherent authority, being on their own dung hills.

Hughie, of course, was not the same man. He was quieter. Prior to the confrontation he had always been sure of his position. I think he had been surprised to know that Old Psych held such views, Tory though he was. It may even have occurred to Hughie that revolutions are not always totally justified, and that occasionally even the Tories may have a point: I do not know.

What I know is that something more of man was opened to me, and no less the two men, Old Psych and Hughie. I recall that they confronted each other across the front of that classroom, each holding the other with his eye. Now

that is my point: neither yielded to the other, but both were strong and determined. That is what I would like, now, to talk about.

### ***PART II: 'I Looked Him in the Eye!'***

Having told you about Old Psych, I hasten to tell you one of the most famous stories which concern him. I told you about a bit of loss of face when the altercation took place between him and our history master, Hughie. Some said Old Psych was too thick-skinned to lose face, but I beg to differ. I swear I saw a faint touch of humility, a new shade of thoughtfulness, and a lessening of his extrovert ways. Of course I could be wrong, and it may have been sight born of wishing, but I can only report it as I saw it.

It was the matter of 'Silver Arrow' which I wish to report. Old Psych, as I have told you, liked to look a man, a boy, and even a beast in the eye—fight in the eye, I should say. He had looked Hughie in the eye, but then Hughie had looked him back, exchanging look for look. That made history, yet Old Psych—The Boss—was still free to go his way looking all and sundry in the eye on whatever occasion he pleased. It may well be that the one notable exception was dear Min, his energetic and dominating spouse, but she is not the centre of this story. Indeed she has nothing whatever to do with it. The story concerns Silver Arrow. In fact, it is almost his story: almost.

Who was Silver Arrow? Silver Arrow was our famous Ayrshire bull. The Boss was magnificent in the way he persuaded both the Education Department and the Department of Agriculture to buy a highly priced young bull. In fact the one in question came to us as a quiet and amenable bull-

calf. Anyone could tell from the lines of him that he was bidding fair to be a prizewinner in the Sydney Royal Show. And why not? His perfectly straight back, the regular angle of his hindquarters, the massive but well-proportioned shoulders, the finely-set head, and every other necessary detail was there, even to perfection.

Silver Arrow accepted his new environment calmly. He had been bred and brought up by a famous family of breeders, who treated their stock well. The idea of a bull being wild, of turning into a rogue, and of having tendencies to be a killer, was quite out of the question. Silver Arrow gave every indication of being a show beast, an animal for the ring. Just put a halter on his head and that was all that was needed. You could forget about needing a ring in his nose.

Anyway, for a time! Silver Arrow accepted the six-rail, eight-foot high fence of his bull paddock. He grazed quietly, ate at his stall-trough, stood calmly by the hour, and chewed the cud in a dreamy manner. He even accepted the audience that daily sat on the top rails of the fence or on lower rails, legs tucked in the rails below. He even accepted the odd pupil who vaulted into the pen and approached him. He had, no quarrel with humankind, but sadly enough they could not accept this unusual docility. The boys called his virility in question. Their image of a bull was a strong masculine beast which was always looking for a fight.

The sad story is soon told. A combination of things changed Silver Arrow from a quiet domesticated calf to an adult beast, filled with suspicion, mating intensity, and anger towards mankind: anyway, towards ebullient high-schoolers who should have known better than to bait him. Old Psych would have had raging fits had he understood the teasing his pupils exercised towards his beautiful young showpiece.

Doubtless the young bull had all the masculinity he needed without the schoolboys taunting him into anger. He could quietly have mated his show dams, brought forth progeny

with minimal pride, and gone on enjoying his periods of rumination. Pass over the methods the young rogues used, but soon all were convinced that Silver Arrow had entered into the tradition of other high school bulls. He knew how to rampage, how to turn half on his side and score the pasture with his sharp and polished horns. He could huff and humph and heave and roar with the best of bulls when he saw a dam in sight. A vagrant pupil would no sooner climb down from the railing fence into the pen, than the Ayrshire was off in his direction, breathing hotly, bent on destroying the human varmint. The time came when no one would dream of entering Silver Arrow's domain.

Except, of course, The Boss; I mean, Old Psych. He rarely visited his pet bull, but when one of those balmy days would come—be it spring or be it autumn—he would shed himself of his office paraphernalia, he would rid himself of staff worries, and he would even ignore student demands. Off he would go around the farm, looking at pigs and cows, horses and sheep, and even at the poultry. He would descend to the vast vegetable garden and make forays into the orchards. Most of all he would visit his Royal Show hope, young Silver Arrow.

They had been mates at one time, and the young bull was inclined to remember that. Indeed Old Psych could enter his pen without much trouble. Silver Arrow might edge away from him, or evince little interest, and even withdraw into aloofness, but there was some kind of bond between them.

Not this day, this balmy day when the headmaster visited his young friend. Alas and alack! Silver Arrow had become ornery. His aristocratic background had changed to the autocratic, his trained kindness to provoked anger. Mind you, the anger did not begin all at once. He had to work himself up to go against his former friend and admirer, but turn he did.

It was a red-faced and excited Old Psych who shared the

matter with the school. He called a Special Assembly in fact. These were rare occasions, and most important. They came about when a Prime Minister died, or a member of the Royal Family passed on. Once or twice they were called when matters of immorality had arisen, but then such were rare. This time The Boss had two things in mind, the first being the deterioration of a gracious and gentle bull into an enraged and man-killing beast, and the second the experience he had had as the animal had charged him. Not knowing the cause for the occasion, and because some had been in recent scrapes, many a guilty-minded pupil watched the arrival of The Boss with deep anxiety. Following 'Attention!' we were allowed to 'Stand at Ease!' but not 'Stand Easy!' That boded ill. We waited.

At first he mentioned his shock and amazement at the change in his favourite beast. We could tell that a long process of detection would be put into operation following the Special Assembly, but meanwhile, a great flush of triumph enveloped him. He was almost benign in his revelation of the recent happening. To spare you the anguish of the matter, I condense the description of his battle with Silver, Arrow. His story went something like this!

'There was I. I went to the fence. I looked at Silver Arrow, my young friend, my beautiful show beast. Other days he has accepted me quietly, but today there was nothing but rejection. Knowing I must be master of all my animals, I climbed the fence, jumped down into the paddock, and made my way towards my friend.

'Friend.' Today he was no friend! He put his head down. You know that when a bull puts his head down he is about to charge. Also he tossed his head. He tossed it angrily and impatiently. I said to him, "Silver Arrow, old friend, this is your master. This is your Boss."

'There was no friendly response, so resolutely I walked towards him, my hand out to fondle him and set him at

peace. That, students and masters, seemed to enrage him. He shook his head and snuffled. You could see the mucus like silver streamers. Not that I felt very poetic at that moment. His horns, as you well know, are very sharp, and they looked most dangerous.

'So I went closer to him. This time he dug one horn into the earth. He tore up some turf. He set his front legs apart and began tearing with his hoofs at the grass. His tail stood up, and you can say it waved like a flag. Then he put his head down and began running towards me.'

The old boy certainly looked magnificent: same red face and silver locks as on the day of the Hughie confrontation. This time, however, righteousness was wholly on the side of Old Psych. Hughie may have had a point or two on his side, but today Silver Arrow had no moral right, none whatever. Not that that had seemed to worry the bull, who appeared to think that might was right, anyway, and who ached for vengeance for his couple of years of taunting and teasing from the block of jeering schoolboys. Looking up at The Boss, we were tempted to be moved, which is saying a lot, since schoolboys reject all emotion and display it only at football and cricket matches, and never before adults who desire it.

The Boss talked on eloquently. 'There was I,' he said, right hand in the air, the fingers waving, 'there was I and Silver Arrow coming for me. What could I do? Turn and run, try to reach the fence? Not at all! He would have had me in a trice. He would have gored me from behind. Was I going to allow an animal to defy man? Never! Men, do you know what I did?'

No, we didn't know. We really didn't know. That he had escaped was evident, so we did not greatly care. But then again we were curious, highly curious. The old boy might have some good information to impart, something that would be useful if ever we were caught and cornered by a

wild bull in a small paddock. We shook our heads. We evinced interest. We seemed to wait upon his words. Ah! That was what he wanted. His strong ego rose to the occasion, and his oratory also.

‘Gentlemen,’ said Old Psych, ‘I stood my ground. Always stand your ground. I stood my ground and he came at me. I did not flinch or budge. When he should have rushed me and knocked me down, he didn’t. He stopped, spread his legs apart, tossed his head, shook his horns at me, and, like me, stood his own ground.’

‘What did I do. I tell you now what I did. Boys! Gentlemen! *I looked him in the eye.*’

Looking back over the years—as I often do—I swear The Boss spoke in italics. Anyway that is how it came to me, then, and now. He shouted in italics. His statement runs through my head like a refrain,

**I looked him in the eye!**

**I looked him in the eye!**

**I looked him in the eye!**

Old Psych went on. ‘*I looked him in the eye*, and he did, not move. I advanced slowly, still looking him in the eye. He did not move, but stared back at me. He gave a few attempts at tearing up the grass, but he did not move. Again I advanced, still staring him in the eye. Then it happened! It happened!’

Ah! What had happened? Now we were caught by this dramatist, this actor, this consummate demagogue.

‘Yes, gentlemen,’ said our headmaster, one hand high in the air, the piercing blue eyes turned somewhat upwards to the sun whilst still holding us to himself, ‘*I kept looking him in the eye*, and he stopped his angry antics, turned his eyes from me, slewed away, and in a few moments he was eating grass as though nothing had happened.’

We could visualise the bovine embarrassment, the lower-

ing arid slewing of that great head, and the return to normality under the fierce eyes of his natural Boss. We could scarcely forbear to cheer. It was a sort of standard of life for us youths not to show too much appreciation, and yet whilst we did not cheer, spontaneous clapping broke out, and Old Psych seemed genuinely surprised and not a little gratified. However, he had more to say, as always seemed to be the case.

He stood there on the platform, six-feet-and-three-inches tall, a fine stamp of a man, his blue eyes staring at us, his silver locks seeming to be somewhat of a halo, and delivered himself in solemn tones: ‘Boys, always remember in life, that be it man or beast who confront you, look him—look them—in the eyes. Do this and you will always succeed.’

I forget the remainder of his speech. There was a bit of moralising about how young men should treat prize bulls, and all stock for that matter; some words concerning the place of animals in the divine order for creation, but I scarcely heard them. Whether I liked them or not, ‘the words *‘I looked him in the eye’* were storing themselves away in the repository of my memory. I tell you this because part of the reason for my writing these stories is to confess the impact Old Psych had made on me.

We boys gave up baiting Silver Arrow, and he, for his part, seemed to make recovery and even become a good show bull. Frankly, I think he was a broken animal. Perhaps he suffered from some bovine neurosis: I do not know. I noticed that for the first time Hughie evinced interest in Old Psych. During the speech—at least in its first stages—he had had his habitual look of contempt for the headmaster, but it had changed as the speech progressed. I swear I saw something akin to admiration in his face. I cannot be sure.

Having told you of the remarkable event of Silver Arrow and Old Psych, I must now share with you the outcome of

his famous words, 'I looked him in the eye!'

It all has to do with demons. Fancy that! Fancy a man in these days talking about demons! Even so, I vouch personally for all I am about to say.

For some years, with my family, I worked in a foreign country. I will not worry you with the details, but amongst my friends was a man well-versed in demonology. He taught me quite a lot about the subject, and I have no doubt about the existence of such evil spirits. Undoubtedly they inhabit trees, lakes, brooks and stones. Folk are well aware of the demons which inhabit the local territory. They try to placate these unseen powers. They offer gifts, and they even worship them. The demons, for their part, are cruel, and even possess some of the human beings who are their worshippers. That is why amulets and charms are devised to protect against such occult powers. Witch-doctors do a great trade.

I admit that such talk is a long way from the healthy events of an Ag. High School, Old Psych and Silver Arrow, but then you never know. Demons infest animals as well as, humans and other objects. I am not suggesting Silver Arrow was demonic on that balmy day when he charged our esteemed Head, but then you never really know.

What I do know is that in this land where we live, I have seen a demon-infested dog. Home for a period of vacation, we were holidaying in the Blue Mountains in New South Wales, not far from Katoomba. We had beautiful autumn days and chilly autumn nights. During the days we roamed those ancient hills, and in the night settled before a roaring hearth fire.

When you have been in another land, there is always a period of settling in, or re-orientation, and I was caught in this process. Feeling a bit restless, I went for a walk on my own. The children were exhausted from hiking, and greatly

enjoying their hot buttered crumpets piled with blue-gum honey.

So I walked, my mind teeming with ideas. It was late evening, but not dark. That was when the dog confronted me. I could joke about it being a Heinz dog, composed of 57 varieties, but the matter was no joke. Undoubtedly there was Alsatian, Airedale and blue heeler cattle-dog in his hefty makeup. Maybe there was part greyhound also. Whatever its ancestors, it suddenly confronted me, and it was a terrifying experience.

What I am going to say now, you will undoubtedly assess as coming from the mind of a man obsessed with the demonic, and quite irrational. Let me say to you that evil powers seek to demean and debase man. I have seen it too many times not to believe it. I could tell you heart-sickening stories of human tragedy brought about by these wrong spirits. They are by no means the figment of human imagination. What they do, unseen by the human race, cannot be computed, and Western society is certainly not Wholly immune from them.

Well then, here suddenly was this great hound, standing in front of me, forelegs splayed out, Airedale lips drawn back in a yellow snarl, Alsatian fangs gleaming yellow, strong and massive blue heeler shoulders haunched and taut with power, but most of all the blazing yellow eyes that you have never seen in any true beast.

In a flash I knew what was happening. Normally very reluctant to call any situation demonic, I realised this one was an attack from the occult. I need not go into the reasons for it: I was simply confronted by it. I know-you will think I am in some fantastic religious imagination when I tell you that those eyes were of a demon. There is a look which does not belong to this world of humans, for whilst crazed human beings can look frightful in their lunacy, no human person ever has that strange demonic stare. To say the least it is

hideous: to describe it in its weird extreme is wholly frightening. Once seen, demonically possessed eyes are unforgettable. That is why you can always recognise the demonic having seen it only once.

Demon rage spurted from those yellow eyes, and the utterance of the animal was a horrible snarling cacophony of utter hatred. You could not call it barking. Barking is a decent occupation for a dog, but this attack was not canine. It was out of the depths of hell itself.

So it was there before me, tensed to spring and savage me, and I was frozen with fear. Even my mind was paralysed. I had the sickening thought, 'This is the end,' for I would have stood no chance against the possessed hound.

Then it was that memory flooded something into my mind. I saw Old Psych standing in the sunlight, firm on the podium, hand raised towards heaven, and his fierce blue eyes staring at us. In a flash I remembered Silver Arrow and his Boss. Now it did not seem absurd and stupidly histrionic. For me it was a wonderful visitation of memory. I could hear him declaiming,

'Boys, always remember in life that be it man or beast who confronts you, *look him in the eye!* Do that and you will always succeed.'

It is incredible how time seems to remain poised whilst a torrent of ideas and impressions flood your mind. It was so now: it could not have been seconds since this fearful beast was about to launch itself. I could hear the unearthly snarling and shrieking, and watch the dreadful eyes, but then, almost without thinking, *I was staring it in the eye.*

Inwardly my heart was pounding. Adrenalin was summoning all my nervous excitement and powers, and with it a great indignation swept over me. Why should a demon in a dog terrify me—I, who am a man? Why should I—a human being—accede to a low and malevolent spirit? The indignation rose higher and grew wider. So, *I looked him in the*

*eye!* Then marvellously and miraculously, it happened!

I saw the horrible light die out of the beast's eyes. Its tensed body slowly relaxed. It gave a bark, but it was an abrupt— even surprised—doggy bark. Whilst its tail did not wag, its drooped body told me the crisis had passed and the confrontation had now ended.

I watched it turn around and pad towards the nearest gum sapling. It eased its bladder against the small tree, and so covered its doggy embarrassment. It looked back as though to say, 'I don't really know what happened, but then it doesn't matter, does it?' He then trotted into his home territory. I also turned back to mine, where the last of the crumpets was being toasted on the open hearth, and I could taste—in my imagination—the globules of pure butter and the little rivulets of blue-gum honey.

I said nothing to the children, nor even to my curious wife, who can read all my moods, and insists on knowing what I am thinking. I knew I could share that later, and that she would understand.

I did, however, find my mind occupied with Old Psych and his unforgettable advice.

## *The Holy Feast*

I first met Andrew Aingers at Victor Harbor, down the south coast of South Australia. If you know the place, you will also know it is very beautiful. It is a kind of holiday and tourist resort, and although it has a fair population throughout the year, the number swells in summer until it is quite a work to contain the tourists and holiday-makers, but then they always manage to do it, and do it well.

I was living and working there when I met Andrew Aingers. He was a long rangy man, a man who gave evidence that he had been athletic in his younger days. And so he had. He could even now lay in a medium-to-fast bowl with the cricketing youngsters when they played recreation cricket on the green strip of grass near the Soldiers' Memorial. The kids would grin a bit at him—so old he looked to them—but after a time a surprised look of respect would come, and they would watch his bowling. It was still dangerous.

Aingers had been good at more than sport. He had been—and still was—a man of the cloth, a clergyman. He lived in one of the many units for senior citizens. Victor Harbor is well known for thinking about aged people: in fact it is a place for retired folk. Aingers was retired, but always seemed to be filled with energy. Much of his time was given

to reading, and you wouldn't think that would be much of an outlet for a man who wanted to do something, but then you could be wrong. Aingers—when he read—lived his life to the full.

His favourite author was Feodor Dostoevsky. In fact it was seeing him with *The Brothers Karamazov* that drew me to talk to him. I simply asked him, 'Do you read much of Dostoevsky?'

He gave me a long stare out of his lugubrious face, his large eyes penetrating mine, and he said, 'All of him. I read all of him.' He grinned, and there was nothing lugubrious about him. 'All I can lay my hands on. I can't remember when I didn't read him.'

I liked him for that, because I read the same writer, time and again. So we sat there in the sun, in the park that is fronted by a couple of hotels, the food places, and the bakery that has been there since Victor Harbor became a flourishing resort. It was drowsy in that beautiful autumn weather, and behind us lay the harbour with its deep blue and its white wispy tips under a vagrant breeze.

For a time we discussed the Russian writers. Aingers felt Tolstoy had some ingrained weakness, but after Dostoevsky he liked Tchekhov. He revelled in his simplicity, his ability to sketch a character in a few paragraphs. 'It's man these writers get to,' said Aingers, 'and they know man.'

I was curious. Being a bit of a writer, I had always been fascinated by man. I had done a bit of preaching in my time, and the thing that kept me doing it was the reactions or responses people had to teaching, especially if it was vivid. I kept thinking that Aingers would have been quite vivid in the pulpit.

Well, he was that. A few weeks later I heard him in the old Anglican Church. He was not only vivid. He was deft. He could weave a beautiful story, and weave it quickly. He kept his listeners' attention. I thought, 'This man is a born

storyteller. I must get to him.'

You could never just 'get to' Aingers. You couldn't use him. It was not that he was wary. It was just that everything in life had its place and purpose, and he didn't like entertainment for its own sake. I could tell that by what he read, and what he refused to read. So I let him come to his stories himself.

Come he did, and the stories often flash into my mind. Aingers is dead now. A sudden coronary occlusion, unattended, brought death, but then they tell me he looked quiet and peaceful, which is just about how I remember him in life.

The story which stands out most is the one I am about to tell. I think it best just to tell it as he told it to me, so that I can recount some of his own feelings and reactions.

The day he told it to me was a spring one, which was almost the same as the autumn day when I had first met him. It was sunny, drowsy and relaxed. There was a touch of vibrancy in it, a hint of coming new life, I had brought a Thermos with light brown tea which we were both drinking—without milk and sugar. We were back on Dostoevsky.

'He was a man of hope,' Andrew Aingers said, and he looked curiously at me. 'You probably know that they still debate whether the man was deeply religious or an atheist.' He grinned. 'I think he was a Christian person, but he doesn't fit our ideas of a Christian. He is in another category. I'd like to see a man like him in our Australian scene. You know, a man who writes with all his grandeur.'

He paused. 'Dostoevsky was a man of hope,' he said. 'He had a mystical understanding of Russia. He believed she was to bring a message to the world, and in some way save it.' His eyes shone. 'If Patrick White had become our Dostoev-

sky,' he said, 'then our literary scene could have been quite different.' We sat thinking about that great writer. Suddenly Aingers said, 'He doesn't have any hope, so he can't offer any.' He shook his head. 'We need hope more than anything.'

I kept thinking that Aingers himself might have been a man to give it. Maybe he was. I never did discover whether he had written anything. He remained quite closed on that score. Maybe he did write. Maybe it will all come out one day. It could be possible that the family has his writings: I don't know.

Now as a reader, you might think this long preamble is unfair as a lead-up to the story, but I thought you ought to understand something of the man who told it. His person has everything to do with the story. Even as a young man, he was a thoughtful person. The story is a gem; at least it is in my reckoning. It has more than a touch of the old master in it, the great Russian writer he so admired.

'In the days that I speak of,' said Aingers, 'we were working in a Sydney suburb. It was a waterside place, and we 'often had people off ships come in to us. They seemed attracted by our old church, which was true Gothic. It also had beautiful stained glass and leadlight windows, and the colours were rich and deep, quite medieval in fact. There was nothing stiff in their depiction, and they weren't gaudy. Visitors used to stand looking at them as though one of the saints, or maybe Christ himself, would talk out of the glass to them.'

'It was the latter time of the Great Depression. You must remember something of it. I never do forget it. It might do us good to go through it again, or another war time, something to make our present materialism be seen for its own • crassness. '

He shook his head, and said soberly, 'I don't really wish depressions or wars on anyone. It is just that human nature often seems to be different in great crises of the spirit.' He was away in some world of his own, some private thinking, and I sipped my tea, waiting for his return.

'There was this day,' he said, 'when I was getting ready for the Holy Communion.' He smiled gently. 'We had a strange tradition in our church. Some incumbent had introduced it many years before. It was the custom to place a loaf of bread, untouched, on the paten. Also to have a flask of wine, a small bottle really. I'd say it was strange because, as you probably know, no bread or wine was allowed to remain after the service. That meant the church wardens would have to come and assist me in consuming the elements.'

I had a vivid picture of the wardens demolishing the remaining elements. I think Aingers did too, because he smiled with faint amusement.

'I was in the vestry,' he said, 'and the wardens had attended me, and then gone into the congregation. I know we had five or six minutes before the organist gave me the cue. She always played Purcell: it had become traditional. So I sat down, leaning on the table. The bread and the wine were in front of me.'

'It was at that point that the man came in. I say "the man," because I never did get his name, nor did I see him again. I tell you he looked like a character out of Dostoevsky. He was ragged, weary and passionate. I knew he was intense. His eyes burned with something akin to madness; but then he was very sane. I suppose his look was just passionate.'

'I looked up at him, and he stared down at me. His eyes kept darting to the bread and wine, and then back to me.'

"I'm hungry," he said, "I'm terribly hungry."

'Well, he wasn't the only one who was hungry in those days. Professional men, expert tradesmen, and even clergymen were often hungry. Only those who have lived through those times can tell you about the hunger. Things are good for clergy these days, but plenty of us in those times were ragged. We had worn cuffs and collars. We had shoes with holes in them, padded with cardboard, and our shirts were frayed. Our congregations just couldn't pay us, especially at this waterside church. The docks were for the most part idle, so we also knew times of hunger. Certainly our food always had to be simple, very simple.'

'I can write you a note to the City Mission," I said. "They can help you."

'He was not hearing. His eyes were on the bread and the wine. Then he said roughly, "The Lord's Supper, eh?" I could tell by his voice that he was an educated man. Perhaps he wasn't even Australian by birth: I just didn't know. He said it again in a kind of meditative way. "The Lord's Supper, eh?"'

'I nodded; it was about all I could do. "You care to join us?" I asked him.'

'He put up a hand, an unwashed hand. His face had days of stubble on, just like the men who hung around the church at nights, waiting to sleep behind it, near the incinerator, those who drank cheap wine—"plonk" we called it—or who were metho-drinkers, who drank methylated spirits with boot-polish in it. They were sad days.'

'I knew he wasn't a derelict, but I knew he was at the end of his tether. I knew he was desperate, especially for food, but also for something else.'

'So for a time we stared at each other. Then he said brokenly, "Padre, just let me have that bread and wine."

'I understood his plight, but I was shocked. I was young and new at the game, but I thought my years in the place

had matured me sufficiently. I would sometimes be mistaken for a Catholic priest, and a sailor would whine and want me to hear confession of sins. I would tell them what I was—an Anglican clergyman—and they would still persist. Then after they had vomited up the most incredible filth, they would abuse me. “Call yourself a priest,” they would scream. “You ain’t a priest’s bootlace.” They wanted a guilt-cleanout and I couldn’t give it: not in their way. I had had plenty of those incidents, and others too. I had seen enough corpses in the streets—some suicides and some homicides—but no one had ever been like this man. I had experiences without doubt, but not of a man like this.

‘I said gently, “These are the elements for the Holy Communion. The people are waiting. They want to worship God. They want to be with Christ.”

‘His eyes were pleading. “Padre,” he said, “I haven’t had a meal in days. I don’t get the dole. I don’t get the relief. That’s all I can say.” Then his face became contorted. “For God’s sake!” he cried passionately, “let me have some food!”

‘I thought about that. I was tired from a day’s intense work, and it was hard to think. I leant again on the table. The paten and chalice were both made of solid silver, and I guess that mocked the man a bit. I looked at the full loaf, and the small flask of wine. I wondered whether I could give the man a bit of each, some bread and some wine, and save the rest for the congregation. It was as though he read my thoughts. His eyes pleaded, and his hands moved nervously. He clenched and unclenched them.

‘ “Go on, Padre,” he pleaded, ‘give a man a break.” ‘I was wondering what the congregation would think if I divided the food. They had never seen it that way. Even my explanation might sound weak to them. They were poor enough themselves, although, in the main, respectable. They had little money, but they knew about wheedlers and bludg-

ers and winoes and metho-drinkers. They would have thought I had been taken for a sucker. At that moment, if I had had money in my pocket I would have given it to him, but then where would he have gone, and I knew that wasn’t the point anyway. My mind kept slipping back to those characters in Dostoevsky, those nervous, mixed up, but passionate characters.

‘Then the man spoke. “Remember David,” he said, “remember what he did with the shewbread.”

‘I was stunned. How did he know that? How did he know David had taken the holy shewbread from the holy place and given it to his starved men, and had himself eaten of it?

‘ “Jesus said David was right in all that,” the man said, pressing his point. His eyes were on the bread and wine. My mind was running fast. I knew that somehow I could counter his argument, but then I couldn’t fulfil his need.

‘Something else was working in me. It was a strange sense of excitement. In a way I knew I had been forewarned of the event. There were times when suddenly all I had known seemed about to give way to a new understanding. It would be more than an insight. It would be a fresh revelation that changed the older revelations I had had. All that had been former understanding would be revolutionised by a newer, more radical unfolding of the truth. All my life it has been like that with me. It is not that I have changed my views, for they have remained fairly much as they were, but the new light has given them a different look and a new perspective.’

I was watching Aingers closely. He was talking in a way he had not previously done. I realised I was seeing him at heart—as he really was. I knew why he liked the Russians. I knew why he felt impatient with Patrick White, who, in his greatness, really held out no great hope for anyone. His brilliance as a novelist lacked this sort of understanding, even though

his sympathy with men and women was deep enough, and his characterisation superb. White lacked nothing in gift or ability. I kept thinking, 'Then where is White? What is he at?'

Aingers took up his tea, but he was sipping absently. His mind was back forty or fifty years. He looked at me. 'You know,' he said, 'the fellow wasn't cornering me. He had something on his mind, something quite deep, and I found myself responding. All this had only taken a couple of minutes and my ears were listening for Purcell and trying to understand the situation fully. I was thinking, "Jesus actually attacked the legalists of his day, the fine religionists who knew the law. He was telling them that it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath, and they were angry about that." Was I, then, just a legalist, and were the folk in my congregation really the same?'

Aingers grinned at me. 'They didn't train us in these things in theological college. I guess a man has to think some things through himself. This one was certainly a poser.'

'In a way I knew what I had to do. Of course I had to give him the bread and wine. In these days we would not think that to be a big deal. We have grown, more liberal in our thinking, but to give him the elements and then to tell the congregation was to have to explain why I did it, and what lay behind it. To do that meant I had to tell the people the new understanding that had come to me. I wasn't even sure that I knew what it was. I sat there trying to work it through, hoping the first notes of Purcell would be delayed.'

'I realised the man wanted food, but he wanted more than that, and suddenly the whole thing flashed in on me. Christ had created signs so that people could read through to God'. They could look at the sign, but discover the reality it signified. That reality was always God—God in action. Christ trod given a blind man sight, but not just sight. He had given him something beyond his sight. He had fed 5,000 ravenously

hungry people—just because they were hungry—but he gave them more. That is, if they would take it! Some stopped at the food and didn't go on to the most powerful of all bread, the True Bread. Not that bread from flour wasn't true. It was true for its own place, as common bread. The giving of the bread was what led to the thing beyond it.

'I knew then what this man was about. He was wanting to know if he mattered enough to be given the bread and wine, and not just some hand-out which didn't matter much. If I had given him some money to go and buy bread and wine, it would have been different. He would be back where he had always been. He was hungry: he was starving, but he wanted the bread and wine .because the giving was more than just bread and wine.'

'I pushed the bread towards him, and undid the flask. I poured wine into the heavy silver chalice. He broke the bread apart, tore scuds off it. I noticed that he muttered over the meal before he began eating. He sipped the wine, as though drinking might not be good. He didn't wolf the food. He seemed to be eating in 'another's presence. He scarcely looked at me. When he did, there was contentment in his eyes.'

'All the time I was wondering how I could explain the matter of signs, how I could explain that the man himself was a sign to us all, and that we ought to read the sign and not stumble over it. Then I heard the first notes of the Purcell voluntary and I knew it was time to go. I had the practical problem of leaving him alone in the vestry, particularly with the pure silver vessels, but I knew I had to risk that. I knew to lock them away would have taken away the bit of royalty he was knowing, the unusual glory that he was sharing. It would have been to take the icing off the cake.'

'I gave him a nod and a smile. I knew he wouldn't be there when I got back. ! also knew the address or sermon wasn't going to be all that easy.'

Aingers grinned at me, took his tea-mug into his hands, cupped it there affectionately, and then threw his head back, draining it. There were some tea-leaves, and he nibbled at them before he spat them out. Around us, everything was golden, and above us, blue. I was waiting for him to finish, to round off the tale, but he wasn't. He was just sitting there, looking down at the well-mown Kikuyu lawn.

I said to him, 'Andrew, what happened? Was he there when you returned? Did the congregation understand your act? Did they get the point? What about the silver?'

He looked keenly at me. 'What about the man, eh?' he countered. 'What happened to him?'

After that he just nodded and said, 'He was gone. He had finished the wine and bread. As for the congregation, I don't know whether they understood or not. But then again, they may have had more than an inkling of what it was all about. But of course it was the man who mattered. It was the sign which counted.'

At the back of my mind I had been thinking about the silver vessels. 'What happened to the silver vessels? Did he take them?'

Andrew Aingers never told me. He just stared at me thoughtfully before he grinned. 'Now what do you think happened, eh?' he countered. He seemed to go into a private world, all of his own, but the grin was still with him. As I said, he never told me.

## *Over the Hill*

MARION was making cakes when Rosamund and Terry came racing down the passage. She could hear the slither and clatter of their feet on the long polished hallway. The well-known gleam of that long, silent passage glinted for a moment in her mind, a vision of years of silence, staring, polished boards.

She was making a cake for Tom. Marion's cakes were famous. They were light and fluffy and delicious, because she knew how to whip egg whites into curly meringue consistency, and to heat ovens to just the right temperature until the soft yellow mixture in the cake tins had risen with heat and good management to high, rounded sponges, waiting only for thick cream filling, or maybe, jam.

Her egg-beater whirled and stopped. For a moment she stared into the near distance. Yet her eyes did not see the garden with its last quivering cineraria, or the cool green shape of the lawn, for the shining passage might have been a hallway down which she crept to years filled with old sorrows, quick and long apprehensions, chasing each other like shadows, barred across with sudden golden spasms of joy, which were of old memories, days before the war.

And now, again, after all these years, she was making a

cake for Tom. Around her were sugar and eggs, while flour spattered across the table like dry snow. The butter, warm, and ready to mingle with the mixture, was a still pool in a saucer. All this was food.

Food! How he must have dreamed of it. How his mind must have hungrily searched the past, longingly caressed old memories of winter nights, a table laden with rich foods, eggs, brown and gravied meats, clean white rounds of bread, food and more food, and with it all, the gleam of china, the smiling reflected faces in spoons, the laughter of them all—she and Rosamund and Terry and himself.

So must he have dreamed in those prison days, hating the small yellow men who kept him from fulfilment of his dreams. Now it was no dream. He was home again. Tom was with them, looking at Rosamund and Terry; looking at her too, but—what a look! Her eyes were wondering as they remembered. No food, no thought of food, nothing could drive away such sorrow, such unexpended sorrow and sadness which lay in the eyes of the returned man.

The footsteps were almost at the kitchen now. Steadfastly she beat back the rising tears. He had laughed; yes, he had laughed, but his laugh had been surprised, then wondering, and then somehow empty. It had echoed across her shivering nerves, and because she could not fully define its quality she had been puzzled, and gradually little cold lines of fear had spread outwards across her being.

When he had held her in his arms there had been sudden peace. She felt the joy surge through her, and suddenly those years did not matter. They were quickly, richly fulfilled.

She had whispered to him, 'Tom, Tom. I only want your happiness. It's all I've ever wanted.'

He had looked at her then, and some gleam of hope had shone in the shadowed background of his eyes. It was as though he had been searching, perhaps expecting to find

something, and here he might almost have found it. Then the look had died.

Rosamund and Terry burst in. They screamed at her, 'Mum! Dad's smiling.'

She stared at them. Within, her heart was racing, and suddenly it gave a leap. The three stood silently for a moment. The troubling secret was out; they were united in its expression, a conspiracy of knowing, and now, perhaps, happiness.

Then Terry grasped her arm, tugging. 'Come on, Mummy, come and see Daddy smiling.'

He propelled her along the passage, and all the while her heart was singing and she was crying, 'He's smiling. Tom's smiling.'

As they neared the room, the two children pulled her to a standstill. Rosamund put a finger to her lips. Terry was grave. Rosamund's voice was sweetly confidential, hushed with the importance of her secret.

'Daddy was frowning and staring, and then the sun came into the room, and he looked out at the hill. You remember, Mummy, you told us he said he would come over the hill... ' Her words were tumbling out in excited ripples, her eyes shining with the joy of her message. '... well, he looked at the hill and... and then, he smiled.'

She stood at the door. Tom was in the large lounge chair by the window. The sun was perhaps behind the clouds. She could see him, his head was resting upon the cushioned back, his whole being relaxed. His fine, long fingers were upon the arm-rests. There was no movement in the closed eyelids.

As she stared, a golden stream of sun burst into the room. It bathed Tom in a gentle late afternoon beauty. From where she stood, she could see the hill, moving away from the cool green of the lawn and the darker green of the trees.

'He is happy,' was her first thought and the joy came tumbling in cascades of foaming happiness. Every doubt for the past and the future was suddenly cleansed, and she and Tom were one again.

'Sh... Mummy, don't wake Daddy. He went to sleep when he smiled.'

She turned to the children. Her voice, when she spoke, was hushed. 'Run along, dears. I want to be alone with Daddy.'

They tiptoed from the doorway and she forgot them. 'Over the hill,' she had said, and now she knew that he was happy. Some sort of peace flooded her heart, peace which flowed in like the soft glory of the afternoon sun.

She would not wake him, of course. The fear in her heart was gone. Only for a moment had it lingered, but she knew now that it was better this way, to smile looking towards a hill, and then to fall asleep. The years rushed up at her, quick promenade of what the future would be, and yet she was not afraid.

She stood beside him, watching his gentle features. The old sad years had fled from him, and now he was at peace.

A gentle whisper from behind almost startled her. She turned and saw the children, fingers to lips. 'Don't wake him, Mummy,' said Terry. 'He might stop smiling,' said Rosamund.

She nodded, because she could not speak. Then she motioned them away. As they pattered down the hallway and away into the silence, she bent over Tom, slowly. The sun flooded into her tears as she whispered, 'No, I won't wake him.'

Then she kissed his face, his face which by now had gone cold, with a last final coldness.

## *Red Dress, White Cockatoo*

THE little group stood around Jock, their old and gnarled. *guru*. No one had appointed him as their *guru*. It had just happened. They had crowded into his Northern Queensland tropical paradise, his *ashram*, the retreat where they could meditate and think. Jock welcomed them warmly enough, but he made them work, and he'd have nothing of drugs and alcohol. At heart, these disciples of his were rebels within society, but he handled them very well. He was gentle enough, but firm also. So they respected him and listened to what he said.

Jock had put his hand into a nesting box of young budgerigars, and right at this moment one of the nestlings was clinging to his hand, trembling slightly, wondering whether it ought to take flight or not. Behind the group, birds whistled, sang, chattered and chittered. From other aviaries, parrots called, whistled and piped. They all had an eye for Jock.

Sometimes, for no explainable reason, the bird utterances died to a strange silence. In one of these moments, they were all looking at the small bird. It was timorous, yet brave. It trembled slightly, but it was not afraid of the bird-lover, the horny-handed old Jock. Jock for his part never ceased to

marvel at the newness and freshness of a fully fledged budgie. Their lines were so smooth, their plumage so complete. Perhaps no eyes were so rounded, so limpid, so freshly beautiful.

'You're a wee thing,' he said affectionately, smoothing its head with a gentle finger. The fledgling quivered, wondering whether it ought to trust its instinct and take to flight.

Jock looked at the group. For him, they were a class of confused pupils, truly human, yet so much needing love and help. He said, 'People love pets, because such things are dependent upon them.' He frowned. 'A pet means nothing to its owner unless it is dependent.' He was still looking at the warm and quivering bird.

'Pets need bonding,' he said, 'just as a wee babe needs to bond to its mother the moment it comes from the womb.'

His rough finger continued to smooth the clean outlines of the young budgie. 'This little thing needs bonding,' he said. 'It wants a parent, just for a time. That's why folk like to get budgies straight from the nest.'

He turned to the group and grinned. 'Human beings are sentimental about birds,' he told them. 'Some want all birds to be free.'

A murmur went around the group. They had wondered why Jock kept birds in aviaries. It went against everything they believed. They believed in what they would call 'the natural.'

Jock said, 'Do you know that birds live much longer in cages than in the wild? That's because they don't have the same tensions—fear of predators—and they always have food. Birds are creatures like us: they want affection. They love their owners even more than their food.' When the group looked a bit sceptical, Jock said, 'I'll give you a wee demonstration after a time, but first see what this mite will do.'

The 'mite' suddenly flew from his hand, shot upwards,

then in despair fluttered to the ground. It sat there, looking up. at Jock and trembling.

'Just watch it,' Jock said quietly. Suddenly the bird opened its wings, flew upwards, almost madly, landed on a perch and clung there, panting.

'Give it a day,' Jock said, 'and it will do everything.' He pointed at another bird, also very young. 'Look at that wee thing,' he said.

They looked, and began to laugh.

'It's a born clown,' said Jock. 'Watch its antics.' Antics they were. The small bird jiggled itself around a perch. It cavorted, and then curled itself around its support, almost dislocating its body. It seemed to like its audience. The group had received its communication, and there was the applause of laughter. The little bird tried even harder.

'Now let me show you,' said Jock, and he went into an aviary of rosellas. They were of different colours and names, but all were rosellas. They began to land on Jock, on his shoulders, arms and head. Some of them nibbled at him without biting.

'You see,' said Jock. 'I give them nothing. It is just that I fed them when they were wee things, and so we have a love relationship.'

Someone said in a surly voice, 'No bird that is in a cage is ever truly free.'

'Now that is very interesting,' said Jock. 'I was in a prisoner-of-war camp for some years, and I have never been freer than at that time. Maybe the old couplet sounds corny to you, but it was real enough to me:

Walls do not a prison make, Nor iron bars a cage.

He looked at the group. 'You can be more in prison out of one, than in one. Anyway, sometimes. It takes a lot to achieve freedom.'

He turned and looked down the track, between the lush tropical palms and trees. They could see a young woman dressed in red. Against this brilliant foil was a Sulphur-Crested cockatoo. It was on the arm of the woman in red. It raised its beautiful crest, opening and closing it, raising it and then lowering it.

The group stared silently, captured by the picture in spite of themselves. Ordinarily they were very intense young people, rigidly committed to an alternate life-style, and indeed a counter-culture. They hated the old culture and all it seemed to stand for. This included families and friends.

The sight of the young woman was beautiful and pathetic, and they did not know why.

Jock was staring at the young woman. 'Freedom,' Jock was almost muttering, 'is being both dependent and independent. When you trust your Maker and depend upon Him, then life makes sense. At the same time, you need to develop what you have been created to be.' He paused, looking around, but mostly at the girl in red. 'You are free when dependent, free enough to accomplish something.'

Some of them were hearing, but now, almost as though mesmerised, the group was drifting towards the woman and her cockatoo. They came to an opening in the trees and paused, watching the spectacle. The girl was trying to get her bird to fly. He just wasn't flying. He wasn't even trying. She had him on her right arm. Suddenly she shook her arm free and the bird fluttered down to the ground.

It was a tragic moment for the bird. Its fall to the ground had not been gracious. It had dropped heavily on to the ground, and its head doubled under as it hit the earth. The young woman was in tears. 'Oh, George!' she was muttering. George, the parrot, seemed bewildered.

Strangely enough, everyone was tensed. As though, to break the tension, one of the men said, 'Would you like to be back there again, Jock—back in prison?'

Jock shook off the question. 'No need to be,' he said. 'You can be prisoner enough without a prison.' Then he said gruffly, 'As some of you should know.'

There was a silence as they thought about that. One young woman flushed with anger. Even so, her eyes were on the woman, the one who was comforting the parrot. She had picked it up, and her head was over it, crooning-

'They've had that parrot for years,' said Jock, 'and they've grown very close to it. Maybe too close.' When all stood in silence, Jock added, 'Maybe the bird had to be more than just a pet. It's become a kind of symbol of love and affection.' When no one spoke, he added, 'George was a confidante- He listened to all their woes and sorrows. They used to talk to him when they were alone with him. Maybe Mum would say the things to him that she should have said to Dad, and whilst Dad never actually talked like that to the bird, he would stand for periods just staring at it. In his own quiet way he communicated with their pet, and of course their pet with him.

'Then there were the children. On their own, they would talk to George as a kind of brother. When George said nothing they did not mind, but when he did they were delighted. George was a good talker, but then he was also a good listener.'

Now the group wondered at Jock as they did at the girl and the parrot. She was lifting George into the air, above her head, dropping him, and slipping away herself so that the bird would have height, and not drop on to her. There was again that sudden silence from all the aviaries, as though the avian world was watching the drama.

They were all watching, hoping the bird would fly. It had only fallen to the ground, and was faintly flapping its wings on the grass. Jock reached forwards and picked it up. The cockatoo's crest was rising and falling, opening and closing. Jock held the bird against his chest and began to feel its

muscles.

'Atrophied, they are,' he said softly and sadly. 'Too long in an enclosed space.' He looked at her. 'Must have been like this from the nest.'

When she nodded dumbly, he said, 'Maybe it will never fly.' He looked around him and saw the sympathetic eyes of the group. It was the bird they were sorry for, and not the girl. Jock was looking at the girl.

'That doesn't mean George isn't happy,' he said. 'He's a most contented bird. Right now he's just a bit bewildered.'

Perhaps there's something of the preacher in every Scot. At heart, Scots are religious. Jock, however, did not sound preachy. 'We all live in some kind of security cage,' he said, 'and we don't call it a prison. George loves his cage. He's adapted very well to confinement. He would never think of himself as a prisoner.'

He looked at the group. They stared back, glad of their *guru*, and insecure without him. Most of them were still scared of life. That was one of the reasons they banded together.

Jock said simply, 'It is just that we have different security cages. We only feel safe when we are in them.'

They knew what he was saying. This parrot, in some way, was like them all. He was unhappy with his new freedom. He wanted to be back in his cage.

The young woman in red had George on her arm, taking him gently and lovingly from Jock. The bird rested there, glad of a respite from the bewildering happenings of the opened world. The girl herself was thinking of the recent death of her mother, who had loved George. In a way, George was a link for her with that vanished mother. Also she was thinking of the break-up of the family that went with that death. She herself, in a way, was now alone. George represented something to her, some kind of parallel

in relationship, but then he couldn't fly. Was that an omen or a parable, or something? She did not know.

Suddenly it happened. Before the eyes of them all, it took place. The parrot's crest opened, and so did his mandibles. He uttered a raucous cry, as though remembering something most startling. He lifted his wings, took off from the arm, and went sailing across the open space towards the trees. He could not clear the trees, so he flew into one, gripping a branch tightly, and staying there.

The birds in the aviaries seemed to take the happenings as a cue. They went mad with songs and whistlings, pipings and shriekings. The budgies indulged in constant chattering and chitterings. The doves moaned as though with sweet pain, and the great black cockatoos screamed harshly. Some of the group felt their hearts pounding, and the girl was caught between terror and joy.

A miracle had happened. That was what they were thinking. Jock said, 'A miracle has happened!'

Up in the tree, George screamed his excitement. Then he shouted 'Hallo George! Hallo George!' The girl raced across to the tree where he was. She was not fearful of losing him. If he flew away that would not matter. She was just so glad for her bird.

Jock, looking on, muttered to himself. 'A ruddy miracle. A miracle in many ways.'

He was thinking of the liberation of the girl, but he switched his gaze to the group. He could see something new had broken through to them. A few of them were bewildered, but others were tasting the emancipation of the great white bird. It seemed, almost, like a personal symbol and promise to them.

George was looking down at his mistress and shrieking to her, or at her, or something. She, for her part, was looking

up at him with joyful eyes. The tears were streaming down her face. She was oblivious to the crowd, even to Jock, yes, and even to the shrieking of the excited black parrots. She was not even aware of the tears which were flowing.

She kept staring up at him, with some kind of personal rapture, and all the time the tears kept streaming down.

## *The Little Light*

WHEN Ivan Stavanoski first moved into our valley, people were somewhat suspicious. It was not that they were against foreigners as such, but because the man was Russian they could only think of the Bolsheviks who were at that time ravaging Russia. I have to tell you that I wasn't even born when the Bolshies were doing their thing, let alone of an age when I could formulate my ideas of Russkis. As a boy, I used to read a comic in which wild-looking men with unkempt hair sneaked around with globular bombs which—in most cases—were smoking at their fuses. For me, it was a frightful thing to live in Russia.

Ivan Stavanoski always fascinated me. Sometimes I would think of him as a noble emigre, other times as a serf who had found his freedom. I wove wonderful stories around him, but I was never game enough to talk to him—that is, until I was in my teens, and then nothing would keep me away from his poultry farm. Not only did I like the noble lines of his Rhode Island Reds, the Black Orpingtons and Australorps, but I loved the smell of the incubator and brooder rooms. I loved the cheery, cheeping chicks and the lusty sounds of laying hens and proud roosters. I also loved his fish ponds, his grunting pigs, his few pet sheep and

calves. I think it was Ivan Stavanoski who impregnated a love for the land in me.

Not, of course, that we did not have our own farm, our dairy cattle which were pure-bred stock, our stud pigs, and also our crops. I loved those crops, especially the maize and the great cattle-pumpkins we grew between the rows. Where have all the cattle-pumpkins gone these days? Where are all their varieties, shapes, sizes? What of those large round ones in which a child could nestle when they were opened? Ah, as they say, 'They were great days.'

I used to nestle at Ivan's feet, and look into his dark eyes as he told me tales of his beloved Russia. Sometimes his eyes would grow sad and gentle, sometimes fierce and stern, and at other times it would just be a longing look that they held. What a feeling man was Ivan. He certainly was very fond of his farm, even fiercely proud of it, but I always sensed that his first love was Russia, or rather its land, the rural people, and the customs as he had known them. Many a time he would shake his head sadly for the cruel revolution which had changed all that.

He had carried many of his customs to Australia, and one day I will write a whole novel about them—so much material there is—but in this little story I want to tell you about Ivan's little light. But before I tell you about Ivan's light, I will have to tell you about Stef—that is, Stefanos Roundabout.

You might think that, having the name 'Stef,' this other person was also a Russian. He was, however, very, very Australian, and crude as they come. I never heard a man swear in the way that Stef would curse. Mind you, there was nothing unclean in his swearing. Just straight, strong blasphemy, except on Sunday when his language was pure enough. Somewhere he had Scottish ancestors, and somehow the message had passed down in the family that it didn't pay to swear on Sunday. Sunday was the Sabbath,

and the Lord was particular in noting infringements of rules on 'His special day. Otherwise Stef skilfully used swear-words in a fashion that left him without a peer. He could turn nouns into adjectives, adjectives into adverbs, and adverbs into nouns—and so on.

It doesn't really matter, except that Ivan disliked Stef's swearing, and in a way it was that which set them at loggerheads. As they say in modern jargon, they were ambivalent, they had a love-hate thing going all the time. None of this that I write would have reached print except for Ivan's little light, his continuously burning night lamp, his perpetual flame, so to speak.

Often I would ask Ivan to explain why he lit his lamp every evening, just at the time of dusk. His explanation was simple. In Russia, the population lived without the benefit of electricity or even gaslight. What is more, the abject darkness of night could be terrifying. Leave alone the question of footpads, thieves and murderers, there was the simple matter of getting lost. You might think that folk would know their way home, even in the country, and perhaps you would be right. Without doubt the Russians were as canny as their Australian counterparts in the rural areas, but it was the snow that made things difficult. Only those who live in snow country know how the first fine fall of powdery snow blots out every landmark. In the quiet world that snow brings with it, the last light of day is eerie, a greenish whiteness that obscures the known things. Then let the darkness fall, and one is in a lost world. That is to say, a world in which anyone can easily be lost.

You needed Ivan to tell the story in order to enter into the fearful loneliness of a snow-covered countryside. The path you once knew would be hidden for months. The old familiar things were erased. You felt terror in this beautiful new world, this world of the unknown. As a boy, I would sit, head between hands, eyes rooted on Ivan as he told me the

stories of lost people. How one had been found within six yards of his home, .but stiff as a board in the deep snow. Others had just been frozen in their tracks, far away from habitation, or quite close. Many nights I failed to sleep as I visualised those frozen ghosts staring lifelessly into that Russian wilderness. They troubled me deeply.

'Now,' Ivan would say, like some severe schoolteacher, 'now you can understand why I light my little lamp. In Russia we all lit our lamps. We lit them so people in the darkness could make their way to help. From a long distance they would see the little twinkle and they would journey to it. They would be saved.'

'No other significance,' I asked, '—like a "bright light shining in a naughty world"?' I was studying Shakespeare at the time.

Ivan was a dignified man. You could not joke with him about these things. He took his relationship with God very seriously. His look was enough to reprove me. 'Of course the little lights have great meaning,' he said. 'Of course they are lights to show the way through the darkness.' He would stare at me and say, 'There is no such thing as the religious and the non-religious. They are all one.' His voice would become almost haughty. '*God* is all in all,' he would say, 'hence all things are His.'

As quickly as possible I would steer him back to the present, back to the matters which were immediate and practical. 'Now tell me,' I said, 'how could anyone get lost in our valley? Why would anyone need your little light?'

You could never break through Ivan's Russian dignity. 'It is not good to make the joke,' he would say, stiffly. 'The light is for all, whether they care to see it or not. One does not ask regarding the usefulness or not. One just does that which is the custom.'

That sort of an answer never satisfied Stef. Indeed, his eyes would gleam at Ivan's hauteur. With a wink at me, he

would say slyly, 'I reckon you must use a lot of kero with that little light of yours. I reckon you must spend quite a bit on it in a year.'

Still in dignity, Ivan would reply, 'It is not the money that matters. It is the custom.'

'Pretty silly custom, if you ask me,' Stef would say. I omit the monotonous repetition of the great Australian adjective, and the not-so-monotonous variety of other swear-words. They simply interrupt the flow of conversation as I remember it.

'I'd give up that custom,' Stef would say blandly. 'I'd become more Aussie if I were you, young Ivan.' Ivan was not young, and Stef's patronising tone would irritate him.

This Stef knew well, of course. I would watch the anger rise in Ivan; Suddenly, when he could stand it no more, he would rise in dignity, indicate the door, and point the way out to Stef.

'Please to be going,' Ivan would say in high rage. 'Please to be leaving me when you come with your laughter at great things.' His English would deteriorate with his rise in anger.

Stef, for his part, counted these little reactions as personal victories. He would stand up, and shake his head. 'You Russkis have some queer ideas all fight,' he would say, 'but one day you may get civilised.' He would scarcely refrain from giggling as he passed the frozen dignity of Ivan.

'So long, mate,' he would say, and both Ivan and I could catch the note of affection in his voice. That is what would make Ivan explode when Stef had gone.

'He is the very great tormentor,' he would say in his cold fury, and I would try to get his mind off the subject.

I would ask him, 'Did you ever see anyone helped by the little light?'

I knew he had, and then his eyes would dance, and he would shout, 'Of course! I know the times when people were helped. Now you just listen to me.'

That was what I would want to do. I would drink in his tales of strange happenings, people—good and bad—who needed the guiding light which twinkled and glowed from the Stavanoski home, and, for that matter, from other homes. Reluctantly I would have to leave Ivan and his little light, and trudge my way back to our fairly stolid and mediocre farmhouse. I would wish we had some curious customs, and, thinking back now, it seems that perhaps we did. Perhaps Ivan saw much about us that was strange, and even bizarre. On the other hand, maybe we were just bland to him—I do not know.

Now I must tell you the event of Ivan, Stef, and the little light. I scarcely know how to begin the story because it all seems so improbable. At the time, it appeared probable enough to me, because I knew both Ivan and Stef, but something will be lost in the recounting, something about its reality.

My Mum had sent me across to Ivan to get a couple of dozen eggs. Most of the eggs were to be used in the soft, moist saffron cake that was her specialty. She would make it in a huge baking dish, and we would fight for the scrape before it was cooked, and the crusty parts of it after it came out of the huge fuel-stove oven. Also eggs were needed for our farm breakfasts; you know, steak and eggs, bacon and eggs, fried tomato and eggs, and the like.

I was dreaming a bit as I made my way to Ivan's house, and in fact I must have approached pretty silently, because he did not hear me. He was talking to himself. In fact he was weeping, and this made me very curious. Ivan typified the self-sufficient man to me, but at this point he was far from self-sufficient. He was pretty close to moaning. Also he was speaking to God, a matter that made me feel a trifle uneasy. I felt I was intruding upon a fairly personal relationship.

Ivan did not know I was standing there.

'It is Ivan, Lord!' he called out, as though God would not have known, or might not have heard. When no answer came, he said again in a voice laden with grief, 'It is I, Ivan Stavanoski. It is again the matter of the little light.'

If the Lord had deigned to reply, then I heard no answer. Perhaps the conversation was more in the mind of Ivan than in reality. Maybe that is where he heard answers. I do not know.

'Every night for these many years,' said Ivan, 'I light the little lamp. I know it is a good thing. I know these Aussie people do not have the custom, but then we always have had the custom. Doubtless, Lord, You gave us this custom from the beginning.' There was a silence, either for Ivan's own contemplation, or the answer of the Lord.

I felt deeply for Ivan. Now he was moaning, weeping. 'All I ask of you, dear God, is that you give me the little sign, the sign that it is good, and that you would have me continue the custom.' I could now hear him beating his hands together. 'Never do I get the sign. Night after night I fill the little lamp, and I light it, and these people who are my neighbours never say a word.' There was a moment of silence, and then a voice filled With exasperation. 'Except of course that Stefanos. He is the wicked one. This we all know from his blasphemy. This we know because he makes fun of the little light.'

I could sense that Ivan's grief had deepened. I was about to steal silently away, when his monologue recommenced.

'Oh, Lord,' he was saying, 'it is not that I regret the money that is spent. Even in this Depression I will keep lighting the lamp, but it is the scorn I cannot easily accept. This Stef person is most irritating. Much of what he says seems to be true. No one cares for Ivan and his old custom. They laugh at it. The expense is foolish.' Now he was sobbing, and I felt deeply embarrassed for him. I knew foreigners could get this

way, but I had never witnessed such a case. I was going to return without the eggs, but youthful curiosity gripped me.

'Oh, Lord,' he was saying, 'just give me but one sign, that it is good I keep lighting the lamp.' For a moment he went silent, as though awaiting an answer, and it seemed none came, for when he spoke there was a change of voice. I could distinctly hear the anger. 'Very well,' he was saying, and his voice reached a high pitch, almost a shriek, 'very well, I shall not light this lamp tonight.'

I was awed. I knew that the Stavanoskis for many centuries had lighted their little lamps, come wind, come weather, come poverty, come prosperity. Even to my pagan mind this sounded almost like blasphemy. Because I felt my presence might be discovered, prove embarrassing, and Ivan's cup of humiliation overflow, I slipped back along the path a little and began to sing one of my favourite songs, a song by which I knew he would identify me. I heard a cough and a splutter, and the door opened to a lighted room.

'Mum wants a couple of dozen eggs,' I cried boyishly. 'Mum's gonna make a saffron cake.'

'A saffron cake,' Ivan muttered. 'Two dozen eggs.' He busied himself taking the eggs from -a crate. He counted them out, took my money, and then as though I would understand he suddenly asked, 'This is no sign, hey?' 'Sign!' I said. 'Sign of what?'

He muttered to himself, and then said loudly, 'No, it is no sign. Here, boy, give these eggs to your mother.'

I took the eggs and floated into the darkness. Ivan remained silent, and I imagined that the monologue—or dialogue—was now finished. Of course, I could not have been expected to know that this was the night of all nights.

The story as I tell it from this point must necessarily be in the third person. I was not there to hear or see what hap-

pened that night. Mind you, everyone agreed that it was a strange night—all that darkness as though there had been an eclipse of the moon, when in fact there had been no eclipse. It took me some time to put the story together from all the pieces that I heard, both from Ivan and Stef and comments given by some others. Yes, it was indeed a very strange night.

I suppose the only thing about it that was not unusual was Stef's visit to the local pub. Along with his cursing, Stef imagined that a drink or two was extra proof of his own strong manhood. In fact, Stef—when you really knew him—was a very shy man, and a bit of a dreamer. I firmly believe he was an idealist who—like most idealists—had never achieved his dreams. For this reason he would let his anger go in cursing, and would demean beautiful customs and traditions such as Ivan and others held. It was his way of hiding his disappointment, and hitting out in envy at those who had partly achieved their dreams and ideals.

This night, guilt had nibbled at Stef. He knew he should not have ridiculed the Russian. In fact he had a high regard, if not a deep affection, for the emigre. He had genuine admiration for Ivan's farming, which was, of course, good. Ivan was an excellent host, and 'sported the best coffee in the district. Also he had a fund of exotic sweets and pastries, known, I understand, as 'bakemeats.' Stef's mouth would water even at the thought of them. Now guilt was gnawing at him because of the way in which he had ridiculed the Russian's perpetual light. True, he had only intended to tease his friend, but he had noticed that Ivan was deeply hurt. In his heart he tried to rationalise the matter, but when he could not win the argument he fell to somewhat moody drinking, the result of which was that he stumbled home, dropped on to his rough couch, and fell into a troubled sleep.

When he woke, all was dark. When I say 'dark,' I mean

*dark.* It was deadly dark. I knew it to be dark by contrast with other nights. In those days I would often awake during the night and go out from our large house to look at the countryside under pure moonlight. I would often imagine the sheer whiteness to be the snow of Russia, and would dream stories in my mind until my southern identity became purely northern. This night there was no place for such dreams. As I said, the night was deadly dark. I joke: it was a deadly night shade. Ha! Not a star to be seen, some kind of cloud formation brooding over us all, and hemming in the upper light. With that, of course, was the blackout.

Blackout! We never knew the word in those days. The electricity just did not fail. 'No one knew on that special night that the power had failed. To me, the night had a sort of apocalyptic mood about it, a mysterious brooding. Not, of course, that I knew the word 'apocalyptic.' I just knew that down in the maize paddock the shapes and forms of the cattle-pumpkins would be weird and tortuous. I felt strange excitement seeping into me.

With Stef, it was different. He had suddenly awakened, as though into a different world and age. Darkness gripped him, clutched at him, so to speak. It seemed an oppressive weight above and around him. He was swathed in it, as though it had become suddenly and heavily personal. He felt a sense of terror, a left-over, perhaps, from his bout of drinking. He rolled off his couch and on to the floor. Feeling a bit stunned, he clawed his way up to a sitting position. Then he stood, completely disoriented. A small panic seized him, and instead of going for the Petromax lamp, he blundered on to his small verandah. Again, everything was cocooned in the same even darkness.

It was then he cried out, 'O Lordy, has the end come?' You may laugh at such simplicity, but a man who will swear prolifically during six days a week and not on the other—the first day—is a man with a conscience, and a man with a

conscience problem. What had been a nibbling, and a slightly gnawing conscience, suddenly evoked streams of terror. Stef's mind seemed to dart backwards and forwards, hither and thither. The words with which he had teased Ivan kept running around in his mind. He felt his way along the verandah, whimpering, gripping the rails, and making little movements in terror. Finally he stumbled off the verandah, down the steps he had made from block timber. His eyes were searching for Ivan's little light.

There was no little light to be seen. Only a night of solid darkness was about him, enclosing him.

'Oh, my God!' he cried. 'Oh, my God!'

He tried to orientate himself to Ivan's poultry farm. His limbs were weak with fear and probably also the deleterious effects of alcohol. Even so, he set out grimly to find Ivan, and to look—if Possible—upon the little light. He knew it must be out there—somewhere. His fuddled mind shuddered to think of the dread alternative. The alternative, of course, was that he must be blind. Holding his hands to his eyes was no help. *He could not see them!*

Ivan, for his part, was in no less a horrified state. It was not that he thought the end of the age had come, and that God was about to arraign mankind for judgement. Ivan knew that was not the case, but he too sensed the darkness to be unnatural, an immediate visitation upon his sin of doubt. Passages kept coming back to him about a sinful generation asking for a sign. That thought bore down terribly upon him, bringing horror with it.

If you think I am exaggerating, please cease thinking that way. Ivan and Stefanos were really both of the same ilk. They would never believe that life and the world are limited to the five senses and the three dimensions. Both were romantics; both were incurable mystics. You might say they

were superstitious, but Deity was no myth to them, no lofty and distant personal power. He—God—was ever so real; ever so close, never leaving humanity to its own devices.

Ivan was moaning. ‘Oh Lord,’ he was saying, ‘I sought a sign from you. How wicked I have been! Why did I not leave things as they always were? Why did I want You—at this time—to do what my fathers had never asked? They lit their little lights and never questioned The Wisdom.’ Ivan tossed and rolled on his bed, shaking with human guilt and terror.

The answer was simple enough. Ivan could have taken his box of matches and gone out to light the little lamp. In his better moments he would have understood the Divine Mercy, but now he was trying to expiate—by contrition—for his great sin. He felt that if he suffered deeply enough and long enough, that somehow it would pay for what he had done, i.e. for not lighting the little lamp. He did not know that his friend Stef was blundering about in the unnatural darkness, tripping over dry timber in the paddocks, barking his shins, and even falling over logs in the long grass. How was he to know that his blasphemous friend was sweating with terror, grunting and groaning with inner fear, his body scratched and grazed from contact with scrub and briars and other hostile things?

Stef’s sense had guided him through all these obstacles towards Ivan’s shack. He stumbled, fell, picked himself up, and finally reached the hillock. There was no sound from his blue cattle-hound. Probably it was silent from fear. Not one hen squawked in the thick darkness. All things combined to maintain the mood of terror. Stef was sure that he alone was left in the world, and his bemused mind was brewing dreadful imaginings. At this point of his shock, he heard the wail of Ivan Stavanoski. At first his skin prickled, but then that sensation was replaced by a growing joy.

Ivan was wailing, ‘O Lord,’ he was saying, ‘how greatly I

have sinned! I am asking you for the sign, and that is a wicked thing. Now you are punishing your Ivan. Not only do you not give him the sign, but you send the darkest night ever. This is the sign of my sinfulness.’ His voice was rising to a crescendo. ‘Oh! Oh! Oh!’ he was crying. Then he was sobbing, ‘There is no way back.’

Stef, it seemed, had been cured of his blasphemy. Not one such word was mixed with his great cry. ‘Ivan,’ he was shouting, ‘I am coming to you, but there is no light. Why is there no little light? What have you done?’

Ivan was not only an intelligent man; he was a man of certain wisdom. In the darkness he saw it all. In a flash—so to speak—the light reached him. ‘Then it is a sign,’ he shrieked. He began to dance around on his verandah, to leap with great Russian ability, like any dancer from the Bolshoi Ballet. His joy knew no bounds.

Stef was tempted to use his old invective, but desisted. Instead he cried, ‘Light your little lamp, for God’s sake!’

‘The little lamp?’ Ivan shouted. ‘Oh yes, the little lamp!’ He scarcely fumbled as he searched for the matches. A sharp spurt of light, a rattling on the lamp of the chimney, and a small gold flame flickered into being.

For Stef it was most heartening to behold it. For Ivan it was the restoration of a great tradition. He wasted no words as he rushed back into the kitchen. Stef could hear the rattle of the poker in the grate of the wood-stove. He smelled the smell of rekindled red-gum. He sensed that the next smell would be that of strong Russian coffee. The Aladdin lamp was also being lighted, and then there was the clink of cups and saucers. Good old Ivan was turning it on!

Stef struggled in, scratched about the hands, face and arms, and sweating in no mean fashion. He collapsed on the old rocking chair, his arms limp on the sides of the chair and his legs splayed out in front. He was breathing heavily, but something of a glow was beginning within. He had been

brought back to life, out of the darkness of an apocalyptic terror. He was a human being again.

In front of him, Ivan was going as close to cavorting as Stef had ever seen him. He was rushing to and fro, backwards and forwards. He was pulling biscuits out of a tin, he was unwrapping exotic bakemeats, and he was stirring the rich coffee grounds in the saucepan over the regenerated fire. He was scarcely containing his excitement as he muttered phrases in a mixture of Russian and southern Australian.

Stef minded none of this. He knew himself to be one with his emigré brother. 'Hurry up with that coffee, mate,' he was saying. 'If ever a man needed strong coffee, I am the one.' He knew he had no need to add comment.

Ivan was a man delighted with the sign that had come to him, *gratis*, from above. Even so, Stef was in a generous mood. He was expanding, you might say, even beginning to rock gently in the chair.

'Just you look here, young Ivan,' he was saying, 'you had better keep that little light going, d'you understand? We need that little light, especially on nights like this one.'

Ivan was nodding. With one hand and spoon he was stirring the good grounds of fragrant coffee, and with the other he was indicating heaven and all it contained.

'Oh yes,' he was saying, 'we will keep that little light going all right. Oh yes, my dear Stef, it is always needed, as you say.' His smile became gentle almost seraphic. 'Always it is needed, isn't it?'

He kept stirring the coffee.

On the hill opposite, I could know none of this, but seated on the verandah of our farmhouse and staring across, at Ivan's place, I found something very cheering in the flicker of the little kerosene light.

## *The Boy with a Birthday*

THE boy's name was Godfrey. For all that, it might have been Charlie, but these two names don't have the same ring. Godfrey is on a somewhat higher rung. It also fitted the fact that his father was a professional man, and not a tradesman. In those days—long ago—it was a lesser thing to be the son of a tradesman, i.e. not to be the son of a doctor, dentist, lawyer or such. He was unaware of this.

At the age of six years he was given a birthday present of six Nestle's penny chocolates. His idea of high bliss was a penny chocolate. His mind never ran to having more than one chocolate. With his four brothers and four sisters, he received weekly Saturday money, also known as 'pocket-money.' He never connected the idea of money with a pocket. Next door but one to their rather posh home was a corner shop. He could never put his money into his pocket. It was hot in his hand until he had expended it in the corner shop.

The shop was a bit of an anomaly. Their posh house was also in a posh suburb. At six years he wasn't quite aware of this: he thought all human creatures were equal. He knew nothing about snobbery. As for the shop being 'commercial,' in contradistinction to his father's rather fine home—well, the thought never entered his junior mind.

But then he was not one for distinctions. He was quite vague about many things which people around him thought distinctive. For example, when he was dressed nicely for school, with polished shoes and garters to his long socks and a bow-tie to set off his chubby face, he always managed, ere noon, to have lost at least one garter, to have scraped the polish from the stuffed toes of his shoes, to have his trousers loose around the waist, a trifle of shirt to have escaped from the rear, and to have his bow-tie either in a pocket or to have no bow-tie whatever. Bow-ties made him feel restricted, and he had a suspicion that they were a bit sissy. Somewhere—though vaguely—he had caught the idea that a long tie was masculine, a bow-tie was sissy, and no tie was freedom!

Anyway, at the age of six he was given these six Nestle's penny milk chocolates. He never forgot that day. Since his birthday was in summer—January to be precise—his early rising was to a kind of natural glory. First there was his garden to be visited. His father had allotted each child of the family a garden plot. Each was to be tended properly. This arrangement instilled a love of the soil in him. Before long, he was a budding farmer, even without knowing it. Others of the children conceived a dislike and disdain of horticulture, and for years insisted they would have plain concrete around their houses when they got married!

After a time—i.e. after marriage—they all reverted to cultivating gardens. It was, of course, learned behaviour, but then they knew it was part of the functional order of the universe. At times they even had guilt when they neglected gardening.

He loved his garden. The pride of it was a six-foot-high dahlia tree. Being only small, it was to him some tropical rarity. He would tremble with delight when it kept growing like some special beanstalk of the legendary youngster Jack. His excitement knew no bounds when it flowered with its

pale mauve flowers. He would often weep with the joy of it.

This morning he also wandered among the ripe plums. Anyway, some of them were ripe—the Wicksons and the Narrabeens. Their juice was exotic. He could tell, without pressing the flesh, which plum was ripe and which was not. Early peaches were also ripe, especially Duffey's Special. He often wondered who Duffey was and why his peach was special, but he loved the fruit for itself.

After a time he wandered to see the fat Japanese goldfish in their low pool, lazily sucking air through their bulbous lips on the edge of the water-lily leaves. Really, at heart, he was moving towards the aviary of his brother Francis, where the redheads shrilled their reedy witness to each other and their wild brothers and sisters invading the Queensland box and Western flowering gums. Also the zebra finches—greatly infected with St. Vitus' Dance—would zip backwards and forwards in a never-ending flight and dance, burping out their characteristic and inimitable calls and songs. They fascinated him: he thought there was no finch as beautiful as these.

For him it was a beautiful world. He could sit and watch the budgerigars who had their own kind of private ecstasy as they chirruped and chortled, Whistled and shrieked, often with their eyes closed, as they butted their beaks against one another. It was a happy world all right, and today his happiness was legitimate because it was his birthday. Each child, on its birthday, lived in a special world. This day had privileges no other day was granted. The family recognised and acknowledged this splendid fact.

So, at breakfast he was greeted with a warm kiss by his mother, who was of pure Irish descent. His less effusive father—of pure English descent—gave him a nod and a cultured grunt. Thereafter the children solemnly lined up at the servery and received their porridge. Because Father was present, there was little scuffle. Mother always tried to keep

him pacified. Only years later did the boy realise that so many children was quite a pressure on Father. He really loved his dentistry rather than his fatherhood. The latter seemed almost like an unfair imposition on him.

The boy thought he was omniscient, and also omnipotent. There was nothing his father could not do. Even at six years, the lad had gathered the fact—through his father—that this father was the most special dentist in all the world. His fillings were everlasting, his bridgework superb, and his dentures the most snugly fitting obtainable in a world where most dentists made fairly loose-fitting sets of false teeth. What the boy thought was that his father could read every thought of his junior mind, and perhaps that was true since he—the boy—had the kind of face that told everything!

The boy, though loyal to his father, preferred his mother. At least until his sixth birthday. He had always found her affectionate, congenial and kind. He had only one problem with her, and that was her mother, his own grandmother. She—the grandmother—had wrinkles. He was horrified by wrinkles. One of the great dreads of his life was that when Grandmother visited them, she would kiss him. Somehow he managed to endure this torment, but one day she had said, 'Now, Goddie, you must kiss me.' To the end of his life he would never forget having had to kiss the wrinkles.

The problem he had with his mother was that one day she might have wrinkles. He knew his own face would betray his distaste no less than his horror. That, however, was the only unease he had about his mother. Not in his wildest dreams did it ever occur to him that one day he might have wrinkles. Had he thought so, then life would have become a continuing agony.

Very quickly in the piece, the family—those older, and those younger than he—had discovered that he was a curious boy indeed. They delighted in his early egocentricities, like forgetting to come to meals, being preoccupied with

people who passed their front fence, and asking the kind of questions which sent the family into shrieks of laughter. It all seemed to bewilder him, this pinpointing of his idiosyncrasies.

His mother was the only one who comforted him. In her quiet and precise manner, she inserted into his mind, some where, that he was not an idiot, but, rather, was a special person who had some kind of unusual future, and he must work determinedly towards this. She had specially devised 'pep-talk' times, in her bedroom, where she compensated for their laughter of ridicule with a lolly or two, which he would hold in his hands firmly whilst she delivered her homilies, most of which he did not understand. When he wandered off, not wanting to disclose the favour of the lolly, he would feel that object in his chubby fist. It would be warm and moist, and he would flee into the privacy of the shrubs and devour it with satisfaction.

Today his mother was to appear in a different light. It was to be his first great life-shock. In fact the shock would never quite leave him. Many times in his life he would go over the whole matter, slowly, thoughtfully, trying to find some hidden clue which had been missing for him at the time of the event.

His young unwrinkled aunt—sister to his mother—was the one who gave him the six penny chocolates. She arrived on his birthday. He had a suspicion that she liked him. That he liked her was never in doubt. She would come with Sargents' meat pies for all the children. What a large brown paper bag that was! Also she would bring fat Fijian bananas, all curved and golden, and they loved her for it.

He loved her for herself. He thought she was the most beautiful woman in the world. The way she would look at him, curve her face in a smile, look out of those large blue eyes, and show astonishment at his least accomplishment; it made him feel that life was a very good thing indeed. Even

the 'religion' which she was supposed to 'have' never greatly disturbed him. She was so full of fun and joy that he was sure no angel could outshine her.

She had brought him six small chocolates, in a brown paper bag, and he grabbed them with tremendous joy and ran to the shelter of his pittostrum trees, a small grove at the farthest end of the garden, way beyond even the vegetable garden and orchard. He carefully held the chocolates as he clambered up the tree which was specially his.

Once seated, he opened his treasure and gazed at the red and silver of the chocolate wrappings. A dream he had never dreamed had come true. He was about to taste these delicate things.

A voice came to him. 'Goddy! You come down straight away! Mum said you have to come up! You have to share the chocolates with all the children!'

Each staccato sentence was like a stabbing in his vitals. He could not believe his ears. It was his birthday! It was his special day! Every present was his own, his *very* own! He could have wept.

Not without a battle did he give up. 'It's my birthday,' he shouted, 'my very own birthday! This is my present. Auntie Flo gave them to *me!*'

The protest made no impression. 'Mum said you have to bring them, and divide them amongst us all.'

Perhaps it was a ruse. Perhaps this sister of his was deceiving him. Suspicion had not been part of his life, but now it began to intrude. One part of him could not believe his mother would do such a thing. No mother who was a true Mother could have such injustice!

Another part of him was thinking that life, after all, was different from what he had imagined it to be—warm, useful, intelligent, always consistent with the greatest happiness to and for every creature. Perhaps mothers were not perfect. Perhaps terrible things could happen, even through a mother.

As yet he did not know the word 'injustice,' but the idea of it was worming its way into his very vitals.

He hated descending the tree, especially in the demanding eyes of his self-righteous sister. She was implying that somehow he had unlawfully gotten six chocolates and was going to consume them with dreadful greed and he had better hurry up and confess his evil. In fact, her eyes were only on the chocolate and the incredible good fortune which had come the way of the family.

The boy was not up to sums of division, but common sense told him that nine into six left little chocolate for him. It was that thought which brought rage. It brought grief, the grief of injustice, and this is the most bitter-sweet potion that the human race can imbibe.

He imbibed. He became lofty. He achieved a sudden high dignity. His chubby hand proffered the brown paper bag with hauteur.

'Take them,' he said, 'and give them to Mum. I don't want any.'

His sister was far from sensitive. She just thought he was silly.

'Oh!' she said, wrinkling her nose, 'you're daft.' She took the bag, stared at it, then turned on her heels, running up through the orchard.

'He doesn't want any!' she was shouting. 'He doesn't want any of his chocolates.' He could hear the scornful glee in her voice.

Tears were close to the surface. Now they would come and torment him for his idiosyncrasy. They always did this. He wondered where he would hide.

He chose another pittostrum. It was a thick leafy one. Here they would not see him. So he hid.

After a time his eldest brother came, the one he scarcely knew. He was the kindest of them all.

'Goddie!' he demanded, 'Goddie, where are you?'

The boy remained silent. His brother exclaimed something in impatience.

‘Come and get your chocolate,’ his brother said. ‘There is a whole one for you. We just got a bit each.’

The boy’s soul froze within him. They had actually divided his chocolate, his present! He had thought it all an awful dream, but now this matter had become a fact.

One chocolate! He could not believe it. His mind was racing.

He thought that he understood why. His mother had principles. He knew that. She had drummed them into his mind in those special sessions. Sitting on the bed, she had been a preacher in her own rights. The boy had listened to preachers, and knew them to be far and away above his own simple little head.

He knew his mother’s world was a strange world. Her mother was Presbyterian, and her father had been Roman Catholic. In fact he still was. Goddie had some vague idea that Grandfather had argued with the priest, especially when he had said the children were all bastards. Grandfather had actually hurled the priest from the house.

After that, no one went to church. His mother had a strange world in which were angels, little children who on dying turned into angels, and his mother showed great interest in such things and such a world. The boy, sitting in his pittostrum tree, knew that her world was very strange: indeed, very very queer! It had driven her to this decision of hers to divide up even a birthday present.

His six years had not equipped him for such thinking. That was why he fumbled it. It slipped away from him. Although he did not consciously know it, he sensed that justice is what matters to man, most of all. So he clung to the idea without fully comprehending it. He stayed frozen in silence to his branch.

His brother was impatient. ‘I’m leaving your chocolate

below this tree,’ he said. ‘I won’t search for you. You’d better come and get it, or the ants will.’

A red poker of agony stabbed the boy. ‘The ants!’ The thought added to his indignation. Mothers and ants! The world was dreadful.

He wanted to burst into tears. It was all so unfair. Then his brother was speaking. In doing so, he sounded very much like Father. His brother had great dignity. He never called Mother ‘Mum.’ He shuddered at that. He always called her ‘Mamma.’

‘You might as well eat your chocolate, young Goddie,’ he called out. ‘I’m going now, but I want to tell you I do not agree with Mamma.’ That’s all.’

Then he was gone, retreating up the orchard—tall, dignified, and quite thoughtful.

Goddie watched him go. He suddenly knew he loved this brother. That brought a flood of tears. At first he would not come down the tree. He would stay there, forever. He would die. Then they would be sorry. His young mind could even envisage falling down out of the tree—dead! How sorry they would be.

It was the image of his mother which made him uneasy. He tried to puzzle out what had made her divide his present, even if he had been allowed more than the others.

Then he remembered his brother’s words, ‘I don’t agree with Mamma.’ His brain began to hurt with thinking. If only his brother hadn’t disagreed with his mother. Then he would know that he was one against a whole world. But his brother was with him.

He was puzzled. After a time he climbed down, cautiously and with dignity. He found the chocolate in its brown paper bag. He climbed back up the tree. He sat with the bag in his hand, still puzzling, still hurt, but finding solace in his brother’s words. Almost absently he took out the chocolate.

Its wrapping was beautiful, and he felt the smoothness of

the silver foil. He came to the chocolate, with its delicate thinness and its delicious promise of taste.

He ate the chocolate slowly, there on his throne of pittostrum branches and leaves, and one part of him was still in anguish, whilst the other part was coming to terms with the differences of view within his family, and so, perhaps, in all the world.

He ate the chocolate very thoughtfully, knowing this was his birthday, and that he was growing up. Perhaps he was growing very quickly.

Even then he did not think about wrinkles. Wrinkles, in fact, were the last things he thought about.

## *The Strange Case of Caraby Quinn*

THE story of Caraby Quinn is indeed a strange one; in fact Caraby Quinn himself was a strange one. I can remember standing in the line when we were at the Recruiting Depot in the Royal Showground in Sydney. Quinn was the man ahead of me. He said little to anyone. If anything, he seemed a bit nervous, but I reckoned he was just withdrawn into himself. In that detail I was right, as events proved. Not that it was easy to come to conclusions about Quinn, because when you made them, and they became firm, then Quinn would do something normal and natural, and you would be uneasy at the way in which you had assessed him.

Even at that time of recruitment, when you thought you had him summed up as being quite unaware of you, he would suddenly smile and look at you as though he thought you were a bit special, even though he had only just met you. I remember him saying to me, 'Do you like birds? I mean, do you like parrots?'

That was a strange question, but I nodded. My mind wasn't on parrots. It was on the mad German dictator and Europe falling around our ears—so to speak.

‘Yes,’ I said, humouring him, ‘I like parrots all right.’ ‘Nothing wrong with parrots,’ he said suddenly. ‘They’re great in fact.’ After that he lapsed back into silence, fell back into himself.

Caraby Quinn never looked to be much of a soldier. He was about medium height, a bit thin, and mostly absent in his stare, as though he was not with the present moment. His mind would be somewhere else. He rarely seemed keen about the drill, or the food. He would stand listlessly, staring into space, or receding into himself.

On that recruiting day he signed his life away to the army, but I made an inward bet that they would never get him— not Quinn himself—and in that I proved to be right. They gave him his giggle suit, and his uniform, and all the gear that is standard army private issue, but it made no impression on him. Nothing seemed to make much impression.

It was my luck to become Quinn’s corporal. I was discipline proud: I was smart at drilling the troops. Also I was a Physical Training and Boxing instructor. I liked that sort of thing. Also I liked soccer.

Caraby Quinn didn’t take to drill as a duck takes to water. Oh, no! He ignored drill. He also ignored PT exercises. He wouldn’t lift a hand to box. He was late for nearly every movement. He would have come to attention when the others had gone on to ‘Stand at ease!’ and then he would be standing at ease when the others were ‘standing easy!’

But the crazy thing was that Quinn was not consistent. One day he would get it into his head to drill well. He would jump to it, and even be a fraction ahead of the other troops. He would be quick to salute, and his salute would leave you a bit breathless. He would jump to attention, change quickly to ‘At Ease!’ He would move smartly when the section wheeled. ‘Right wheel!’ ‘Left wheel!’ ‘About turn!’ He

could do it all right—if he wished to. He could also have an eager gleam in his eye.

One day I said to him, ‘Quinny, how come you can drill well some days, and other days you just don’t seem to be with it?’

He gave me one of his long and disconcerting stares, and then said, ‘You said you liked parrots, didn’t you?’

I told him I liked parrots all right, and he just stood there a bit amused, and having a grin to himself as though it were a private joke. Then he took my hand and shook it warmly. ‘I’m glad you like parrots,’ he said happily. ‘I’m real glad. I tell you that. I’m real glad.’

After that he wandered off. I have a habit of scratching my head when I can’t understand something. Often, when Quinn was in my sights, I would scratch my head. Quinny was .a strange character, without doubt.

After all these years, I look back at Quinn and grin quite a lot, but my aim is not to give you a full biography of him. It is just that the guy really intrigued me. To tell the truth, I used to make quite a thing of analysing people, and had the notion that I was never wrong about anyone.

Well, I was wrong about Quinn; quite wrong in fact.

We had plenty to do on that Malayan Peninsula in the eleven months from our landing at Singapore till the Jap troops’ coming through from Thailand to Alor Star. Alor Star was where they first met the British troops.

Before all that happened, we were up and down the Peninsula. I was mad on riding motorbikes. We had Harleys and Nortons, and would break in the army-green machines until we were fairly racing on those coiled bitumen strips of road. Also we bivouacked in the jungle. Once we went over a hundred miles down a river on rafts, and I picked up

typhus from drinking the river water. That was painful.

Most things were fun then, but I never saw Quinny fun it up. Not that he was morose or cynical about things. He just seemed to like being withdrawn from us, into himself.

In action he was quite a character. He would have brilliant and lucid periods. We got to like him, especially his intuitions. He intuited very well. He intuited planes a long way off. He intuited that the Japs would come this way, or that. Intuition would take up his whole being, and he would concentrate deeply on the dangers that threatened us. Not that we had a lot of contact with the Japs—some of us—until we got on to Singapore Island, fighting a retreating action which went by the euphemism of ‘strategic withdrawal.’

We sometimes lost Caraby in those last days of fighting. ‘I’m trapping!’ he would shout, and he would go off through the rubber plantations. He wasn’t supposed to do that. He was supposed to remain with the section, but he would go off and we wouldn’t see him for hours. In those hours we would move quickly—backwards! But still Quinn would find us, and we knew something had happened. Quinn never told us about it. Somewhere in that strange brain of his, he kept stories that would be fascinating to hear. I tell you I would have given a lot to get at Quinn’s stories, especially his intuiting and trapping stories. God knows what really happened in those weeks on the Island.

I was wounded in action and rehabilitated in the prison camp hospital. I won’t tell you about that. Much of it was ghastly. Then one day I saw Quinn. I saw him with a bunch of others from the Mental Ward. He was walking along with that stiff and unbending way that mental patients seem to affect. Head bent forwards slightly, eyes looking at no one, hands hanging at the sides, partly tensed, partly loose—a queer combination of withdrawal and refusing to come to

terms with things about them. The term ‘zombie’ is an unkind one, and I won’t use it for Quinny, but that was what he made me think of.

I was limping away—with a splint on one leg and a walking stick in hand. When we drew near the bunch of men, I said, ‘Hullo Quinny!’

He didn’t even look at me. He passed like a skinny human ghost. His eyes didn’t turn to me, but I could see they were sunken back into his head like dark pools. I shivered a bit.

‘They never talk,’ said the orderly who was seeing me around the place, teaching me to walk.

‘It’s funny,’ he added, ‘you hardly ever see them. They rarely let them out of the ward for a walk.’

He peered after the squad of men with sick minds. ‘The whole place is barred up,’ he said. ‘The Japs made sure of that. They’re scared one of them might get out.’

We struggled on. I was panting a bit. The orderly said slowly, ‘You know, the Japs almost reverence those guys. Maybe they think they have special spirits in them, and are sorts of gods. I’m not sure; but they avert their eyes from anyone who is crazy.’

I thought about that. I thought about Caraby Quinn and his intuiting. I lay awake that night, trying to work it all out, and in the end I gave up, and joined the fellows lining up at the rose-bowl—the urinal—whilst they got rid of their excess fluid from their beriberi. I supposed that they had to keep the rose-bowl inside the Mental Ward for the sake of the superstitious Nips.

The Mental Ward wasn’t far away from where I slept. For the most part it was silent, but occasionally a day would happen when most of the patients seemed disturbed. You would hear shoutings and cryings. Sometimes there were sobbings. One or two who had betrayed their mates under cruel beatings from the Japanese would wail out their guilt. Maybe they were a bit morbid, but it always made sense to

me. I would listen to hear what Quinny might say, but only once did I ever hear his voice.

I used to listen because I wondered what happened when he went off on his own for hours during the fighting. The one time I heard Quinn shout made my blood run cold, for although I knew it was Quinn, I was sure I had never known that particular Quinn. Not the one who was shouting the words with unholy glee. It was all about trapping, and it evoked horrible visions of him trapping unwary Nips and doing them to death with a bayonet. In fact, I have even hesitated to write this particular paragraph, because I think killing men—even the enemy—is a pretty horrible thing, and nothing is gained by recounting it.

That great day came when Lord Mountbatten came into our camp. He had his beautiful wife with him. He put her up on a mess table, and shouted 'Meet the Missus!'

Meet the Missus!—why, she was a doll, and we hadn't seen a woman in three-and-a-half years. We just adored her: we worshipped nervously from afar.

Mountbatten looked pretty good in his commando gear. We admired it, but wanted none of it. Most of us were broken people. Some were too scared to go out through the gates to walk about in the new freedom. They slunk back from those opened gates, almost crying.

The curious thing about many from the Mental Ward was that they suddenly came to life, as though nothing had happened in three-and-a-half years. Somehow they had wangled it so that they remained oblivious of the events of those years. Now something got to their minds, and they emerged quite cheerfully. They were thin, but happy. Even Quinn was happy. I saw the twisted grin on his face, and he recognised me and said, 'Hullo there, Goddie! It's great being free, isn't it?' ! was a bit stunned by it all.

He went home on the same hospital ship as those of us who had been given sickness priority. It was a beautiful ship, all gleaming white, and it could do twenty knots. Quite fast. In no time we were in Sydney as the first returning POWs from the Far East. The crowd went mad, ticker-taping, screaming, bands playing, shouting, crying, singing, and altogether welcoming us. Quinny was in the same ambulance as I was, and he didn't mind the girls jumping up and hugging and kissing him.

A few days earlier, while we were still on board ship, I had found myself sprawled next to Quinny in the sunshine on deck. Unexpectedly, he had spoken. 'It's really something to be here, eh!' he had said, and I had marvelled at his unusual lucidity.

'You O.K. now?' I had asked.

He had winked at me. 'I've been O.K. all the time.'

I had looked at him like a stunned duck. 'You're kidding; you haven't been O.K. at all.'

He had grinned. 'Most of the time I was O.K. Occasionally I had bad memories. They weren't so good.'

He had seemed satisfied, however, and had gone on grinning. 'It was a good place to hide out.'

I had sat on deck a long time after he went below. I was trying to figure out Caraby Quinn. I kept telling myself that it was I who had been the nut-case—not Quinn hiding away from the stress of the camp, being looked after in a special way, free from the Japanese, and having his own thoughts. Three-and-a-half years of incarceration had virtually passed him by. I kept thinking that the man was quite cunning.

Before we reached Sydney, Quinn had gone back into his own mind, withdrawing, closing the curtains to hide himself. He didn't grin or wink again. He seemed to be preparing for his home situation—Only when the girls clambered into our ambulance did he temporarily revive. He took that event quite well, indeed very nicely. When we reached the Repatri-

ation Hospital at Concord he was back in his cocoon. I had a suspicion that he liked his cocoon, and in fact found it very cosy.

It was years later that I met Quinn again. He was living down at Miller's Point in one of the Harbour Trust homes. He was on his own, and completely withdrawn. I knocked on his door in the line of business I was doing, and he scarcely looked at me.

'I don't see people,' he said. He was quite apathetic. 'May I see the missus?' I asked him.

He shook his head. 'There's no missus,' he said, 'and there never has been.'

It must have been some characteristic gesture of his that made me recognise him. 'Caraby Quinn!' I said.

He looked at me with disinterest. 'That's the name,' he agreed. He looked stolidly at me. 'Someone tell you I live here?' he asked.

'Nobody told me,' I said. 'I just recognised you. You were in our unit. You were in Changi.'

He stared at me, his mind still away back of him. Then he peered. He suddenly became startled. 'Goddie!' he said, 'Goddie the sergeant!'

A faint grin came onto his face. 'Fancy Goddie coming here, to this place.'

I gathered he didn't think much of Miller's Point.

We sat and talked. He let me make the cup of tea, as though he expected others would be a help to him. He also told me about his T.P.I. Pension for war neurosis. I thought, 'War neurosis, my eye!' I remembered our talk on the beautiful hospital ship.

'Quinny,' I said, 'would I be right in saying you don't have a war neurosis?'

He was temporarily startled. 'No neurosis?' he asked. He

seemed to be thinking about that. Finally he made a decision. 'No. Maybe it isn't neurosis, but I'm pretty sure I've got some sort of thing. Maybe a bug.'

'What do you mean—"a bug"?' I asked.

He smiled faintly. 'Over there in Malaya there were all sorts of things going. Some people call them "demons".'

I felt my blood freeze a bit and something crawled up the skin over my spine. 'Demons?' I asked suddenly. I coughed over the cup of tea.

'Some used to call them "bities",' he said. 'You know, they come and bite you, and you are never the same.'

He didn't seem to have much time for psychiatrists or therapists. 'They don't really understand,' he said. 'They don't know our world at all.'

I felt a bit uncomfortable. After that burst of conversation, Quinny retired into himself. I washed up the cups, and let myself out. Quinn didn't even nod.

Curiosity took me back there. Indeed I often used to visit Quinn, seeing he was in my area. Also I had that chronic 'old soldier' syndrome which makes you ferret out your old friends and acquaintances to see them and talk. Maybe some of us oldies are still looking for answers to the problems raised in those years: I'm not sure.

Sometimes I could draw Quinn out and at other times nothing happened. I continued making the cups of tea. On a few occasions I took pies and pasties and had lunch with him. I wondered whether he ever cooked for himself. He seemed quite healthy, even if a bit morbid.

What I am about to tell next really sounds as though from the realm of the impossible and the absurd. In fact you will tell me I dreamed it up. No way! The crazy thing happened, 'and it all began with Charlie our galah.

What is a galah? It is the most prolific of all Australian

parrots. Also it is very beautiful. If it were not so common it would be looked upon as having rare beauty. It is made of gentle pinks, greys and white, all rather pastel in tone.

Parrots, of course, are humans of small size, in feathers. They thoroughly understand the human mind, although they have a certain contempt for it. Their own mind is much more astute. They think more quickly. Also, they never let you know what they are thinking. Or they do, with some sort of contempt!

Our Charlie had brought up our children. He demanded their attention continually, and got it. They rather paid court to him. If they laughed and joked or patronised him, he would fix them with a steely stare. You might even call it a glare. It brought them back into line quite quickly. Occasionally he would take a quick nip at them, possibly to keep them in order. One parrot specialist told me that the nip is a sign of affection: in which case our Charlie must be quite a loving parrot.

When I asked Quinny to come up to our rather posh North Shore suburb, I never imagined a miracle would take place. Certainly not through a mere galah, but then is any galah ever 'mere'?

Caraby Quinn had no means of transport. As I could not imagine him getting a bus or a taxi or even a train, I picked him up one Saturday morning. Our children who remained unmarried were divided in their activities between football, hockey and tennis. They scarcely gave the time of day to the withdrawn old soldier. He looked at them and blinked, after which they were gone. My wife was very kind to Caraby, and he responded a bit to her.

Then I took Caraby out to the back, where I have hundreds of budgerigars, finches and doves. I have only one parrot, Charlie the galah.

Quinny looked at the budgies with deep interest. His interest was less for the finches and doves.

Then Charlie spoke from behind him. "Ow are yuh?" he asked in a chortling kind of voice.

Quinny's eyes shadowed as they often did when people asked him that. He turned and saw Charlie. His hand flew up to his head as though he had been shot between the eyes. 'Oh, my God!' he said.

Charlie surveyed him with thoughtful eyes. "Ullo! 'Ullo! 'Ullo!" It was as though an old friend had walked in.

At that point I didn't know how much of a friend. I didn't really understand.

I won't say Quinny tottered away from the bird, and back into the house. But it was as though he had seen a ghost, and it had drained him of feeling. He sat down on a couch, and my wife brought him some orange juice. Caraby Quinn drank it in a gulp and then asked for coffee. I hadn't heard him ask for anything before that morning.

After a time he said, 'You like parrots?' I had a strange feeling because it brought back memories of our early army days. I remembered that Quinny had asked me that question then, and more than once. It had seemed so stupid because irrelevant.

'I guess I do,' I said.

He muttered something to himself and sat staring at the empty orange juice glass. Finally he gathered himself. 'I never thought it could do that,' he said. When I looked puzzled, he said, 'That parrot: that galah. It unnerved me.'

He saw my bewilderment. 'I suppose I locked myself away, not wanting to see things like that.'

'You mean things like Charlie the galah?' I said.

'Yes,' he said, 'like Charlie the galah.' He sat silent for a moment, and then said, 'I used to have a lot to do with galahs.'

When I drove him back to Miller's Point he seemed different. When we went inside his Harbour Trust terrace house he seemed lonely. He looked around at the kitchen-

dining room as though he were seeing it for the first time. When I left him he seemed abject and even forlorn. That was when the idea first made its way into my brain. It was a strange idea, but maybe we needed strange ideas for fellows like Caraby Quinn.

I rang Dennis Carmody, the parrot breeder. He lives just out of Bowral and has 120 aviaries. I think he has every variety of Australian parrot. He won't keep exotics—imported parrots. He admires them but will not keep them. Dennis had given Charlie the galah to us, as little more than a fledgling. He had instructed us in how to train the galah, and we had carried out his orders faithfully. We had trained Charlie on Dennis's system.

I talked to Dennis over the phone—STD—for quite some time. I yarned to him about Caraby Quinn. Dennis was ex-army, fighting in the Middle East and Pacific Islands areas. He also had a few decorations. After the war he had done a bit of general farming, but gradually his heart turned to birds—parrots mainly. His hobby became his life and livelihood. Gradually he had amassed his vast collection of birds. He thought he could understand something of Quinny, but wasn't all that confident about my plan.

'It might go the wrong way, Goddie,' he said. 'It might drive him back beyond where he's been.' I remembered Quinn's wink and grin on a special occasion, and wondered whether anything could drive him that way.

When I asked Caraby whether he would like a drive in the country, he responded with unusual alacrity.

'I reckon that would be good,' he said, and again he was looking around his Harbour Trust terrace house as though it were strange and unknown to him; as though, almost, it were a prison.

we had a good crisp day. It was early autumn. We sped towards the Southern Highlands. Quinny was developing a new habit, hitting his right fist into his left hand and breathing hard and exclaiming. He would say, 'What do you know? What do you know?' and give a chuckle. I thought he was on a high, and wondered whether he would relapse into a reactionary depression.

He didn't. He really enjoyed the day. It was obvious that he rarely visited a restaurant or roadhouse. He loved the coffee and cakes that we had.

When we turned off the main highway into a secondary road, he looked about him with relish. He peered at every cow, horse and sheep he could find. We left the sealed secondary road and were soon on a red ochrous farm track. After a time we went across a cattle-grid and were in Dennis Carmody's farm. There were a few over-fed beef Herefords, ruminating in knee-length imported grasses. Quinny viewed these, too, with delight.

Then we turned around the drive and there were the endless lines of aviaries and the massed choir of chortles, whistles, calls and screams dinning up against our ears.

At first Caraby was stunned. He went white in the face. This changed to red. In a second he was out of the vehicle and running towards the cages. I started up the car again, following him. Dennis came out of an aviary, carefully closing the door behind him. He stared at Quinny and then nodded to me. Quinn ignored us both. He was running up and down the rows of cages. Dennis looked quite concerned. What he had thought might happen seemed now to be so.

'I think we have tipped the scales,' he said, shaking my hand and being a bit mournful. 'I think he might have tipped over into something.' 'Look at him!' I said.

Dennis looked and nodded. Then he began to grin. 'He

loves parrots,' he breathed. 'He really loves them.' If anyone should have known that then it was Dennis.

Quinny's face was pink with excitement and his eyes were shining. 'Gang-gangs!' he was shouting, 'Eclectus and Major Mitchells!' He reeled off name after name, as he rushed from aviary to aviary. We followed him about. He certainly looked manic. By the time he finished his rushing about, he was quite exhausted.

Even then he scarcely saw Dennis. Not even when I introduced him. 'Fancy all those parrots in one place,' he was muttering. Then he became aware of Dennis. 'How did you do it?' he asked.

Dennis nodded thoughtfully. 'There are ways and means, you know.' He left it at that and invited us to have some lunch. Dennis's wife Beryl was a sensible woman, and competent. She helped her husband in the bird breeding, and she had cooked a superb meal. Quinny enjoyed it immensely.

When we were relaxing on the glassed-in verandah, drinking coffee, Caraby suddenly exclaimed, 'Corellas! I didn't see any corellas!'

Dennis nodded. 'That's right. I don't have any.'

Quinn looked stunned. 'But you must have corellas,' he said. He was staring at Dennis. 'Don't tell me,' he was saying in an ominous voice, 'that you don't like corellas.'

'They're so noisy,' the parrot man said. 'They never give up on noise. They're a bit like galahs.'

'Now what's wrong with galahs?' Quinny asked him. He had begun to bristle. I left them on the pretext of getting more coffee. I went into the kitchen to talk to Beryl. We could hear the two men going at it—hammer and tongs. I had never seen Quinn so animated.

'Hope he doesn't lapse back into heavy depression,' I said.

Beryl shook her head. 'He's coming to life,' she commented. 'This could be the making of him.'

We chatted about parrots and the uncanny ways they had, the influence they exercised on human beings. We agreed they were creatures all on their own. Nothing else was quite like them.

On the way home, Quinn was quiet but not depressed. He was thinking deeply—Once he said to me, 'You like parrots, don't you?' I nodded. This time it didn't sound weird. Somewhere in me, confidence was growing that Quinny could emerge from his decades of nothingness, his blank anonymity. Now this I confess to you: I know I am a sucker when it comes to human beings. I give anything to see just one of them rehabilitated. I have to admit that human beings are quite special—almost as special as parrots!

Later, I went to Miller's Point to see Quinn, but he was gone. He had given his house back to the Harbour Trust. No one knew where he was. I was a bit sad about that. I rang the Repatriation Hospital. No, they hadn't heard anything of Quinn. The Repatriation Department didn't have his address. They just kept paying his pension into his bank account, and that address was the same. I rang Dennis Carmody, but he had heard nothing.

One day Carmody rang me. 'I have a letter from Quinn,' he said. 'He wants me to go south, into Victoria. He wants me to sign a contract for corellas and galahs. He says he can get me any number of them.'

We talked about that, wondering whether Quinny had gone queer: I mean queerer. I felt I owed something to Caraby; after all I had steered him in the direction of parrots.

'Are you going?' I asked. Dennis hesitated, and then said he thought he would. 'Do me good to have a holiday. I'll get a lad in from the next farm. He knows how to look after the birds, and Beryl can direct him.'

When he said that, I knew I had to go, too. I knew then that I also needed a holiday.

A few days later we were on our way to the Mallee.

The story could take a long time to tell—given in all the details. We found Caraby Quinn looking after himself in a large tent. We had brought my caravan, and so the three of us made camp together. Quinny had a large truck with thumping great cages on its tray. He had large nets, and parrot decoys. In short, he had all the equipment of a birdcatcher. Also he had a trapper's licence—a rare thing to obtain. I guess he pulled his returned soldier status: I don't know. For his part, Quinny was all ready to talk, and talk he did.

He told us his story. Before joining the army, he had trapped parrots. The farmers in the Mallee loved him. Parrots weren't in such large flocks in those days, but they were a menace to the grain crops. In the Depression years birds were hard to sell. So the cocky-farmers paid Quinn to destroy as many birds as possible. Quinn hated doing this, but it was a living. When the war came, he was glad to get away from the bird-killing, so he enlisted. I remembered him asking me, time and again, whether I liked parrots. It had seemed a bit queer then, but Quinn had not been queer at all; only a bit sensitive.

Quinn went on to talk about the 'greenies,' the conservation buffs. 'They don't understand,' he said. 'The farmers are losing millions of dollars a year from the corellas and the galahs and sulphur-crested cockatoos. The government is now willing to play ball. I have permission to kill as many as I like. These parrots are not on the Protected Species list.'

We nodded at that. 'So that's what you're doing,' I said. He shook his head. 'No!' he said violently, 'I can't. I just can't come at it. That's why I had to give it up before.'

We were bewildered, and we gestured towards the large cages on his truck. 'What's all this gear for, then?' we asked. Quinny's eyes shone. There was nothing queer about him; he looked as healthy as any man I had ever seen.

'That's why I asked Dennis down here.' He leaned forward, grinning hugely as though he had a king-sized secret. 'I want us to go into business, me and Dennis.' He paused and looked at me. 'You can be in it, too,' he said. 'That's if you want to.'

He spread the plan before us. Since Dennis knew just about all the parrot breeders and bird wheeler-dealers, then he could arrange the sales for all the wild parrots which Quinny could trap. I looked at Dennis. The scheme didn't seem too wildcat to him. He nodded, but I saw he had reservations. I left them both to talk it out, and wandered off into the mallee scrub. Don't start me off on the matter of mallee scrub. I love it so much I could bore you with talking about it.

That afternoon—dusk to evening—the corellas came. Quinny explained that there were two flocks. One was of the little corellas. The other was of the long-billed corellas. We ached with laughter at the antics of both. We just marvelled at the scrambled white and crimson all over the pastures as the birds picked away at the fallen grass seed. The sight of them in the wheat was a bit heart-rending, but we roared at their antics. Quinny was as proud as Punch at what they did—as though, in a way, he had invented them. That he loved them was pretty clear to us.

Quinny boiled billy-tea. He also pulled a damper out of the ashes of his fire. We ate that with some tinned meat, and apples from a crate. We were like kids.

Quinny settled down to business. First of all he talked to me, gesturing towards Carmody. 'I can tell Dennis isn't one

hundred percent convinced,' he said. 'He thinks people won't buy wild parrots.' He waved a fork in the air. 'Let me tell you both, that corellas and galahs are the most intelligent parrots in the world. God made them so they could get to know humans, and even help them.'

Dennis didn't seem to think this revelation absurd. Thinking about our Charlie, I could see some sense.

'If every family had a galah or a corella,' said Quinny, 'then we'd have less family trouble. It's parrots that train humans, you know.'

This was a new Quinn. I sat back, enjoying the billy-tea, the conversation, and most of all, Quinn. We talked for hours, brushing off the mosquitoes from the Murray River. When we went to bed, I lay awake for some time. Two things puzzled me: the first being Quinn's utter abhorrence of killing the parrots, and the second, his incredible confidence—almost pathological, I thought—that people would buy his wild birds.

The next day we went on a trapping expedition. It was quite something. Quinny laid out his spring-loaded nets, scattered wheat-grain plentifully, and placed his decoys skilfully. He had recorded cries on his cassette recorder. He bundled us into the scrub, set the recorder going, and we waited. He kept the cord release in his right hand.

Then he began to tell us about his dislike of killing. 'I was born a trapper,' he said. 'I learned it from my old man. We used to go out as kids, and at first I loved every minute of it. The trouble was, I had a long-billed corella. We called it "Billy" of course, and that was short for "Billy Hughes." You remember, Bill Hughes was Prime Minister, and a very clever man. Also he looked like a cocky!

'I loved that long-billed corella. As I said, no parrot in the world is as intelligent and affectionate. He loved me too, and would get mad if anyone tried to take my affection. We talked together for hours. That's when I learned to under-

stand parrots and how they think. Once that happened, I didn't like the work any more. Every day I'd go through this pain when the old man and I killed the birds by their hundreds.'

A white flock wheeled overhead and then turned south. Quinny didn't seem greatly disturbed.

'When the war came I got out of the business, but in Malaya I got back into it.'

I felt my blood run cold. Quinn wasn't smiling any more. In fact he looked sad, and stern. He put his head down, staring at the ground. 'I used to trap them, you know. I'd always learned how to move quietly, and so I trapped them.'

I heard him sigh, -and there was a lot of sadness in it. 'I didn't like killing those Japs any more than I liked killing the birds. I felt the same kind of sickness. I used to ask myself why men killed birds and one another.'

We sat whilst the flock from the south wheeled back. I was glad I had come to the Mallee, but I shivered along with Quinn. He was uncovering the silence of old soldiers: the sorrow of the human race. Suddenly he raised his hand. 'They're coming,' he said. 'Watch them. They're coming down!'

So they were. Quinn's eyes were shining, alive with excitement; his face was pink and glowing. I envied him for the joy that he knew.

There were the flutterings, the cries of the sentinels who settled in the short mallee eucalypts and watched out for the safety of the flock. Then the birds alighted near the decoys and began greedily going for the grain. They formed a bubbling mass below the nets.

There was humour in the whole matter, for the corellas were the short-billed ones. I tried not to laugh at their antics, their wise nodding, their proud swaggering gait—indeed everything about them that corresponded to our own human ways.

Quinny pulled the cord, and the net flew down. Hundreds of untrapped birds. fluttered up. The sentinels cried, the flock formed, wheeled, and fled. We could hear their cries as they shot upwards and away.

On the ground the birds cried indignantly, squawked and shrieked. They fluttered madly in the nets, protesting against the indignity of it all.

Quinny said, 'I'm going to show you something.' He went to the truck and came back with an instrument that could only be called 'a stamper.' I could imagine it being used to stamp earth. It had a long sturdy handle, and the base was of iron. Quinn said, 'I'll only do one, so watch!'

We watched. Caraby Quinn walked towards the flustered, fluttering, squawking and screaming birds. He raised his instrument and brought it down upon a bird, crushing it. One quiver and it was dead.

Quinn looked at us. 'I used to kill hundreds,' he said. He looked down at the bird. 'Hundreds!' he repeated. After a moment he rushed towards the truck, put on some elbow-length leather gloves, grabbed a couple of small cages and began to catch the birds under the net. When he filled these small carry-boxes, he emptied their contents into the large cages.

'Grab some gloves and carry-boxes,' he said. 'Come and help!'

We slipped on the gloves and joined in the turmoil. Birds were flapping everywhere. Some of them were indignant, shrieking their outrage to the heavens. The skies themselves were empty of corellas. The cages quickly filled. Finally we had them all captured.

We stood there, three middle-aged men, looking at the dynamic mass of feathers and protest. The parrots were still protesting that their dignity had been assailed. Some, however, had settled down and withdrawn into themselves. Corellas have a way of creating their own dignity.

Suddenly Quinny said, 'Fancy that! There's a long-billed corella amongst them.' He jumped on to the truck. He opened one of the large cages and walked into it, careful to cover the partly opened door. In a flash he had the bird. It clung to his gloves, claws sticking firmly, and long beak biting into the tough leather.

Caraby was unperturbed. One hand held the bird, the other smoothed down its wings. Quinny gave a youthful chuckle.

'Now Dennis, my fine friend,' he said, 'I can put your fears at rest.' He tucked the bird under one arm and fumbled in his back pocket for a pair of scissors. They were long-bladed and sharp. He clipped away at a wing of the corella. It protested but he was firm. The clipped feathers fluttered to the ground.

Caraby turned to me. 'Dennis can't see thousands of these birds being sold because they are wild. They won't make pets. People won't get to know them.' His eyes gleamed. 'He's wrong!' he shouted. 'I'll show you!'

He began to walk away from us into the scrub. 'See you in twenty minutes,' he said. We lost sight of him as he walked towards the river. We stood in silence, wondering what it was all about.

After a time Dennis said, 'I have never seen a man so renewed as Quinn is.'

I nodded. 'It's a miracle.'

'I understand the miracle,' Dennis said. 'I remember years ago thinking how noisy, screechy, and harsh were parrot cries. Now they are like music in my ears. I love them. I feel as helpless as a kitten when I hear them. If I hear one in the bush, I want to run to where the bird is.'

I said gently, 'So seeing our Charlie awakened all that memory in Quinny, eh?'

He nodded. 'It did. And seeing my parrots destroyed his wrong memories. '

‘Even of trapping and killing Japs?’

‘I guess so,’ Dennis said, ‘but I really don’t know.’ He stood staring down at the dead bird under the net. ‘I’m not really sure, but I guess so.’

After a time Quinny came out of the scrub. On his left arm was the long-billed corella. Quinny was talking to it, and his voice was very cool. It was gentle and intimate. It was soothing. He kept muttering to the bird.

He grinned at us. ‘It’s tame,’ he said. ‘After a few days it will look forward to my coming. It’ll like me better than the food I will give it. It won’t be long before it will talk, whistle, cough, bark and laugh.’

We watched him, fascinated at the rapport between the man and the bird. Once or twice the bird nodded, as though it was agreeing with him. Occasionally Quinny would touch its back feathers, gently, smoothing them down.

‘Every family will want one,’ he said. ‘They won’t be getting a wild one.’ His voice was steady, but not boastful. ‘Twenty minutes a bird, I reckon. Give me twenty minutes with any bird and I will tame it.’

Dennis seemed impressed. ‘You’ll need to teach others the method,’ he said, ‘especially if you aim to sell thousands.’

Quinn recoiled from that. There was protest in his eyes at first, but that died. He was thinking the matter through. Then he said, ‘I guess I could. I guess I could teach it to some people. Maybe that’s a good idea.’ He paused, thinking again. After a time he nodded strongly. ‘I guess we’ll do that, Dennis. ‘It’s much better than killing them.’

We stood watching him in the pure autumn air of the Victorian Malice. Somewhere behind us, the River Murray was making its way towards South Australia.

For his part, Quinny stood there, the quiet bird on his arm, its solemn eyes staring ahead. Quinny was looking

down at it with gentle but strong love. Behind us, in the cages, were white parrots with orange-scarlet on the head, mantle and upper breast. They were jostling for perch positions.

The one long-billed corella was doing no jostling. He was sitting on Quinny’s arm, as though deeply contented, and Quinny was standing there, not moving, immobile as a statue, but his eyes were different from the old days. In fact, Quinny himself was a different man, standing there, immobile as he was, in the autumnal Mallee sun.

## *The Place on the Left*

EVERY time I go past the place on the left, I think of young Migley. Just before you come into Balhannah, back of the Adelaide Hills, you see the place on the left. We always called it 'the place on the left.' My wife Meg never ceased to be scandalised by it. 'It's nothing but a shack,' she would say, 'and every other place being so nice too.' If you know Balhannah, you know she was right in what she said. Most of the houses were old, but very neat. Many of them were German, and all the better for that. They had a very tidy look.

Not the place on the left: it was always untidy. In a way it was like a junk yard or a disposals place, but then they never sold the junk. Not that they would have got much for it anyway. It was like a scar on the rich green countryside.

The cattle always looked calm on the undulating farms: the black and white of the Friesians always caught your eye. So did the aristocratic cut of the Scottish Ayrshires. I remember old Pullman—next to the Sensums—had the finest Ayrshires you would see outside Scotland. Not that a lot of them hadn't been imported from Scotland: they had. Our mouths used to go into a compressed 'Oh!' when we heard the prices he paid. But then the country itself was

aristocratic—what with the old Germans and Scots, and some English too. Now, of course, they were all Australians, but they never forgot the dignity of their forebears. That is, with the exception of Migley's man, Tommy Sensum. He was a type all of his own, was Tommy.

Migley was all the way from West Australia, from Albany in the South-West. Albany is quite a place too, if ever you have seen it. Its cool green hills surrounding those multiple bays—they just get you in. I tell you that you never forget Albany once you have been there. If you have been born there, then it is always somewhat in your blood. Migley has eyes as deeply blue as the water around Albany. Her hair is that rich nutty brown with some dark movements in it. She is a looker, is Migley, or was—just as you take it.

Most people were amazed when Migley came to 'the place on the left.' She had such charm, and with the charm a lot of dignity. Yet in a way it wasn't just dignity. It was something of graciousness and humility wed together. People loved to talk to Migley. I think she was actually Church of England, but she used to come to the Methodist church on Sunday, and a few times she played the organ. I used to sit back and listen to that organ music, although, to tell the truth, my liking ran to something more than the bright hymns from Wesley's day. I liked the old German chorales, and many a time I made my way to the Lutheran church, and the folk there didn't seem to mind. I could almost dream when they sang their hymns of duty and dignity.

But to get back to Migley. She came back with Tommy after he had been across to the West for a rare trip. Tommy never wasted a penny, and a holiday was a most uncommon thing for him. Maybe he knew it was written in the depths of the scroll for him. He just brought her back, and his relatives planned the rest. They worked and sewed and cooked and arranged until the wedding took place. They went into Adelaide for their honeymoon, part of it being spent at Victor

Harbor. Few South Australian honeymoons have missed Victor Harbor. I imagine the place reminded her of Albany, being a bit less in scale, but beautiful all the same. They may have made it out to Second Valley or Back Valley or Normanville. I don't know, but I do know that the honeymoon meant a lot to her. She was misty-eyed for months—even years in fact.

Now that is the thing that puzzles me. How could she keep her respect for Tommy Sensum when he took her into such a dump? I give it to you that Tommy is quite a person. His forebears were Irish, and he had a lot of the joy and the blarney in his blood. But it may have been his love for the cattle which took hold of her. She also loved the cattle, coming as she did from the dairy country around Albany. She was used to the homesteads, of course, but then never anything as plain as Tommy's 'place on the left.' She must have been filled with loads of romance not to see the wretchedness of it all. Maybe Tommy kept her in good spirits all the time, chasing her around the old timber piles, romping through the collection of used trucks and cars, or leading her a dance through the rusting machinery plant. I don't know: I just don't know.

Often I used to wonder how she felt when he carried her across the threshold of the old house. House! You had better be realistic and call it a shack, for shack it was. It was more like a humpy, but perhaps a little better. I had never seen it except from the outside, and so, for all I knew—in those first days of their marriage—it may have been quite comfortable inside. Moses Shannon, however, told me otherwise. He said the dining table actually had its legs into the dirt floor, and was composed of slats so that the crumbs fell through on to the floor, which was good for those huge Rhode Island Red poultry, and it didn't call for them to stand so much on the table. For all Moses knew, the old and worn couches may have been of cedar-wood-frames, but if

so they were very faded and the years had taken their toll. Moses said it was a real shocker, and he should know. He was the dairy inspector, and most of his troubles were on the Sensum farm.

The good thing about Tommy's farm was that it was large. It went over the hills where the red-gums were, and some old stringy barks, and even some of the old olives planted by the first settlers. I guess Migley could get away over those hills and forget the problems connected with their terrible shanty.

Yet the strange thing about the girl was that she seemed to thrive on it all. When they came to town—to Balhannah—Migley would go everywhere with Tommy, except of course to the pub. Ladies didn't go to pubs in those days, and certainly not in the Valley. There was a sort of decorum everyone kept, and the community seemed to be quite happy because of this. It was certain that Migley—Tommy called her 'Mig,' and after a time we did also—would be at the sales, and Tommy appreciated her eye for a good cow, a young heifer or a budding bull. She was a help to Tommy, was Mig. There was an enormous lot of good-natured envy about. Some of the men would have given their eye-teeth for a beauty like her. They liked her common-sense intelligence also, but they were puzzled about her devotion to Tommy. If they had known what the word meant, they would have called it 'inordinate.'

I had my times when I talked to Migley. She was very easy to converse with: she was so fresh and enthusiastic, and she could talk cows until they came home. Mostly she talked about Tommy—what he was doing, the crops he was planning, the new Ayrshire bull they had gotten from the south coast of New South Wales. She could tell you a bit, too, about the milk yields, and certainly if they were as good as she said they were, then they were very good.

That was what puzzled me: how come Tommy could have

such yields and seem to be so poor? I even talked to him about the matter. I said, 'Tommy, when are you going to put up your real house? When are you going to give young Mig a good home?'

Tommy was a bit astonished at first, I imagine. His eyes laughed a lot usually, but now they stopped laughing. They even went a bit hard. His look bored into me, and it was my turn to be surprised. 'It is our real home,' he said, 'Mig's and mine. I've lived there all my life, and my Dad before me. I reckon it'll do us as good as it did them.'

I'm not the soft kind; not by a long score. I guess I must have had a deeper feeling for Mig than I had previously imagined. I was a bit shocked 'at my own inner indignation. I said, 'That young Mig has been used to a fine sort of a house,' I said, 'and you are just the man to give it to her.'

His look had not softened. 'Am I now?' he said slowly, and he was not sarcastic, only just even-voiced so that you did not know what he was thinking. He kept staring. 'What you say is very interesting.' He stopped talking and looked down at the ground, kicking it a little with his Wellington boots. After a time he turned away, and I didn't know what to think. He walked away as though he was still thinking. Then he stopped in his tracks and turned to me. 'I reckon I can work out what is good for Mig, eh?' He turned again, on his heel, and strode off pretty quickly.

It was years later that I thought again about Mig and the house. If anything, it had further deteriorated. Maybe it hadn't. Maybe it was just that everyone now seemed so prosperous, and such lovely houses were being built in the postwar era. About the only advance Tommy made was to put in a new set of milking machines. Even then the milking shed was so primitive that the machines stood out like something grand in a place of poverty. Moses told me that the machines soon toned down and fitted in with the rest of the place. They looked old in no time.

'Really quite strange,' Moses said. 'When I went on inspection, the engine would keep stopping, and all the cups would fall off the cows with quite a clatter. Tommy would feel around in the dark, looking for the spark plug. His engine used to shed the spark plug every so often.' He nodded apologetically. 'There are machines made like that,' he said. 'They shed the spark plug when the pressure is too great.'

Even now I am not sure whether Moses was having me on. I never asked about engines which shed spark plugs. Sounded a bit like a Jolliffe cartoon to me. Come to think of it, Tommy's set-up was a bit 'Jolliffe,' but then it was not funny like Jolliffe.

Mig never thought it funny. She just thought it was wonderful. This was because she saw Tommy and her as being on a great adventure. They were trying to build up something which was pretty good, and build it up they would. She could just see what it would all be one day. For some reason or other she made me a bit of a confidant, possibly because I was an older man and was beginning to have grey hair.

'Tommy's got what it takes,' she said. 'Things don't look much now, but you wait.' She gave me that warm, soft 'Mig' smile, and even I had to believe her.

It was just that something about Tommy himself left me uneasy. I couldn't see that it would work out. I thought, 'Mig must know something I don't.' This thought made me happy, especially for Mig's sake, so I left it at that.

I had the feeling that Mig was the best at choosing stock. She seemed to have it in her blood. Often, at a sale, she would dissuade Tommy about a young bull or a heifer. He didn't take it easily, but finally gave in, and they would make another purchase. Also she could persuade him to sell stock which he had thought to keep. She was quite charming in the way in which she dissuaded him, and very humble

when she pointed out the weaknesses or deficiencies of an animal. Tommy saw the sense of it, and gave in. I think he was looking to use Mig's special intelligence.

I remember when Tommy built his new milking shed. The whole thing was quite strange, really. By this time Mig and he had two children: young Ernie, and Mary Migley. Mary Mig was the living image of her mother and Ernie the dead spit of his father. There is no doubt that the parents doted over them quite a bit. Tommy always had Ernie down at the milking shed.

One day Tommy said suddenly to Mig, 'I reckon you deserve a holiday. I reckon you need to go back to Albany and see your people.'

Maybe Mig had always thought about going back there for a good stay. They had gone on occasions, but then only for a few days. In those times they had to cross the Nullarbor in their old FJ Holden, and the going was rough. That was when the dirt road had not been sealed. Still they had enjoyed it, and Mig saw it as an adventure. Tommy saw the holiday as having to get someone in to-milk the cows. Now —this special time—he wanted her to go by rail, by the Transcontinental Express. Mig was certainly a bit excited, and agreed to take the two kids, but she was a bit puzzled. This was the first time she was allowed to go off without Tommy. It just wasn't quite in character with him. Even so she went, Tommy taking the three of them to Adelaide. They stayed overnight at the Grosvenor (which was a rare treat), did a little shopping the next day, and then they were off, over the 2,000 miles or more to Albany.

It was then that Tommy got stuck into his project— building the new bails. He didn't pull down the old ones— probably thinking of them as a good shed for other uses: I don't know. He built the new bails up behind the old house,

and no man worked harder or quicker than Tommy. Of course he hired help—plenty of it. The plan for milking sheds is pretty regular, but Tommy had obviously thought out a new idea altogether. I won't go into it much, because these days similar bails-and-shed are fairly plentiful. But then Tommy's plan seemed like an innovation. To tell the truth, the building was remarkably functional. Tommy never lacked any marbles in that shrewd head of his.

Some of the fellows—the dairymen—came to have a look. They were amazed at Tommy spending such money on a milking shed, but when they saw the construction they went away pretty silent. Some of them looked at Tommy as though they had not seen him before. I mean, they suddenly seemed to see him as another man. I don't know what they were thinking, but I was a bit mad, which shows how much the idea of Migley had gotten into my brain, and even, I guess, my heart. Maybe you don't know why I was getting a bit mad, but the idea didn't appeal one little bit to me.

Tommy then had the top milking shed around that part of the country, even including the Prosperous Barossa Valley. It was the talk of the district, but of course there was other talk too, which I will reveal when it comes to telling you about Mig's return with the two youngsters. Tommy seemed to show little excitement, but then it is hard to read the mind of a fellow like him. He went down and picked them up at Adelaide, but did so at a time when they would arrive at Balhannah in the dark.

Mig was glad to be back, her adoration of Tommy undimmed. She planned to be up early to get Tommy something to drink before the milking. She always had a cup of tea with him; she did so this morning. When the dawn broke, he took her up to the new balls. She was stunned when she saw them, and for a while remained quite silent.

'You like them, eh?' he asked. He didn't wait for the answer, but bundled her happily inside the building. When

she saw everything—the disposition of the bails and stalls, the circular formation, the entrances and exits, and the clever arrangements for sluicing the bails, and washing up the buckets and utensils, she went as cold as ice. At first Tommy did not notice this, but then even he realised something was amiss. He waited for a comment but it did not come. Only her face went harder and harder, and Tommy had never seen Mig in this kind of mood.

Her first words were, ‘You sent me to Albany to get me away, eh?’

He took her statement at face value and grinned. Then he nodded proudly. ‘Wanted you and the kids away from all the noise and fuss,’ he said, ‘so you could come back and see it finished.’

Her continuing silence after that alarmed him. He waited long enough and then burst out, ‘Don’t you like them?’

He noticed that her beautiful eyes were like steel, cold and set as blue ice. When she didn’t speak, a tremor of fear passed through him, although he couldn’t tell why. His puzzlement seemed to infuriate her. Then she spoke.

‘Where’s the new house?’ she asked. ‘Where’s the beautiful new home for us all?’

Even with all that stiffness he thought it was the old Mig back to herself and joking. Mig wasn’t joking. Mig was a million light years away from joking. She was just strongly, deeply and unremittingly angry.

‘Maybe,’ she said, ‘you have that further up the back, up on the ridge where I dreamed it would one day be?’

‘On the ridge?’ he said, suddenly wholly astonished. Then he muttered, ‘The house! What house?’ Those were words he should never have said.

‘You never even thought about a house, eh?’ she shrilled. Tommy had never heard Mig shrill. The high frequency stirred his nerves, but he made an attempt. ‘What house, eh? Do you really mean we need a house...?’

He didn’t finish. She knew he was going to talk about the old’ shack as though it were perennial. No one needed a house when one had *that*. She had never dared to let herself believe that Tommy had an idea like that!

Mig was a person who was always one way or the other— wholly. Tommy didn’t understand it when she was packing the old FJ. He looked at her, and at last asked her what she was doing. ‘Packing to go,’ she said, ‘and to go for ever.’

Even then Tommy did not comprehend. ‘Go where?’ he asked. She didn’t answer, but she dressed Ernie and Mary Mig, and then got into the vehicle. That was when the whole matter broke in upon him. ‘You mean,’ he said, ‘that you are leaving me because I built a new milking shed and bails?’

She shook her head. ‘Of course not,’ she said. ‘Why should I? New bails are fine. We’ve needed a new milking shed, and the new yard just like you’ve made it, but we needed a new house before that. New furniture, too. In fact, new everything!’ She banged the lid of the boot. You always had to bang the lid on their old FJ or it shook loose over the corrugations of the back roads. Mig settled herself into the front seat.

Tommy stood there helplessly, but her old adoration and mercy were gone. She was just a woman now, an enraged woman whom he would never pacify. He stared hard at her. ‘You just can’t do this to me,’ he told her.

The ice in her eyes never thawed a degree. ‘You just see what I can do,’ she said, and loose gravel rolled under the sudden spurt as the acceleration came. He watched the old Holden bundle itself out of the farm, on to the main road, and bite its way towards Balhannah.

At first no one knew anything. Tommy Sensum was not the one to talk about his personal matters. I guess he had not sorted out the whole thing, anyway. I mean, it would take a long time for him to be able to believe she had gone because he had built the bails, or rather, that he had not

built the house. Then rumours were born, and quickly began to grow. Tommy had had a row with his wife. Mig had taken the children to Adelaide and was living down there somewhere—over Modbury way if you could believe the whole thing. It wasn't temporary. It was forever.

That was what set the tongues going. The old folk thought it a bit tough on Tommy. It made some sense, they thought, to get new bails. Take what the dairy inspector had said about the old bails—that they needed to be condemned. Not all the old wives agreed with the husbands, and some of the younger husbands said Tommy must be nuts to have done what he did. Tommy, for his part, seemed to withdraw more and more from folk and into himself.

That was when he came to talk to me. Somehow or another he trusted me, and he knew I had a high admiration for Mig, and that I liked the two kids. I was a bit dismayed when I saw him, because he was back to looking like he was before the marriage, untidy and careless. I had a pang of pity; I had thought Tommy deserved what he got, but his misery was too profound to let you stay in that frame of mind.

'Theo,' he said to me, 'can you really see why she went?' 'Can't you?' I asked. 'Can't you see why she left you?'

He was a bit uneasy. 'Something to do with building the bails and not building a new house.'

I nodded. 'That's just about it,' I agreed.

He still looked bewildered. 'But what's wrong with the old house?'

'What was wrong with the old bails?' I asked, and he was about to give a reply, but then remained silent.

I pitied him, but he had to know the truth. 'Whilst you were battling,' I said, 'she adored you. She could take the old house and the old bails, but when you built the new shed before the new home, that just busted her. You must have been crazy not to think so.'

'I never thought she would ever leave me,' he muttered.

'What kind of a place did she live in, in Albany?' I asked. 'Was her home a shack like yours?' He kept staring at me, and his eyes were tired. Finally comprehension began to dawn. I felt I had better help the comprehension a bit.

'She would have lived with you forever,' I said, 'whilst you had to battle, but those new bails told her you didn't have to battle.' I stared at him for a few moments. 'Did she know you were cashed up enough for new bails?'

The misery increased. His face was off-white. 'She knew nothing about the money side,' he said. 'The Sensums have never told their women folk anything about their money.' His face was dead. 'Maybe I should have shared something of that.'

I came close, looked hard at him, until our eyes were meeting. 'How are you off, cashwise, Tommy?' I asked.

He flinched a bit. 'The Sensums have had plenty for years. Even through the Depression my old man was well off.' When he saw my surprise he shook his head with frustration. 'What am I going to do?' he asked. 'How can I get out of all this?'

'Build a new house,' I said, 'and bigger and better than the bails.'

It was after that the rumours increased, but they had lots of reality to them: they were more than rumours. They were facts. Much of it came out of the things that Ted Browning the local solicitor had to tell Tommy. Then there was the matter of the children going to church schools, and the new home Mig had built out at Modbury. I guessed that was her angry compensation for what Tommy had never done. There was also the course Mig was doing at an Advanced College of Education, a special course in business management. Every week seemed to bring some strange fresh news, and the widening of the gap between them. Maybe the gap

didn't really widen. Maybe—since the new bails—it had become as wide as it can be between a man and a woman.

I realised my estimate of Mig was quite wrong. I had thought she would have stood by him, quietly getting him to build a new house, but I can see now that if she had stayed then that would have been enough for Tommy. He wasn't going to break the traditions of three or four Sensum generations. He would never have built the new house. He would have remained stubborn amongst the old junk piles and in the old junk house. She would have known that. Half her anger was from knowing that.

There was anger in plenty, anger in Mig and anger in Tommy. You can't live in South Australia and not know everything that is happening elsewhere. People are pretty domestic on the whole, and so the tongues rattled. My, they certainly rattled! They rattled a whole lot more when Tommy began building his new house. What's more, he built it on the ridge. He had the very best contractor in the Valley to come in and build the house. Tommy himself was up and down to Adelaide to make sure it had the best of fittings. He also put in a fine garden and a swimming pool. He spared neither time nor money. He was just .obsessed about that house, but of course it was obsession about Mig and the children.

Mig came nowhere near it. She never once travelled up the Balhannah road—at least, so far as we knew. What is more, we heard that she sold the old FJ and bought one of those sleek and tidy Jap cars. She was a pretty social type. We heard she earned her diploma, and was quite a bit in demand. She was her own boss; she didn't take much to men in her new life. When the house was finished, Tommy wrote and asked her to come to Balhannah even if only to talk things over. Neither of them had tried to get a divorce. Mig didn't answer the letter. She may have tried, but if so then she never succeeded.

I could go on with the story at great length, and tell you about the letters the two solicitors exchanged. Both Tommy and Mig were advised to see counsellors, but most of the counsellors themselves were divorced, so that didn't figure greatly in assuring them of any outcome. It looked as though the whole matter was finished, washed up, as they say. In fact, that was really the case. In the face of all this, it seemed a bit stupid of me to try to get them together. Even so, I tried.

I went to Modbury, and when she opened the door she was a bit startled. Then she seemed genuinely pleased to see me. 'Come in, Theo,' she said. 'It's good to see you.'

The lounge room was very modern: everything was exquisite and just right. Somehow it didn't seem like Mig, but then Mig didn't seem like Mig. Apart from her flash of deo light at seeing me, she was just not Mig. Something of her old self returned when the children came home from school. She rallied a bit of joy, but then it was gone.

'I believe you are just some businesswoman,' I said.

Her face set a bit hard. 'Ah, yes,' she said, but she was somewhat vague.

'Ever likely to come up to the Valley on business?' I asked. She wasn't sure about that. Her business took her many places.

After that we talked about Albany and her parents. Albany was O.K., she told me, but her parents really hadn't understood the business about the place on the left. 'Theo,' she said, 'you understand, don't you?'

'Oh, yes,' I told her, 'I understand all right. Tommy was just a fool. Just a plain stupid fool.' I could comprehend her disappointment and her anger, but I wasn't going to be supportive. I kept staring at her, wondering where the old Mig had gone.

'What kind of cattle do they have in Albany?' I asked her. I knew without asking, but I wanted to get into contact with

her. She told me, and strangely enough at great length, as though it was good-to talk about cattle.

‘Tommy doesn’t get the good cattle these days,’ I told her.

At first she wasn’t interested, but then her curiosity got the better of her. ‘What do you mean?’ she asked.

I made out that I wasn’t all that interested. ‘The man seems to have lost his nerve,’ I said. ‘He just doesn’t pick them out like he used to. Same with his sales: he seems to sell the best, and that’s no good for any man’s herd.’

I saw the strong flicker of interest, and made out I had to leave. ‘See you some more, Mig,’ I said. ‘It’s been great to see you.’

She eyed me with some suspicion, and then decided she would not let me go. ‘You just sit down there, Theo,’ she said grimly. ‘I want to hear all about the place and the cattle.’ When she didn’t include Tommy, I felt she was a bit too angry to admit she wanted to know about him, so I just let the matter ride.

I told you before that Mig is a remarkable person. I felt very close to her that day as a person. I kept cursing Tommy for a stupid fool, and wanting to bring the two together— not that Tommy would have minded—but she still had all her ice. She had had a long time to go over things, and that time hadn’t helped.

Even so, she finally agreed after some time to come to Balhannah, or, rather, that I should have her stay at my place, and then we would go out together to the place on the left. Tommy Sensum was to know nothing about this, and what is more she wouldn’t bring the kids. Both solicitors would be pretty cool to the idea of her going near the farm, anyway.

I’m not going to bore you with the small-thought and small-talk that brought about Mig’s visit to the old farm. It was late afternoon when we got there, and Tommy was

milking. There was a young fellow helping these days. Tommy seemed to be shocked to see Mig, and I could see him fighting to keep cool. None of her ice had melted, and I think this was mainly what shocked him. He had only ever spoken to Mig in one way, and this very calm, sophisticated and brittle woman was someone he didn’t know. To his credit, he handled it all pretty well. They talked the sort of talk you indulge in front of others, and it seemed that was fair enough for Mig, but not for Tommy. I could see the fire behind his eyes, and tell by his colour and his breathing that he was a mixture of anger and suffering.

When the milking was over, we went to the old house. It was her turn now for anger and suffering. Her gaze swept around the living room with all its untidiness. Far from softening her, she became like granite. I have to confess that often I find human emotional tempests a bit unreal. I had to conceal my habitual ironic humour which was just below the surface. At the same time, I genuinely felt for them both.

Neither was happy, and both were in collision. She said, ‘You don’t keep it very tidy.’

He said, ‘What’s the point? This will all be over soon.’

She stared at him. ‘What do you mean “over”?’ she asked.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘there’s the new house.’

She kept staring. ‘What do you mean “new house”?’

Tommy said nothing, but I could see his anger rising. ‘The place on the ridge,’ I said. ‘You must have seen it.’ She had seen nothing. We took her to a window and she looked up the ridge. Her face was like scarlet. She said nothing as we went through the rear door. The place was not all that easy to be seen, because some of the old olive trees helped to obscure it, and there were new native shrubs which Tommy had planted. They were beginning to flourish.

When she saw the lawns and gardens, and the crazy paving up to the front door, she obviously could not believe it.

No smile came to her face. She walked on, hard as ever. We walked up the steps and Tommy opened the door. We went inside. She went through room after room. It was all done in silence. There was no furniture in the place, except for things such as the electric stove, the refrigerator and the custombuilt sinks, cupboards and the like. The bathrooms were equipped, and one of them was ensuite with the main bedroom. She stood there, not knowing what to say.

Then she did talk. A lot of the anger was still there, but she asked in a guarded voice, 'Who designed all this? Who worked it out?'

'I did,' said Tommy. 'I did it with the contractor.' 'It must have cost a mint!' she said.

Tommy shrugged his shoulders. 'Not all that much; not a lot to worry about.'

'Tommy Sensum,' she said, 'you're a fool.' There was no change in her voice, just the same anger and indifference.

'Is that so,' Tommy said. 'And what makes you think that?'

For a time she said nothing. Then she asked, 'Why did you build this? For someone else, or just for you?'

Sensum was stubborn as a mule, obstinate as all the Sensums before him. 'For you,' he said shortly, 'who else?'

That was when I thought I saw some hope. Tommy didn't; Mig didn't; but I did. I noticed the faintest of alteration in their voices, just enough to give delicate grounds for hope. She said, 'Did you think I would ever come back?' He said, 'Of course: why not?'

Then she blazed away. She called him every kind of fool. She told him he was a disaster. She used her old Albany-bred ability to face any man and not be cowed. She used her new brittleness, born of her recent tertiary training and all the feminist jargon she had amassed. She let him have it, full on. When she finished I thought she had blown everything, in fact blown it sky-high. Tommy just kept looking at

her steadily.

'So you'll come back,' he said quietly. I thought she would rocket him the second time, but she didn't. She kept staring back at him, a mixture of frustration and unbelief.

'You really do think I will come back,' she said. 'You do, don't you?'

He nodded a bit. 'Could be,' he said defensively.

She went to the front windows of the long living room. She looked down at the old house of the place on the left. She pointed at it with great derision. 'And what will you do with that?' she asked.

He seemed a trifle surprised. Then he said, 'Keep it, of course. It is the old 'family place.'

I saw the anger well up. 'You and the old family place!' she said, and out poured another torrent of words. 'Tommy Sensum, you deceived me. You married me as though you had nothing but the farm, and the cattle, and that old shack. All the time you had money and plenty of it. Plenty to build new bails, and plenty to build this house, and you never said anything. I had to use the money that they sent from Albany to build my place at Modbury and to help to get me through college, whilst all the time you sit on hundreds of thousands of dollars.'

His surprise seemed genuine. 'Money?' he said. 'I thought you never cared for it.'

She looked at him, bewildered. 'Do you mean that? Do you really mean that?'

He nodded. 'Well, of course. The Sensums never even considered it. They just kept thinking, "It's been good enough for Dad and Mum, and it is good enough for us."'

That was when she went pale. In fact I saw the tears start to her eyes. 'Didn't you know,' she said, 'that I stuck with you, through thick and thin; that I 'loved the old place because I thought that was all we could afford, and I had dreams that one day we would have a new house, and later

on new bails, a good milking shed—and I slaved to help you get it? Also I wanted you to have good stock. Oh, I worked hard all right, but then all the time the money was there to do anything and everything. Oh my God!’

He stared stonily at her. ‘You just never said anything. You seemed like the Sensums, happy with everything and anything. I just thought the way you loved me that we were going well. I thought you would like the bails. I just didn’t know you wanted a house.’

I have never seen a human being so bankrupt for words or emotions as Mig was at that moment. I guess I have never seen anyone suffer like that. I wanted to comfort her, but it wasn’t the sort of time you do that. I just stood and watched them clash with eyes like swords crossed.

Suddenly everything seemed to be neutral. Tommy was looking at her with wonder, but she was staring through the window, down at the old house. A thought struck her, and a question. ‘What *are* you going to do with the old place?’ she asked.

I saw the old fire leap into his face, into his eyes. ‘Keep it, of course,’ he said. ‘It can be quite valuable.’

That was what unhung her. She turned on him with blazing eyes. ‘Well, you can keep your old place, and your new one,’ she said. ‘Up with the Sensums! Up with tradition! Up with good sturdy old manhood! Keep both places, and keep them for ever.’

I was grinning, but only inside. He wasn’t grinning. A huge towering rage was building up. ‘So you won’t come back unless I get rid of the old house, eh?’ he shouted.

She nodded, and was silent. He looked at her. ‘So that’s about the shape of it, eh? So you’ll tell me what to do, eh?’ She nodded again. He rushed towards her and stopped short of her, but only about a foot. ‘Is that your last word, hey?’ he shouted.

She nodded. ‘It just tells me where you are,’ she said, and

I was a bit shocked. Something close to mildness was in her voice.

His eyes blazed and he rushed towards the vestibule. Then he was out of the house. He was running towards the old implement-shed, whose shingles had almost entirely been shed over a century or so. I saw him climb up on the old front-end loader with backhoe. He gave a couple of angry kicks, and the great dinosaur of a thing lurched forward. She appeared a bit alarmed, and looked askance at my grin.

‘This should be good,’ I said. She came over and stood next to me. It felt good, Mig by my side, while Tommy was lurching with his great machine towards the old house. I thought about the past, and all the reminders of it: the old furniture, and even the crockery and things that had been in the family for generations. Then I saw him raise the front-end loader a bit, whilst the back-end hoe was lifted like a scorpion’s sting. It was at that point he went belting into the old building.

You could hear the crash, and the splitting and the rending. You could see the dust too, and the crumpling corrugated iron, rusty and askew, and the old slabs falling like shattered limbs and twisted members.

What Tommy was shouting I never heard, but he did seem a bit like a knight’ of old, not fighting a dragon, but mounted on it. The tractor itself was roaring as though mad, and each time it charged it was revved to the heavens.

Then Mig broke away from me. I marvelled at the speed she got down those steps, and then forward to the old building and the crazed Tommy and his bulldozer. She was screaming something above all the noise, but he was waving his arms like a madman, and shouting his own words.

It was quite a dialogue, a screaming backwards and forwards of a man and a wife. Maybe Mig was trying to save some of the precious things, and maybe Tommy thought nothing was too precious to destroy, to get back the incom-

parable Mig. I just don't know. I was watching them with amazement and joy and incredible hilarity. Indeed I was weeping—with joy of course, great huge joy—and my arms were going up and down with colossal happiness. I wanted to get down to them and be part of it, but then I knew that just wasn't my privilege. The stupid old bulldozer was standing where Sensums had stood for decades, and its engine was roaring, but that made no difference to them as Tommy clambered down and Mig rushed into his arms, and the whole world went crazy in the face of the two and their indefatigable love. I can't find another word to describe it, but it is a good word, and why should I be ashamed of it? And why shouldn't I make a story of it?

## *The Brilliant Bird*

HE watched with mild astonishment and gentle trembling. The sight of lorikeets, especially rainbow lorikeets, always had that effect on him. He saw the two of them, seated close together on a young stringy-bark sapling, and he thought that it was about as beautiful a sight as he would see. His eyes drank in the incredible colours of their plumage. He knew their description off by heart: 'A large dark green parrot, with scarlet bill, streaky blue head, yellow-green nape, red-orange 'chest and trousers with blue belly.'

He wondered quietly why they were sitting there as though moulded into the winter scene, as though in a way eternal, never moving and caught up in preternatural silence. The whole bush was silent. The birds and he were wrapped in a sabbatical stillness, as though some gift had descended softly upon them.

Of course, in the summer, when they were in the high eucalyptus, screaming and jostling, debating as to who would have the choicest honey of the flowers and generally carrying on with coloured capers, he was always moved, but today was different. A slight mist of rain had drenched the

forest with that quietness, the hush you always seem to have in a mist, but from where he was standing the brilliance of the birds was as clear as in summer sunlight.

He wondered why at this time they should be so calm, so away from their flock, and so private. They seemed to be in a dream, in a world of their own, and appeared contented to have it that way.

This puzzled him. Why, in winter, were they in this part of the Adelaide Hills, and why so quiet and immobile? He approached them with gentleness, thinking they must be out of their natural context. Perhaps they were birds escaped from an aviary. That idea excited him a little. His eyes roved lovingly again over their beautiful brilliance, their metallic colours. The thought of adding them to his own collection of parrots came to him, but because he had no licence to trap, the act would be illegal. Only if they had been aviary-bred and now could not cope with their freedom—so that they wanted to revert to an aviary—would they come into his ken. He had known parrots like that. The bush bewildered them. The lore of the wild was unknown to them, and even frightening. They often asked for the security of a cage.

Years before, someone had given him a pair of these beautiful birds, and he had liked them. Somebody else with a cynical mind had said they were raucous, bold and unclean birds, and he had given them back in mild disgust. Many times he had regretted the act. Now, as he looked at them in the silence, he knew how wrongly maligned they had been. He knew that every bird and animal—as in fact every human—had some special beauty, and that in fact each created being possessed its own unique identity. He had studied lorikeets closely in the aviaries of his friends, and in the honey-flowered eucalypts.

So his excitement heightened as he drew near to them. They seemed to ignore him. This brought that sort of delight

which only bird fanciers know. Perhaps these two missed the domesticity of an accustomed aviary. They may have wanted the security of daily feeding, of being given tidbits, and the friendly chat that so often goes on between man and domesticated bird. He knew only too well the mystic bond that is between man and his creation. Man was made to relate to the fauna of this world every bit as much as to its flora. Some persons love to handle plants, to grow them, and to watch them come to fulness. So, too, others love the very beings and movements of birds, fish, reptiles and other animals.

For some moments the two birds quietly regarded him. They did not seem alarmed. When he began to talk to them they still remained on the branch. He was almost standing beneath them. Then, as though in response to a given signal, they flew off. He was not disappointed, but a trifle surprised. He was still puzzled as to why they should be there in the light mist, and on the cold hills. He watched them swoop in flight until they were out of sight. He was glad they were free birds.

After a time he forgot about them, or, rather, the memory clung to him like some faint scent, pleasant but elusive. There were other things he did. On days such as this one. One of them was his writing. He liked to write about his world, the one he had known in many lands, in times of peace and of war, and especially the world of persons. Human beings fascinated him no less than birds and animals. Memories of men and women, with their foibles and their excellencies and their harsh cruelties too, would continually come tumbling into his mind, and he would have to write. He had no time for professional and traditional writing. That was for others—something to fill the present mindlessness of readers—but it was not for him. What he wrote came unbidden, but at the same time it was insistent. He lived under that kind of compulsion.

There was a team of them who worked together on their project of teaching, counselling and publishing. They were all alert to the human situation with its vagaries, its perversions and its delights. Something held them together—a group of thoughtful individualists who worked in a most unusual harmony.

They were having lunch when Mark burst in on them. He was the son of the man who did the printing. At first he was hesitant, and almost shy. Then his excitement made him burst into speech. ‘A baby lorikeet!’ he shouted. ‘It’s out there, and it can’t fly!’ He looked at the man who loved birds and animals. He—the boy—was training in zoology, and they had a bond.

The team laughed. Their leader was an old man, and they often joked about his birds and his aviaries, knowing his liking for these things to be part of his varied character. When they laughed, Mark blushed. He shouted again. ‘It’s tumbling about in the bushes. The parents are upset. They’re trying to protect it.’

So now the man knew. The mystery of their being on the cold hillside was solved. There must have been a late nesting, and they were staying with the immature lorikeet youngster. He and Mark were out in a flash, running through the bush, searching for the young bird.

At first it tried to hide in the low foliage, the grevilleas, the heaths, and the stringy-bark suckers, but above it the parent birds were anxious and angry. They chattered and shrieked. They fluttered, trying to distract the hunters from their prey. They uttered awkward sounds, and he heard indignation in their cries.

He and Mark rounded it up, a beautiful drenched and fluttering thing, and he caught it gently into his hands. He could feel its warmth, and hear its terror. It kept protesting and calling to its parents. He and Mark made for the shed where there were small cages. The parent birds followed

them.

Once in the cage the two men could examine their catch. Mark said, ‘Its wings are too small. It’s deformed.’

The older man was puzzled. ‘It’s a grown bird,’ he said. ‘Look! It’s fully coloured!’

So it was. They were entranced by the beauty of it, a fluttering bit of untamed beauty battering against the bars of the small cage.

‘If we let it go,’ Mark said, ‘the cat will have it in no time.’ He knew Jayjay for his savagery. One rush and snap and the thing would be lifeless. He didn’t want Jayjay to get at it.

Mufti was different. He was a good-natured dog of the domestic variety, pedigreed and noble, but in the end it would be the same thing: the vital parrot would be a lifeless mass of beautiful feathers.

They brought the small cage out into the open. The lorikeet parents swooped into a tree nearby and called incessantly. The young bird kept up its frantic fluttering. The men put in small parrot seed and water. They left the bird, hoping the parents would come down and comfort it. The thought of Jayjay and Mufti and other predators was in their mind.

The man thought in his heart, ‘It is young. It may become accustomed to a cage. Then I will be able to watch its beauty daily.’ It was not that he was greedy to possess the creature, nor to own its beauty. He wanted to observe. He wanted to establish a relationship. He wanted to explore the mysterious affinity that creatures possess.

Mark returned to study zoology, and the older man went back to his writing. Even so, neither of the two humans could concentrate too well on what they were doing. They could hear the three birds and their cries.

Later in the day the older man put in bread soaked in honey, and the small parrot looked at it out of a cocked eye.

First it ate some of the seed. Then it soaked itself in the dish of water. Finally it ate some of the honeyed bread. It seemed to settle. The mist and the parent birds hung around for two days. When the mist went, the older birds seemed also to have gone. The fluttering was less in the cage, but the bird had not entirely settled.

He could not put the wild bird in with his other parrots. They were getting together in anticipation of the mating season. They might even kill the young vagrant. He thought, 'I will have to build a special aviary for it, and that will take time.' He thought about his writing and the other things he had to do. One part of him wanted to let the bird go, but then he thought of the cat and the dog, and maybe a fox or two.

The other part of him was eager to keep the bird. He could write to the Wildlife and Conservation people and get a Rescue Permit. The bird could not fly: it needed to be protected. So his mind ran, and all the time he was gathering together bits of sawn timber, sheets of old corrugated iron, and a small roll of wire-netting.

It took him two days, in between meals, visits from people, talks with the team, and snatches of compulsive writing. He sawed and cut and hammered. He shaped a door so that it fitted, set up perches and placed dishes for seed, water and bread soaked in honey. In the meantime he visited the bird and talked to it. Now it did not flutter. It eyed him this way and that, and something began to bond the two together.

He felt the excitement of this bonding of man and bird, of human and other creature. He painted the aviary. He had always liked working with his hands, and took pride when something was shaped by them. Others of the team joined him as he let the bird out of the small cage into the aviary.

Strangely enough it looked a bit insecure, as though it had made its home in the smaller cage, and did not know how to

live in the larger. It sat on a perch, cramped and wet. Then it let 'out a squawk. There was a note of pleasure in its cry. From some distance there came an answering call. The man was astonished. The parents were watching from the safety of a high thin stringy-bark.

When the team had gone, the man talked to the bird. It sat silent, but he knew it was noting him. He wandered off and the bird began to eat. Its plumage remained wet for the day, but the next morning the sun came out. It seemed the mists had gone forever, and that the beauty of the creature had returned. It preened itself in the sun, and he felt a pang as he saw its brilliance come to life. It kept looking at him as though curious but contented.

'I must write for that Rescue Permit,' he told himself. 'I'll describe its pitiful state—immature wings, later growth as a nestling, helpless in the bush.' He knew the Wildlife people would understand. 'Later on,' he said, 'I'll buy a mate for it. It will be cage-born, and the two will breed together.' He rubbed his hands with glee. Tomorrow he'd sit down and write the letter.

When he came the next day, the parents were absent. The bird called occasionally, but there was no answer. The bird stayed in the one place on the same perch. It did not seem to eat. Nor did it appear to drink. It was all alone. The other parrots in aviaries nearby kept up their daily chattering, crying, calling and scolding, but the little parrot lived in its own world. It seemed to have privatised itself. He talked to it, but there was no response.

He thought, 'Give it a few days and it will settle in O.K. The sooner I get a mate for it the better,' but in his heart he knew the bird was pining. He knew a mate would not comfort, but bewilder it. Some little desperation grew: he wished he had not caught it. He disliked the dilemma of having to keep it because of Jayjay and Mufti and the unseen fox. The other part of him hoped against hope that the bonding

would recommence, and he would have a beautiful rainbow Iorikeet.

The next day the bird seemed to have recovered. It flitted from perch to perch. It ate and drank. It devoured the bread soaked in honey. It even eyed the man, and he thought it nodded at him.

He was delighted. The whole thing had worked. Immediately he would go inside and write for the Rescue Permit.

Then something hit him: something came into his consciousness. The bird was flying about in the aviary! He stared in astonishment. For a moment, delight grew in him. The bird was whole, and not at all retarded in growth. He tried to take it in. His delight at the thing flying brought dismay also. He suddenly realised it would be in no danger if he let it loose.

'Let it loose?!' His cry was a question and an exclamation. The parrot was giving exultant cries. The man's mind was teeming with ideas. Maybe the bird had been soaked by the rain and had been unable to fly. Maybe it had eaten something which had half-drugged it. Probably a car had hit it, causing it to be partly stunned.

He knew then that it did not matter what had happened. Here was a bird strong and healthy, and loving its return to soundness. Something in him responded, and without a thought he opened the aviary door. The bird knew what it was all about and flew out into freedom. Most astonishingly, the parent birds had been in the high stringies above the aviary, and had remained silent for days. The thought flashed into his mind, 'How amazing that they would not leave their little one.' He felt the delight of their natural parental care.

The two older birds swept down like fighter escorts protecting the young parrot. The three exchanged delighted cries, instructions and responses. In perfect unison, with exultant cries and with powerful swooping motions, they flew

towards the north. Even after a minute or two he could still hear their flight calls. He felt sheer delight rising within him. Once he had been let free from a prison camp, but he knew, anyway, how rich is freedom to any creature.

When he looked down, the cage door of the empty aviary was swinging in the breeze, but above, the cries went on until they faded to silence, and the birds steadily made their way to the warm north.

## *The Power Within*

I first met Scotty McLean at Port Dickson, up where the beaches are unbelievably beautiful, edged as they are by coconut palms and the musical casuarinas.

Scotty was on his own, and for that matter so was I. Incredibly idealistic, many of my images were unreal, and yet I clung to them. I guess I enjoyed dreams, nostalgia and images all in a pretty thick mixture, and this day I was scuffing my feet along the beach, having left the fellows in my section who had invited themselves into one of those Chinese mansions just back from the beach. I found that kind of sociality beyond my immature relationships with people. I kept wanting to live in my own world.

Scotty wasn't like that. He was a man with fixed ideas, strong opinions, and unswerving morality, which was morality without much religion to it.

Scotty was carrying a coconut with a hole in the top of it. He offered me a drink, and although the humidity was about 80°70, one kept being thirsty, so I drank gratefully from it. We sat down under the coconut trees and watched the Tamil coolies shinning up the coconut palms, dropping the heavy fruit and gathering it to make copra or something. Scotty said, 'I sometimes find it hard to believe they are

humans just like us.'

'Well, in some ways they are not like us, but they are very much humans,' I replied.

He agreed with that. I knew him to be in our Brigade group, and so we needed no introductions. Scotty, because I had already decided that he belonged to a certain type, evoked little interest. I simply put him in the category which Australians have for Scots. Then I discovered he didn't run according to type. For instance, Scotty was quite poetical. He had been scribbling something, and when I looked at it—expecting it to be doggerel—I was surprised at its quality. It was not only good writing, but also thought with real depth. I looked at him with new respect. I had had the idea that maybe—in all the Brigade group—I would be about the only poetic one.

Scotty was in LAD, that is the Light Aid Detachment. It was composed of older men than Army joining age, which was 39. These men had skills which were useful, particularly in mechanical engineering. Scotty, like many another Scot, was a whizz at fixing vehicles. He was skilled in engine repair. So he got to be very much in demand, and, since he had integrity, had made quite a reputation. It was only his contempt for human weakness which got him into trouble from time to time. Some officers thought their rank entitled them to special respect, but Scotty took a man as he found him. He was a private and could have been a sar-major, if not even more, had he played the matter well, which he hadn't and didn't.

Often we would make our way to the beach, and lie on the sand and chat. We would see other fellows; they were living life as they saw it their way, and why not? I guess they knew it might not be all that long in time before they would be in action. Maybe they would be called to the Middle East

where the action was happening, or suddenly the Japanese would descend upon the Malayan Peninsula. Even if that seemed a bit far off in those early 1941 days, it was at the back of the mind, just as at present the nuclear threat seems to be at the back of many minds, determining the way people go about life. So, some of these fellows treated it all as a holiday, but most saw it as a time 'in life and world history when they were Called upon for an unusual task. I doubt whether there was any despair in them, other than humans know in the course of life. Maybe they wanted to fit all the joy they could into their existence, for<sup>1</sup> fear that later they would face other things—even death. On the whole, I think there was little of heroics. Just the general army humour about grog and women and the daily thing of service life.

Scotty was a deep thinker all right. He had little time for things that the other fellows were out to do. I think he understood why they did them—mainly out of some natural zest for life, but also out of boredom with the hum-drum routine of the Army. At the same time he didn't approve. In fact he was critical.

He had no time for the brothel crawl, or for things that went on with some of the Chinese women. Some of those women were gracious enough, but things happened that met Scotty's disapproval. Most of all he disapproved of men who surrendered their virginity to the current views on sex. I remember how savage he was against this sort of thing.

'You'll be knowing,' he said, 'that some of these fellows think they're not men unless they go where the women are and do what the other fellows do. It takes more guts and spunk to stand out from them or against them, than to go with them.'

Looking back, it seems even more strange to me that Scotty should stand for such high morality. So far as I knew, he didn't have a speck or spark of religion in him, yet

he was very strong on the moral score. Since those days I have learned about the Stoics, and I would say, now, that Scotty was a natural Stoic. He had no time for emotion, for religious enthusiasm, but he had a strict mind for selfcontrol and natural morality. I call it 'natural morality,' but it always seemed strange to me that he should be so strong on morality when it didn't seem to connect up with any religious system. It was just ethics, and Scotty had developed the system pretty well. It all made sense to him, and in a way to me also. I was a most moral person. My ethics linked with my faith: they were spiritual ethics. Scotty's weren't, but the curious thing was that they were just about identical.

I don't want to give you the idea that Scotty was a severe or dreary man. To the contrary: he had a rich sense of humour, and of fun. His irony was close to unique. He could say the most outrageous things without blinking an eye. There were some of the fellows who took him on verbally and soon regretted that they had. This was especially so if he were in an icy mood. When he was in a warm mood he had us all in stitches. There were few men funnier than Scotty when he was in a warm mood. Words, jokes and riposte would ripple from him. I guess these things endeared him to me. I was glad to have his friendship.

When we went to Mersing on the east coast of the Peninsula, we were busy people. I was busy running a line detail, and our project had us learning lines the British had laid, linking up with the civilian line system, and tapping units into both army and civilian cables. We had a line running twenty-four miles to Endau Brigade wanted to keep in touch with Battalion there. We even had to run company lines within that Battalion, which was not normally our job. I saw little of Scotty because of this, but some nights we would meet in Mersing village, under the white petrol lamps

at the drinks stalls. The fraternising with the local population that we had known on the west coast was toned down in Mersing. We had an idea that we were not all that loved by the local people and that the coming of the Japanese would not be strongly opposed by some: better the Japanese than the British, many thought. Japanese were at least Asian, and we weren't.

Even so, Scotty and I had great talks. Scotty kept up his idea that ethics were what would hold the world together. He hated the politics he found in the officers' ranks, the conniving for place and position, the struggle to prove oneself better than another. To this day I don't know how much of Scotty's thinking arose out of fact and how much out of unjustified suspicion. These days I have the notion that humanity as we know it is a pretty varied mixture and we must come to terms with it, being neither gullible nor cynical. When Scotty was around, the issues seemed pretty fearful.

In action, Scotty was superb. At least these are the reports I received, because we were not able to see things first-hand. We were caught up in a busy round of keeping communications going. In the signal office, they were doing this by wireless for the most part, but we had to keep the lines going for Morse Code, fullerphone, and the new scrambled interchanges. Some nights we didn't sleep, but then it was fun. Scrounging food other than army food took a little of our time. We had to cook with the flame of the blow-lamps covered. Japanese Zero fighters would spot the slightest light, and they seemed happy enough to use a bomb or two on a person or two. They were tough and demanding days, especially as air coverage was nil, and ack-ack coverage extremely limited.

As I said, Scotty was good in action. He earned the appreciation of his fellow LAD men. For their part, they were courageous and hard-working. They kept the vehicles going, fixing them when they became crippled, substituting

parts whilst the bombing was all around them. I suppose Scotty was sure that the British way of life was the only true way. In those days he was not alone in that kind of thinking. This seemed to add to the assurance that we were fighting for the best. The kind of thinking which came later—rightly or wrongly—at the time of the Vietnam War, was totally absent from our mental concepts.

When we had to go back to Singapore Island, we were stunned. Our fortifications at Mersing—we thought—could have helped us to make another Tobruk. We would have been impregnable. Suddenly we were hauled out of that situation, making our way through Jemulang down the road to Johore, and across the causeway. Blowing away part of that causeway wasn't greatly helpful. After softening things up with a relentless artillery barrage, waves of barges swept towards the northern shores of Singapore Island. The Allied machine-guns yammered ceaselessly at the hordes of Japanese infantry as they climbed on to the shores, but sheer weight of numbers, artillery and small gunfire began to win the night, and then the day, and then the days. We were forced back until there was little land left. Finally we capitulated.

Nobody was more shocked than Scotty. He had acquitted himself well in action, showing little if any fear. The Brigade captain said he had been recommended for a decoration, and that didn't surprise me. Scotty, they told me later, was really dejected over the capitulation to the Japanese. It was galling for him to see some 90,000 of us herded into the newly formed prison camps. He held on to the thought of former British history. When he saw the Gordon Highlanders and Blackwatch regiments march into the camp, his spirits rose a bit, but he was working hard to rationalise such an abject defeat of our forces. The news from further south

seemed to indicate that the Dutch empire in Java and Timor was breaking up. The fearful prophecy was that Australia would soon be swamped.

I missed Scotty because I had been wounded. This had happened some days before the capitulation, and we were separated from the other prisoners. Our own medical units were trying to look after us. The massacre of the troops, patients and medical staff of the Queen Alexandria Army Hospital was still a horror in our minds. We were glad, in a way, that the fighting had ceased. It wasn't until we were taken to the prison camp at Changi that I met Scotty again.

He commiserated with me, noting that I had lost stones in weight. There had been loss of blood, shortage of rations, sudden malaria and terrible dysentery. The story of it has been told too many times to need repetition from my pen. After commiseration, Scotty launched into a diatribe which was aimed at our conquerors and then at some of our troops. He was bitter about the decline in discipline, guts and spunk. He blamed it all on the loss of British character. In those days Aussies were proud enough to be called British, although they refused the term 'English.' British meant 'part of the British Empire.' They had grown up under imperialism. It had been a scheme of thinking, a strong context, the true way of life. That was why there was a sudden change in ways of thinking, a loss of certainty, a change in integrity.

Scotty said, 'It all began in that world Depression. Men lost confidence. Men joined the services to get away from poverty, and to make a place in the sun. But the guts had gone out of many of them.'

He pointed back gloomily to the troops on the *Queen Mary* as they sailed from Sydney. Previous troop-sailing had all but destroyed the inner beauty of that famous old

liner. Every removable part had been souvenired by the rumbustious troops. Capetown had been done over in the same spirit. Then there were the debacles of Greece, Crete and the Western Desert. Scotty had totted them up in his mind, and he was greatly depressed.

I was naive in those days. What would you expect of a lad of twenty-three? It was true I had been a person of faith, but that was soon to undergo its own test. It wasn't of much help to Scotty. Not, either, that he would have expected that of me, or, for that matter, wanted it. I watched his battle without great interest. I had been wounded badly, and what with short rations, no pain-killers after the first few weeks, and with constant dysentery, malaria and dengue fever, I wasn't really in the mood for discussing Scotty's problems.

Then Scotty went north to the Burma-Thailand railway. He went in one of the enclosed trucks where men suffered the agony of thirst, dysentery, weakness and death. He missed the event which was later called *Miracle on the River Kwai*. I don't even know how he would have handled that. Possibly it may have meant religion to him, and he may have steered away from it. I just don't know.

What I do know is that he came back with a wasted body, and an ulcerated thigh. It was a small ulcer when I first met him after his return. His face was one which was not that of a zombie, as so many became. I don't know how much human creatures are expected to stand and retain their humanity. I guess, these days, I could say a lot about that sort of thing, but then I was without the knowledge I needed. I had been battling fiercely, as fiercely in my own way as Scotty in his. What saddened me were the zombie faces of so many of the men. They had been worked under

the utmost cruelty, deprived of dignity in living, used as human machines to build the railway line and its many bridges. They had worked under unbelievable conditions. Many of the sick and those with fearsome tropical ulcers had to sit and strain on the ropes and cables that helped to support the growing bridges.

I only tell these things told to me, to show you what Scotty faced, and what confronted him. After only hours of pressures and impossible conditions, men were reduced to animal status. The pressures that came upon them changed their minds, or drew-out what had always been there but which hitherto had been unknown to them. The battle and struggle for life raged in a way that had not been seen before, even in the Singapore prison camps. This story is not confined to the hell-holes of Burma and Thailand. Man's cruelty to man has always been, and, for that matter, will always be, until some power beyond himself change him.

I cannot say Scotty was paralysed in his thinking, but something, somewhere and somehow, had stopped abruptly. Probably some inbuilt mechanism had sought to save him from too intense a shock. He had drawn back from the horror that had turned men into zombies. Some stern spirit within him had helped him to face the horror he had witnessed and had not let him be destroyed; but I wondered.

Night after night I wondered as I tried to analyse his situation. For myself, I had gone through hell from the first moment I had sensed the ethical defection of so many. Rations for the sick had been stolen from the stores, cooks had worked rackets with the bare supplies of food, fattening themselves without mercy on others. It seemed there were few who were not in some racket or another. Some reasoned cynically that if everyone would be in rackets then things would even out. What I did not know in my naivety was that this was nothing new in man's history. Living a fairly protected life, I had been fondly sure that British integrity was

impregnable. I had read history with rose-coloured glasses, if hot with applied blinkers. Once I remembered a teacher who had sought to debunk British history, only to be fiercely opposed by our headmaster who was an Anglophile.. It had been bewildering to the class, especially as we were deeply attracted to the history master.

So what was Scotty's problem? What was my problem?

I had come to terms with my own problem, but only after a struggle so deep and bitter that over forty years later I still remember it. The principles I learned have never left me for one moment of any day. They condition all my thinking and set the nature and quality of what others call 'ethics,' but what I call 'life.'

What was Scotty's problem? It was the same as mine. It was keeping integrity in a world which seemed to have abandoned standards as though they no longer mattered, or had never really mattered. It was seeing the self-delusion of men known as 'righteous,' as they rationalised their self-saving acts, making them out to be ethical. It was the triumph of the lie over truth, in the interests of what they called 'reality.'

Scotty never seemed to waver. He watched the corruption about him without emotion. In fact he had driven his emotions down deeply until they no longer seemed to exist. Except, that is, in the anger that often leapt to his face. If ever he seemed pleased, it was when he saw me. I think I must have been the only one, apart from his wife and child at home, for whom he had warmth, yet he could keep a depressed ward of patients in fits of laughter. There was no doubt about it but that he kept himself from bitterness and cynicism on the surface, and still exhibited those qualities of honesty, fairness, and what he called 'truth,' in spite of the hunger we suffered, and the pain of his ulcerated thigh.

I was there on two occasions when the surgeon scraped his ulcer. It was done with a spoon whose bowl-edge was sharpened to razor consistency. When they exposed Scotty's thigh ulcer, you could see the greenish-grey diphtheritic slough at the centre of it. The surgeon would have to clear it without giving any anaesthetic, either general or local. Scotty was a Stoic, but sometimes the pain made him whimper. Day by day this diphtheritic ulcer ate away at his emaciated leg. His legs and his arms had already been gripped by beriberi, so that he could not move them without aid.

One day we knew he was paralysed. That is, his body was paralysed. Scotty McLean was not paralysed. He could talk, joke, laugh, share in riposte and repartee. He could go hungry like so many and at the same time enjoy the little food he received. Because he was so far gone, they decided to give him special diet. 'Special diet'—so called—was little more than the ordinary diet except it was better in quality. Scotty took it without joy and without protest.

In regard to Scotty, I was faced with an ethical quandary. I had a great problem which related to him.. By this time I had resolved my own personal problem, and without any doubt that difficulty had been ethical in its roots. For some months I had put all forms of religion behind me. I went out into the terrible joyless limbo where there is said to be no God, and man is no longer trusted. It is the most fearful void in all time, place and history. It is Eliot's 'Wasteland,' and worse than that trackless country. There, faced with his own mind, and denying his origins or his creaturely orientation to his Creator, man, in a sense, ceases to be man. This experience is the closest to utter dereliction that I know. I have been there, and let no one say I do not know the terror of godlessness.

What then was my quandary? It was this: I had one

possession I could sell, and the only way I could sell it was through the black market. I disliked the black market and had never been connected with it. Scotty loathed the black market: he had never sold anything through it, or received anything from or through it. I knew we were close to the end and that that end would be either death at the hands of our captors, or liberation from them by the Allies. Japanese troops had been pushed back gradually and painfully from island to island, fortress to fortress, and no one doubted the war was nearly over. The tragedy was that men continued to die from sickness and starvation when freedom was almost in sight.

I could see Scotty was finished unless extra food was given to him. I had learned how to cook food from greens, from flour, towgay beans, and fish *blachung*. Many of us had tried to grow greens in the leached-out soil of that prison camp. We lived in palm-covered huts under the tall rubber trees, and growing vegetables in the shade thrown by the trees was not easy. We shared the nightly accumulation of human urine. Many would be up at dawn, pouring it on their little patches of earth. The pittance we received for the work we did each day bought almost nothing. Many used it on the vitamin-destroying tobacco sold in the canteen. How then could I get nourishing food for Scotty?

I owned one wonderful possession. It was a typewriter. It was a sort of miracle that I should come to own a typewriter. A sar-major in a unit other than ours had looted a dozen of these portable machines from an abandoned retail store. This was in the midst of action. I had no qualms about receiving it from him, promising him I would pay him for it when we returned to Australia. I guess it rated highest in value to me because of the way I could express myself on it and accumulate fact and fiction for the future.

Many a time, when hunger became intolerable, I had been tempted to sell it, but I had not. Now I felt it would help

Scotty. If, however, he were to discover that I had used the black market, he would not eat the food. I had to risk that. No one was going to suffer by my act of selling the machine, so I went ahead and sold it. As usual, the transaction was disappointing. The money fell far short of what I had hoped to get, but I shrugged that off. I set about getting food for Scotty and some others.

Scotty never questioned my gifts of food. He ate them hungrily. I guess he trusted me beyond any other person. He knew I had somehow established integrity. Of course, I am not speaking about perfection. I am only speaking about a man who has tasted the bitterness of human autonomy, the separation from God which destroys his true being. The man who has known this bitterness finds dependence the sweet alternative. Anyway, Scotty trusted me.

I used to find his paralysis a worrying thing. Nothing about Scotty seemed neurotic. It was the unbroken and unbreaking autonomy of the man that I dreaded. He seemed to have a triumph of his own which cut off the rest of the world of humanity, and in some way I was included in that. As the Allied triumphs grew, Scotty seemed to gather strength, and it was that strength which should have delighted me. In fact it deeply disturbed me. On the one hand, I was glad he was not going to die: on the other, I sensed the self-righteousness that drains a man of his basic humanity. Gradually I came to see that Scotty was a Pharisee.

Judgement of one man by another is a fearful and a dangerous thing: that I have learned. Let no man judge any other man. He does not know what moves human beings in their depths to do the things they do, nor does he understand those depths. He cannot even understand his own depths. How then can he know those of another person? I knew these principles, *and I was not judging Scotty*. Even

so, the truth stared me in the face: Scotty was a godless Pharisee. He believed he had kept his integrity, and that he had kept it by his own resources of character and personhood.

So he had, but the cost was lethal. He was Henley's man of invincibility:

*Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance,  
I have not winced or cried aloud:  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

The difference between Henley's Stoic and Scotty was that Scotty never thanked any gods for anything. Nor could he see any scroll 'charged with punishments'. He had kept his integrity. That was what mattered.

I was uneasy because I wasn't sure he had kept his integrity. As a moralist and an ethicist, yes, he had kept his integrity; but is that keeping one's integrity as a human being? I had travelled through the sterile land of moralism and found no comfort: only terrible dread. I was not likely to forget that. I know no man keeps his integrity as a man from birth's beginning to death's end. Somewhere—at some time or another, or many times—he fails in the kingdom of his mind, in the hiddenness of his secret heart. I had the sickening sense that Scotty was hiding himself from himself. What made it worse was that I knew Scotty didn't know that he was.

An incident in the camp at that time greatly moved me. A Dutch doctor who regularly used hypnotherapy to anaesthetise patients for surgery, would give commands to paralysed

patients to raise an arm or leg, and they would do it. This seemed uncanny to me, a layman. What power lay in the will of one man that he could command another to do what his own will could not accomplish? 'Could not'—that was the phrase that worried me. I wondered whether the power of action lay in the will of the doctor, or in the patient himself, his will being aided or motivated by the doctor. I did not know. I still do not know. What I knew then was that men who should never have died, died of faintheartedness, and many who were clinically dead, lived to see freedom because of the strength of their will. I was discovering something about the latent power of the soul, the spirit of man working from his own resources. I have also learned the power of the occult in moving human beings to incredible exploits. It is a power man ought to avoid, but the power of Scotty McLean was not godly or occultish. It lay within Scotty himself. That was what troubled me.

In hindsight, I can see what I should have done. I should have tried to penetrate the self-righteousness of my old friend. Self-righteousness isn't a rare thing, of course. Every human being is likely to live in it from time to time, but it does not stand the test of time and human experience. Scotty's case was quite different: I could see that *he could never afford to be wrong: he could never afford to do wrong*. What terrified me was that he had accumulated mountains of guilt, vast wastes of sterility that would shatter him if ever they were revealed. I saw in frightening moments that Scotty's paralysis, whilst physical, was also, somehow, psychical. He had to be paralysed: maybe deeply down it was guilt which had paralysed him, and not the diphtheritic ulcer. What convinced me that I had discerned correctly regarding his guilt was the growth of his self-justification. He would talk to me for hours about his integrity, his acts of

justice, his unswerving adherence to what was right. At the same time, he would be scornfully critical of others. Certainly he tolerated them, but only from his high pinnacle, his lofty eyrie. It seemed no other human being lived in that rare atmosphere.

Often I was close to tears: he was impregnable. As the news grew of Allied success, he became firmer in himself. He was admirably stoical about his pain and physical affliction, but the gleam in his eye showed that nothing could touch him. Remembering my own painful pilgrimage to humility, I ached for him, but his pride defeated us all. We just accepted his self-evaluation, his claimed integrity, his humour in the face of adversity. He was just Scotty McLean.

Then they came, the planes. For months they came in silver splendour, high up in the heavens. They shone silver to our straining eyes; they moved majestically as the impregnable fortresses that they were. They showered death and defeat on the enemy below. They shot the little Zero fighters out of the sky. And on land and sea, the liberating forces crept closer to us. The news from our hidden camp wireless was good. Scotty enthusiastically ate the food I was giving him. Perhaps he was strengthening physically. Anyway, aid was close at hand.

All of a sudden it was ended: that deadly war had ceased. Japan capitulated. The generals in their various zones made their particular acts of surrender. Only the Singapore area commander refused to acknowledge the Allied victory. Anxious as we were, we sensed it would only be a matter of days, perhaps hours, until he would do the same. Certainly something was in the wind. Supplies 'of food were being rushed to the camps. Suddenly we had Quaker Oats and butter. We had supplies of sugar. Rice was plentiful. Even

so, the surrender had not been signed on our island.

Scotty had no doubt it would take place. Every minute was a vindication of his years of integrity. He had lasted the three-and-a-half years without the crushing moral failure so many had known. I saw no gentleness in him for others, but only a steady pride, an invincible belief in himself, and I turned away, sick at heart. I really had a high regard for Scotty, and, of course, pity for him in his suffering. I wanted to make another attempt to talk to him, to tell him what had happened to me, but I knew he couldn't hear me. He had a quiet assurance that he was the one man—perhaps apart from me—who had kept his integrity. I knew that he considered me too soft, and he despised the fact that I needed what he called 'religion' to keep me in the face of the pressures about us.

Then it happened. It happened quite suddenly. Someone rushed into the hut, shouting loudly, 'It's all over! It's all over! The General has capitulated!' The word 'capitulated' had been a bitter one for us, from mid-February 1942. Now, in August 1945, it was sweet, very sweet.

Everyone was shouting and cheering, and weak ones were whimpering and many were weeping. Scotty was shaking one fist in the air: it was a gesture of triumph. He had made it! His eyes shone.

Then there was another cry. 'There's a plane coming! It's coming around the camp! It's low. You can see them!'

Sure enough, that was no rumour. Some of the medical orderlies rushed outside, peering from under the attap roof on the verandah of the hut. There, with British markings, was a plane. The ack-acks were not shooting at it. This was proof that the news was true. The hatch-door of the plane was wide open and cameramen were taking a film of the camp.

I looked back towards Scotty. I could not believe what my eyes were seeing. Scotty had thrown off the sheet that kept the flies from his wounds. This paralysed man was getting out of bed, without assistance. He was running along the aisle, between the beds. Then he was on the verandah. He was running down the steep steps, and he was out in the open, where rubber trees could not hide the sky, the very blue sky, with its touches of foaming clouds.

He was standing, waving his arms and shouting. I stood on the verandah, the tears coursing down my cheeks, but inwardly I was afraid—scared of, and by, the enormous resources that were in this unbeatable Scot. I watched him waving his arms, shouting and sounding what seemed to be a battle-cry.

I also saw the silence fold over him as he collapsed. It was like watching a slow-motion camera as the power went from him, and he sank to the ground. Then he was a small bundle of limbs, and although his eyes were open and still staring, I knew they were seeing nothing, and would never see anything.

## *The Briding of Bill*

‘IT’S a deep religious cult.’ That was what Jan said to me. We had entered the pet shop. Jan had looked around. So had I. I don’t think I liked her idea about the thing being a cult, but I had to admit she had something. Jan is a very astute young woman. She picks up atmosphere pretty quickly.

You would have to admit that the pet shop had atmosphere. They all have, these pet shops. They are generally overseen by a truly cultic figure, the pet shop owner. He has incredible reserves of knowledge about birds and animals. Some of it he may get from books, but generally it is from experience. He is not your general run of shop owner or proprietor. Oh, no! He is a man of many parts, and—as I have said—has great knowledge. He can penetrate to the very brains and thoughts of his birds and animals. He knows how they think, and why they act as they do.

He has obtained this knowledge from a strange mixture of love, of creaturely affinity, of semi-worship of his creatures, and from that exciting experience which tells him that when he knows all—about humans and other creatures—then he has only begun to know. Exciting vistas of more and more

knowledge spread before him.

Jan has an intuitive—even instinctive—knowledge of how things are: how they are essentially, I mean. She is very wise.

When you go into a pet shop you smell the place first. It is that inimitable and characteristic smell of birds, their feathers, of small animals, of those delectable pet foods which bring a bonding of creatures to their caring masters and mistresses.

There are also the noises. These come from birds, animals, and humans. Humans talk incessantly, giving out their ‘O-o-hs!’ and ‘A-a-hs!’ as they see a new species of finch, parrot or pheasant—as the case may be. They give vent to adoring cries when they see coy kittens or appealing puppies. A strident bantam cock can call forth admiration, and cooing pigeons can evoke the shining of eyes. And so on.

As for the sound of the creatures, well—there are whistlings of finches and canaries, chortlings and chatterings of budgies, and mutterings, grumblings, talkings and shrieking of parrots. There are doves and pigeons cooing, and puppies yapping and squealing. They ‘all seem to like the noise-world, and do their best to keep the sound going continually, as though their very lives depend upon it.

Sometimes there is a cessation of noise—entirely. As though at a given, yet invisible signal, all birds stop their sounds. Puppies cease to squeal and bark. Doves and pigeons become silent. Humans stop talking. Parrots still their harsh cries and calls. The pet shop owner himself stands silent, ceasing from giving out creaturely knowledge and wisdom.

Then, without warning, the whole noise recommences. Sounds and sights are in business again. The cult has resumed its rites. Fascination again grips the members of this reverent religion. Puppies are adored by small children,

kittens catch the eyes of now helpless buyers, and people move from cage to cage. Each is drawn by his special predilection to that which charms him most. The wily shop owner looks at their eyes and calculates the weakness of each buyer. He may be fair in his prices, but he is unscrupulous in his salesmanship. He knows what they will buy. He knows that money knows no bounds when it comes to the pet of your choice, the rare bird of your love, the hunger for your special creature. This is possibly because pets give their affection without strings attached.

Both pet proprietor and buyers have only scorn for those who wish to see all birds in the wilderness, all animals wholly free, and nothing ever in a cage, on a leash, or in a pen. They know something that these idealists of freedom do not know. It is the bonding of man and creature which has been since time immemorial. They know that creatures actually desire affection from man, as man from them. Some birds peck their owners for love and joy, some dogs nip with affection, and others simply covet caresses. This is all part of the noble cult of creaturely affinity, since man is no less a creature than are they. That some creature-owners abuse their pets, and some pets abuse their owners, is no cause to reject the authentic relationship, and ban all such affinities. This would be to throw out the baby with the bath-water.

That day we were out to bride our Bill. Bill is our long-billed corella. It is a known and widely accepted fact in bird-dom and pet-dom, that long-billed corellas are the most intelligent, vocal, and wise of all parrots. Owners of sulphur-crested cockatoos or giant macaws will hotly deny this, and enter into endless debate, but for us—Jan and me—the matter had long ago been settled. When a bird such as our LBC can store up special and separate conversation for each of

his dialogue speakers, then nothing, surely, can supersede that.

Briding our Bill was a delicate and complicated matter. For one thing, we were not sure whether Bill was male or female. He always *seemed* male to us, mainly because he was noisy, arrogant, dominating, and generally speaking *cocky*. He *just felt* male to us. Even so, we had to have him sexed (I will tell you about that in a moment). Then we had to get a mate for him. Because LBCs are on the protected list of parrots, they cannot generally be trapped. It is rarely that you see them in a pet shop, and when you do they are often quite expensive. This is because they have mostly been bred in captivity—never an easy thing to do—or they have been trained patiently over many years. The purchase of a bird-bride then, for Bill, seemed nigh on impossible.

However, every so often the Parks and Wildlife people issue trapping licences to certain responsible people. This is because in one State the birds are a threat to the vinekeepers, the grape-growers and vintners. With their unusually long beaks, these LBCs dig around the vines and attack the roots, thus killing the fruitful vines. When the trappers reduce the numbers of these birds, then trapping ceases for a time.

Meanwhile, the pet shops are replenished with reasonably priced long-billed corellas. So too was this shop into which we walked that morning.

The sexing of Bill was the first thing to do. We had read books, pondered the crimson of LBC markings, and yet had not been able to sex Bill. To get Bill from our home to the pet shop was not easy. We first had to put him in a small cage. When we put the small cage into his large one, he looked at it with suspicion. He moved himself on to the farthest perch. He cried indignantly when I wanted him to sit as usual on my hand whilst I petted him. He read my mind all too cannily. Finally I had to grasp him firmly with gloved

hands and put him in the smaller cage. With difficulty I got the cage into the back seat of our car.

Because the cage was on its side and the perch at the vertical, Bill had to hold on to the perch with one foot and the side of the cage with the other. In other words, he had to use a straddling tactic. He was plainly insulted, degraded and demeaned by the treatment he had received. He sulked, so badly had he taken it. I turned on the car radio, and Bill immediately took to the music. He cocked an ear at first, and then became vocal. He asked "Ow are Bah?" and then went off into his own idiomatic vocality. I could distinguish few words, but knew he was at home in the car. All the way he watched how I drove the car. I now know where the term 'sticky-beak' comes from. I sensed that he regarded my driving with an element of contempt.

He liked the pet shop proprietor. He recognised him immediately as a bird-and-animal man. He asked the man how he was, and said "Ullo, cocky!" The man replied in the same jargon, and then proceeded to examine Bill's eyes. 'He's a male!' he said with certainty. We nodded happily at that.

You must not think this examination was a perfunctory thing. Others were also involved in-it. The proprietor's daughter was a fussy young piece of humanity. She missed nothing of all that went on. There was also a grown woman, and some other young people. They were all fascinated with Bill. After a time we had quite a crowd. They asked plenty of questions. They wanted to know his history. People with parrots and newish babies are much the same. Humans assume a special voice for babies and parrots. At this time the people were using the special voice, which—for want of a term—we will call 'the parrot voice.' It is slightly different from the voice used by adults for babies. The grimaces and grins are also somewhat different.

Bill loved it all. He used his special voice also, which he reserves for human beings on such occasions. He greatly

satisfied them with his noddings, his wise looks, his special way, of walking up and down his perch. They were especially attracted by the miraculous swivellings of his head. Their appreciative laughter drove him on to yet more swivellings. He knew them for sure as parrot lovers. As actors love audiences, so Bill loved them.

The woman's eyes glowed. She used the kind of voice women use in the presence of romance. 'Are you getting a mate for him?' she asked.

We nodded. Yes, we were getting a mate for him. Others also seemed delighted with that thought. Their eyes likewise shone. How could we tell them of the years we had looked at Bill and envisaged him having a mate, a large log, and then some fledglings? Innately all human beings are for bird-romance and animal-romance, as much as they are for human romance—all humans, that is, who are not disgruntled and bitter about life and love. You have to be a true human to accept the goings-on of parrots, especially in their love-life.

It was a procession which returned to the shop. The group enlarged a little when folk sensed something special was on. They shared with us as the shop owner went up and down the cages that held long-billed Corellas, examining each one according to his accumulated wisdom. At last Bill's bride was chosen. She looked to be the dead-spit of Bill himself in regard to size, colour and markings. Indeed she had the same unblinking and wise look that Bill often affects.

It was quite a job catching the new bride. She was at first haughty, startled, and agitated, but finally she was caught. We looked into her eyes, noting that her pupils were somewhat different from those of Bill. Definitely she was a female. We nodded with the confidence that we had in the sagacity of the birdman. We also respected his wisdom in regard to the mating of them. In no way were they to be introduced immediately. Billarina was not to be put into Bill's

cage.

'It's the territorial matter,' the man explained.

We nodded at that. We knew a bit about the territorial matter. Bill had to assert and maintain his territorial rights to his own larger cage.

'You must let Bill out into his large cage. Then you must put the female into this smaller cage, and then put it—the small cage—into the larger cage. This will help Bill to feel he is the boss.'

Even as human beings we understood this matter. There must be a pecking order, and with LBCs a special beaking or billing order.

It was then we met the two monstrous men. I have to say they were monstrous because their size and looks indicated such. They were both huge; they were strong. They looked like desperadoes. Their fists were large, their arms like hams, their chests like wide barrels, and their faces full and strong. One man's head was broad at the base and then sloped until it squared off up at the top. The haircut followed the natural line of the head. The other man's head was equally large, but was square, like a fleshy rectangle, front-view, and a cube, side and back-view.

They began to talk to me. I feared they were in the bird racket, that they wanted to know where I lived, and that knowing this they would, at some time or another, come and steal my other parrots and filch our Bill.

The men had watched the pet proprietor give us advice on breeding LBCs. He had showed us a huge log or stump of a tree. It cost as much as Billarina herself. He gave instructions as to how to place this in the breeding cage. I need not trouble you with the details which were spelled out with great wisdom.

'One day,' the man said, 'about four or five years' time,

they will breed.'

'Hurrah!' we thought, 'our dream will come true.'

The man then told us a lot of technical details which I do not need to produce. The two men looked very closely at the tall log-stump. Perhaps they would, one day, use such a stump. I could not rightly know.

When the shop owner went away to get a box in which to put Billarina, the man with the cubed head came across to me.

'You like parrots, eh?' he said.

'You bet,' I said, a trifle nervous. Not for anything was I going to give him my address. In my mind I could see the rifled cages, the emptied aviaries, the broken doors hanging on their hinges.

'They get you in,' he said.

I looked at him with dawning surprise. His eyes were as gentle as those of a baby. They were beautiful eyes, and all the more beautiful because they softened his face, gentling it down marvellously.

'I've been got in since I was a boy,' I said.

'Me too,' he said earnestly. I wanted to take him up into the hills where I live, and show him my birds.

His mate was now speaking to the birdman about a pair of parrots. I had seen them, and they were most beautiful, called rainbow lorikeets. They had shimmered with colours.

'How much the rainbows?' the man was asking.

The birdman was answering him. 'They're red collars,' he was saying, 'and they cost \$300 the pair.'

The two large men were a bit sad, as though heaven were still a fair distance away from them. The cube-headed man thought for a while, and came back to me.

'I'm breeding cockatiels especially,' he said. He seemed so proud, and so tender. 'They're lovely,' he added.

Suddenly I saw this man with dozens of cockatiels in a

large aviary, and I thought they were such small parrots for so huge a man. I felt ashamed for the suspicions I had had of him and his mate. I saw some of the cockatiels actually landing on his arms, and even sitting on his huge hands, and him looking down at them with his gentle and tender eyes. I was deeply moved, and turned away to pay the birdman.

Before I knew what I was doing, I was 'telling him all about my love for birds; how, as a boy, I had been given my brother's aviary and all his birds, and I had thought that was just about heaven, or paradise anyway. I found I wanted to confide in this man, although he was no more than about thirty years of age and I was more than twice that, with white hair and it thinning, too. I wanted to keep seeing the joy in his eyes, and the gentleness in his spirit.

I had forgotten all about Bill and the bridging of him. I was just thinking about this man and his beefy mate. I wasn't thinking about Billarina and the day she would be let out of her smaller cage into the larger one. I had seen enough of LBCs to know Bill would huffle himself up, ruffle his feathers, look wise and dignified, whilst under it all he would be delighted, and that would be the beginning of the mating.

No, I was just seeing this man and his cockatiels, grey and white, and white ones also, and the lot of them whistling with sheer delight and even adoration as they flashed and flew about their large breeder, maybe landing on his shoulders or his arms, and even his hands, eating out of this hand or that some seed or apple or something, and he, all the time looking down at them with love and tenderness, as though a human being has something in him which is indescribable. That vision was very much in my mind, and I was deeply moved. I thought to myself, 'Cube-Head and the Cockatiels,' as though it were the title to some significant book or play.

Well, it was significant too, quite significant. Bill and all

his doings—including Billarina—suddenly seemed so ordinary against the tender miracle of the large and beefy cockatiel lover. I could see little other.

In fact that was about all I could see in that pet shop, with its mystique of creature life, its smells, its noises, chatterings, whistlings, callings and other such matters.

## *Grandpa's Special Birthday*

GRANDPA woke at 2:00 am. He didn't even remember—not on awakening—that it was his birthday. Grandma, lying beside him, sensed his uneasy movement, but she was adept at going back to sleep quickly. Drank sleep, she did, quaffing it in huge pannikins of unconscious delight. Quite a one was Granny, when it came to sleeping. She knew he would meditate, staring up at the ceiling he could not see. Well, let him: he liked it that way.

Not this morning: he didn't like being awake, for a rush of thoughts had come to fill the vacuum of his scarcely alerted mind. In fact it was like a tide that had risen rapidly and was filling the caves that had their openings above lowtide, but themselves were lower than low-tide. The waters rushed in, engulfing him, and they were pretty close to being accusations. Grandpa almost sagged under the weight of them. He said to himself, almost in despair, 'I've never done anything.' He thought wildly, 'Why, I've been on this earth a long time, and never accomplished a thing!'

True or not, that was the way he saw it. He groaned with the burden of his thoughts. Then the understanding came to him that he was sixty-five. 'No!' he protested to himself. 'Sixty-five means you have become old. Retiring time.'

Pension time. They give you concessions, cut your hair for less. Smile blandly, half pitying you.'

He lay awake, suddenly realising it was his birthday, and then all that the occasion must mean. He traversed the past quickly, wildly, despairingly. No mountain loomed up which he had built. Not even a little hillock. He had never built up the highways, or levelled the hills. He had not made safe-ways for others to walk in. All the time he thought he had been at it, and now when he looked he had accomplished nothing. He could hardly bear the despair. He kept thinking of his life and its mixed motives. He had done nothing out of a pure motive. He didn't question what others had done; whether any human being since the beginning of time had ever done anything purely, anyway.

He began thinking about the children. How human they had been! How faulty. From tottage to their present marital and parental status. The problems they had with their children. Come to think of it, they had much the same problems as he had had with them. The patterns seemed immovable, fixed. He groaned as he thought about it.

'Never done a thing!' he breathed with agonised astonishment. Granny heard him groan.

'What is it?' she asked, resisting arrest, resisting being dragged out of delectable sleep, but an instinct for her man stirring her in unconscious depths.

He had pity on her and answered nothing. She didn't accept that, and became half awake. 'What's worrying you?' she asked.

When he answered shortly, 'Nothing!' she persisted, becoming wholly awake.

'Can't imagine it,' he said. 'It's unbelievable. I've lived a whole life and never accomplished anything.'

Every so often Grandpa had these fits. They made him ever so melancholy. 'What about the painting?' she asked. A few days previously they had painted—that is, helped to

paint—the walls and ceilings of Elaine’s home. Elaine was one of their daughters, married and with two children.

‘I don’t mean that,’ he said, ‘I mean I’ve never accomplished anything worthwhile.’

Grandma was slipping back into sleep. ‘They thought it worthwhile,’ she mumbled. ‘They saw it as practical love.’

While painting, they had listened to the commentary on the Test match between Australia and England. Sometimes their brushes had been poised as they heard an exciting happening. Now all that was part of the miserable unproductive life he lived.

Grandma pressed his arm. ‘You’ve done plenty,’ she said reassuringly, and he knew she was gone from him. He could hear her steady breathing.

He was alone again with his dreary thoughts. They pressed in on him, gloomy ghosts who knew how to raise foreboding in the human spirit. They drifted around his mind as restless wraiths. Only occasionally they descended to stare him in the eye, accusingly, remorselessly. He could have wept.

Then he thought of Clarrie. Clarrie had been an alcoholic, and a bitter one at that. His life had been hellbent on angry self-destruction, but somehow he had come out of it. He, Grandpa, had brought good news to Clarrie, and Clarrie had come out of his anger and then his alcohol. Now Clarrie was quite a person: a real man. Grandpa was glad for this touch of cool water on his parched tongue. ‘Clarrie!’ he thought. ‘What a change in that feller!’ Some of his gloom dissipated.

He tried to remember others, but all he could remember were those with whom he had failed. Clarrie’s success diminished in the face of the others. He began to gloom again. He switched on the light above his head, turning its brightness to his side, and blinking in its brilliance. He pulled a book to him. He always had two books on the bed-

side locker: one by a wise man, and the other by an entertaining author. This time he chose the sage. The other seemed too frivolous.

His gloom dropped away with what he read. He read only for a short time, cheered by the sanity that can be in the world, and often is. Before he realised it, he had slipped away into sleep. His hand had moved mechanically to the light switch. Almost before it had dropped he was sleeping soundly.

The mood was still hovering about him when he awoke. He dived out into the reality of the day. The garden needed watering and he set the water-timers on the sprays. He pulled a few weeds: He picked some ripe tomatoes, and dusted the plants down with disease preventative dust. He fed the budgies in their aviary and peered into the nests at the ugly youngsters. Soon, he knew, they would be fully fledged, beautiful and strong.

Grandma—Maria to him—called from the house. ‘Phone ringing,’ she said, ‘and long-distance calls.’ Her words were always brief in the morning. She disappeared into the bedroom. He knew she would be under the blankets. He waited for the call, and it came with the pips sounding for the longdistance connection. It was a sister. Fancy Nell remembering his birthday! On its heels another sister, Petria. Both calls from New South Wales to his Adelaide Hills home. He was nourished by their care for him. One sister was older, the other younger. Well, he *didn’t feel* old. He knew the cliché that you were only as old as you felt. He felt very young, very immature, a non-accomplisher.

In his study his own books stared down from the shelves at him. They seemed distant from him and separate. He wondered how his groggy mind had ever written them. His soggy spirit was too slack this morning to relate to them. The phone was ringing again. He took the calls, and each one renewed him. His daughters were calling him, one by

one. He would see them later in the day. Their caring for him cheered his slack spirit. He tried, even physically, to shake off the gloom that clung to his shoulders, but it was settled and would not move.

At morning tea, the Team chucked him. What did it feel like to be old? What would he do now? Retire? It was all pointless. They knew and he knew: he would never retire. One day doesn't make a difference in strength or intention. Or could it? Could one change an attitude because of a birthline? He was beginning to smile. He unwrapped the presents and absently ate a piece of cake. He even found himself glowing. Just to be in a team, even if it had difficulties in publishing and communications, was quite a thing. 'Quite a thing,' he murmured to himself.

Suddenly he remembered a monograph he had once written. He had called it, *Commanded to Joy*. Joy was a matter not of circumstances but of decision. There was plenty to be joyful about, if one wished it that way. He began to think of the good things, and in a moment felt the gloom fall away from his shoulders. His eyes took on a shrewd and wise look. His old humour—wry and whimsical—began to return. He let it ride itself out on his bright words. He was the hunter now, not the hunted. His heart cried a 'Tallyho!' whilst his brain followed the enemy in hot pursuit. He marvelled at what a human being could be. Even if he had never accomplished anything—and maybe this is the lie in the life of every man—there was still time, and anyway no man was penalised for non-accomplishment. There was always the severe mercy at the end of the road.

After that he sat at the desk, determined to let the creative flush pour itself out on clean blank paper, and that it began to do until the first grandchildren arrived. They gave their 'hullabaloo!' to the day, and were followed by their strong-minded parents. He always had a sense of surprise when he saw his children, and was puzzled as to how they could have

children, and especially the variety of children they raised.

As always he found he liked being Grandpa to the small tribe. He half-envied Grandma, who fulfilled her role perfectly. He stumbled in his. Never knew how much time to give. Hated being patronising. Would always see the child as the grown person, the baby as the child. Got excited when they turned out a poem or an imaginative flight of a short story. Reminded him of his own dreaming days. Had always dreamed of the first story in print, and then one day it had been. A shining glossy country annual journal, and the picture of a magnificent dingo in full colour. The dream had never crumbled.

What does a man give when he writes? What does a woman communicate in her creative power? The answer he heard was startling. It was to colour his day to its end: the answer was 'truth.' He found that stunning. He didn't ask 'What is truth?' for deeply down in every human being is the knowledge of truth. He knew that only those who cannot afford the truth work hard and desperately at the lie.

He stopped being introspective. He would just let the day come.

Some phone calls tried to build barriers against time. These he treated with warm humour. 'No: no way am I retiring.' 'Slow down? What does that mean?'/ 'Go on the pension? What is the point?' 'Get a little unit? Now what would I be doing with a little unit?' After the conversations he realised how many of his friends were running scared. They welcomed the welfare state and the last years eked out in pathetic hopefulness. They had no real hope of good things ahead.

Suddenly he was grateful for his night's anguish. The agony of non-accomplishment. The sneers of negativity from the past. These kept a man humble. He was out of danger of *hubris*, the human exultancy which makes a man stumble on the feet of his own pride. How grateful he was always to be

cut down to *size—the size of a man!* How comforting just to be a man and not a god. Being a god was a burden. Better to relax and be a true human. There was no crime in being a human, provided one did not make it an excuse to be foolish and indulgent. He rolled the thought around in his mind, as a child convolutes its sweet lolly in the mouth. Human: that was it!

The children and the grandchildren began their official arrival in the afternoon. George would be a mite late as he had cricket practice. Aaron would be in about the same time: he was down looking at the property he had bought. A farm, all vibrant with possibilities. Front paddocks with plenty of dammed water, and the back hills thick with timber, a few rabbits and a mild mob of kangaroos. This was living for Aaron, and his two youngsters were going to find a new life, and Aaron's wife—Grandpa's daughter Veronica—was going to be stimulated. Perhaps she would return to her art of painting.

So the thoughts rolled around in his mind like vagrant marbles. Roll he let them. Whilst they were rolling, Aaron and Veronica turned up, not only to reclaim their children but to present Grandpa with his birthday present. He stared at the two crimson canaries in their small carry-cage. Even though closely confined, the cock bird stood high on his two legs, his head alert, his intelligent eyes surveying Grandpa. In a small moment he cocked his head and Grandpa's heart turned over. He had known there was great joy in the world, but it was multiplied by seeing the aristocrats of the animal and bird worlds. The crimson hen was no less regal. It was almost as though she wore a crown. The family—swelled in numbers—made its way to the large igloo of an aviary.

The liberation of the canaries within the aviary was quite an event. Grandpa almost trembled as his hand went tenderly around the cock bird, and he placed it gently on his open palm. It seemed to like that. It was noble enough not

to be frightened. It stood still for a moment before it made a sweeping upwards flight into the spacious aviary. It was a new experience for it, and one of great enjoyment. The hen followed in equally gracious flight. Both discounted the domestic enquiries of the old-timers, the already established canaries and finches. The two birds carried their own royalty with them. Grandpa trembled within, never ceasing to wonder at the vast supplies of high dignity and quiet joy that exist within the creation. He re-felt the joy of being human.

There were other presents of course: a book of short stories, a Parker pen, a shirt which he could wear in winter, nine pairs of socks from his older sister (along with two pyjama suits), nuts, sweets, and other delectables. There were the home-made birthday cards of the grandchildren, one of them showing Grandpa in the aviary. In this, Grandpa was greatly out of proportion, but doubtless this impressionistic view tallied fully with the grandchild's sight and artistry.

To this point the day was enough. Marvellously he kept in control of the climaxing events. He poured the drinks at the evening meal. He waited until all served themselves in the buffet party. He selected only the things he would enjoy, even if they added to his slight middle plumpness. His conscience let him indulge for a short season, and he delighted in the food. The warm feeling that was growing was a compound production: the events of the night and the day had somehow come together, born of an unseen integrity. They had their own innate unity.

Over coffee they chatted. Inconsequential things punctuated by a grand thought or two. They were all philosophers of a kind, theologians of sorts, and basically human in the way he understood humanity to be humanity. Grandma overarched them all in her quiet but dominant way. She was eminently practical, almost to the point of obsession. He had his own secret thoughts about her. She changed at

night when they went to bed. She was not much more than a girl, and she seemed to resume her dreams with her nightdress. He had never quite understood that. The transformation never ceased—for him—to be remarkable.

Now she was quietly letting them all be: the children in one corner acting out their adult goals, and the adults relieved by being in a semi-play position. The early evening meandered on, punctuated by peanuts and coffee, and various memories of childhood, the main ones being humorous and ridiculous. They liked laughing at themselves as well as at one another. The married children felt the relief of respite the party had given them, free to be themselves and let their children also be themselves.'

Then the faint urging began. Life would have to be resumed. ('As though this is not life itself,' Grandpa said to himself.) They had their last cups of coffee and tea. The parental tones resumed themselves in the serious-minded mums and dads. The children unconsciously grasped at the last remnants of the grandparental life-situation. They were storing up these things—albeit unconsciously. One day they would repeat them proudly. Evocation by chance stimuli would cause their art to flourish, and the truth to pour itself out right nobly. The toys were tidied up, the make-believe clothes were suddenly just a flat pile of old garments. The sales counters disappeared; the noise diminished. There were now only tired and sagging children, slightly irritated after surges of vagrant adrenalin. They knew they were on their way out of dreamland. The play was finished. Life was to begin again as children understood (or did not understand) it.

Grandpa enjoyed the embraces where others might have endured them. He was alert and conscious of the understreams which had flowed, unarticulated, through the evening. They did not disturb him. Humanity must be accepted where it has its play. Realism is always more healthy than

cynicism. Perfectionism is the cult of the damned.

He watched the cars sweep out of the drive. Some sought to go first, and some to stay back until the last; but then they all went. The waves were excited, grateful, perfunctory, absent-minded. Then they were gone. At that mildly late hour the phone rang.

At first he could not believe it, but he was delighted. It was Marina, and from about thirty years back. She had been a girl then, imprisoned in a slum. He had taught her something of the freedom men have under the One who is both Creator and Father. She had not understood the theology, but she had expertly read the action. If ever anyone had grasped truth she had. The truth had not wholly grasped her, she being a rebel. But the encounter had been rich for her, as also for Grandpa, who then was only father, but of course father also to her, in the way she needed fatherhood.

He was glad to listen, only occasionally speaking, and then in answer to her questions. She was old now—forty-three years! She said it with the exclamation mark, but he knew she was proud to be mature. Yet not all that mature: she had drifted here and there. Far from not being warm flesh and blood, vivid humanity, she was all the more so for her errors, repentances (they were many) and renewals. And now she was enjoying the long distance call, not counting the dollars but loving the interchange.

When he put down the phone, Grandma, who had ceased being Grandma and was now a loving young woman—a girl, so to speak—herded him upstairs into the bedroom. 'Time we were in bed,' she said. She almost sniggered. 'Not as young as you used to be,' she said.

He said coldly, 'One day older than yesterday, and all the better for it.'

She nodded at that. 'You'll fight taking the pension until your dying day, eh?'

He also nodded. 'No cheap hair-cuts or fare cuts, or

reduced tickets to the Festival Hall events,' he said. 'I'll just keep living, my dear,'

'I bet you will,' she said with a sudden burst of savage happiness, 'especially when you don't care whether you have achieved anything or not.'

He put up hands of self-protection. 'I agree! I agree!' he cried. Then he leaned towards her, down to her, and said, 'We never know whether we have or we haven't, and it's best that way. That's what I learned from today.'

He grinned to himself in the mirror, marvelled at the older man who grinned back at him, and made a dive towards the bed.

'Beat you,' he crowed delightedly. To him it had always been a mysterious fact that she could be in bed before him. Not tonight however! He was still crowing when she climbed in beside him, but for this occasion at least she did not mind.

After all, it was his sixty-fifth birthday, and old men have strange, strange ways.