

Breaker Morant's Split Personality: Australian Male Identity Through Opposing Eyes

by

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Abstract

Breaker Morant's Split Personality: Australian Male Identity Through Opposing Eyes

Creative Artefact: Pilgrim's Time

The creative artefact is loosely based on Morant's life and death. The narrative is written from three points of view and makes use of three variations of tense with the dual purpose of distinguishing between the different voices and to establish a dissonance that isolates the characters from each other by time and distance. The main character's voice is written in past tense, third person and is set in Australia. It is juxtaposed against his mother's voice that is written in present tense, third person and is set in England. The novel is framed with a prologue, that alerts the reader to the character's imminent death, and the story begins in 1894, five years before Morant joined the Anglo-Boer war.

The novel tells the story of a character known as 'The Pilgrim' who is unclear about his own identity and his place of belonging. His allegiance is divided between Australia and England, mother and father, friend and enemy. A number of minor characters highlight the theme of identity as central to the novel. Harvey, for instance, is a revision of Henry Lawson's Arvie Aspinell. Fryingpan is a re-creation of A B Paterson's innocent non-white Australian after the tradition of 'Frying Pan's Theology', an overtly racist poem on the relationship between Australian Chinese immigrants, Indigenous Australians and white colonisers. Fryingpan's naiveté, which is present in Paterson's poem, is overturned in the novel in such a way that he is the spiritual presence that helps the novel to culminate in the transformation of Pilgrim from confused and ambiguous living identity to a spiritually encompassing identity that belongs in several places simultaneously: life and death, above and below, home and away.

Exegesis: The Making of Breaker Morant: Mythology and the Australian National Identity

This thesis, which consists of a creative artefact and an exegesis, reflects on the 'myth' of Breaker Morant, the Anglo-Australian poet and horseman who was controversially executed by the British for murder in the second Boer War.

The exegetical section of the thesis examines the early life of Edwin Henry Murrant and unravels the ambiguities of his life story and the way in which Australians from different social classes responded and related to both the man and the stories about him. The exegesis then goes on to discuss how The Breaker emerged, and continues to be re-imagined by biographers and creative writers, as a character that symbolised Australian national identity. By establishing the premise that The Breaker was a symbol of Australian national identity, the argument analyses how Morant became mythologised through film and literature of the 1980s that depicted Morant's involvement in the Anglo-Boer war, as a 'famous' poet, legend, and 'war hero' at a time when Australia was still 'processing' its experiences in the Vietnam War. With the current resurgence of interest in Morant, I argue that the Australian military male identity is again being re-examined and defended through cultural representations such as songs and re-runs of plays about Morant. The conclusion drawn by this exegesis that Breaker Morant, as a representation of 'Australian Male Identity', is one that is in continuous state of retrospection and flux depending upon political currents and creative interpretations.

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Pilgrim's Time

BJ Thomason

Prologue

February 1902 and a hot storm has formed up and rumbled over Pretoria. On the twenty-seventh day of the month, Pilgrim prepares to die. He remembers a Thomas Moore poem he'd once loved.

He had lov'd for his love, for his country he died,
They were all that to life had entwin'd him,
Nor soon shall the tears of his country be dried,
Nor long will his love stay behind him.

He is seated now, hands bound behind his back but he doesn't struggle. He speaks. Darkness lifts; a blindfold is raised. Early morning light stings his eyes and enters his head like a knife blade; way back inside his eye sockets the muscles tense against the sudden inlet of bright light. Time moves slowly now; he is savouring these moments. He must see everything but death. Not death at all.

Part One

The City

1

Pilgrim woke up agitated. It was the dream again. And, to add to his annoyance, the dog was straddled over him licking his face. He gagged, shoved the dog.

‘Fleabag.’

He rolled out of bed and stepped onto the floor, shivering at the shock of cold pressing against his nakedness. Pilgrim scooped up the newspaper that the dog had brought in.

‘Thanks, Mate,’ he said as he turned it over and examined the label, ‘but, where’s my *Bulletin*?’ He tossed the roll onto his bed. If his poem had been published, *The Bulletin* wouldn’t pay the par if the poet couldn’t hand over a copy of the poem cut out from *The Bulletin*’s own pages. It was a policy that ensured the contributors subscribed. He would pay a pound a year for the subscription and each poem earned him seven shillings. So far, this year, *The Bulletin* had not paid for itself, and although they had promised to publish ‘Brown Sugar’ in July, he’d not yet seen it, so he hadn’t been able to collect. The dog was sending him broke.

Controlling his anger, he grabbed the dog by the scruff of its mangy neck and yanked. The dog leaned back and yelped as Pilgrim pulled it along the floorboards. At the door, he lifted his foot, dug it into the dog’s grey scraggly backside and shoved. The dog rolled onto its back, baring its undignified male parts as the door closed against him. Pilgrim hooked the latch and then growled downward toward the gap under the door.

‘Why do you *always* lose my *Bulletin*?’

He grumbled, sighed, turned and ran his hands through his hair. The bed springs groaned as he sat down and reached for the package. Pilgrim tore at the loose paper that wrapped his copy of *The Australian Town and Country*. An ‘overdue’ invoice fell out, which he balled up and pelted across the room. It bounced neatly into the corner. Finally, he laid the pages of the newspaper across his bed and buried himself in the news.

The Transvaal. LONDON, July 30. —Advices from South Africa state that Malaboch, the rebel native chief in the Transvaal, has been wounded in an encounter with the Boers, and is now suing for peace. The women and children belonging to Malaboch's followers have abandoned the caves in which they took refuge after the Boers stormed Malaboch's stronghold.

He paused from reading and rolled his eyes upward. His sight was drawn to a corner of the ceiling that was scabbed with flaking paint and a spreading damp area. Ah ...

Last night, he'd been thinking of his mother as he'd drifted off to sleep while thunder had exploded in sharp claps around the city. That explains the dream, he thought, and then returned his attention to the newsprint. His mother used to tell him about the Zulus. How she had amused him with her tales! Ha! She would tell him that sparks would shoot from the tips of their spears ... He would laugh and forget about his fear of thunder.

And Africa! Still at war after all these years. He remembered, with a touch of nostalgia, how it happened that the first thing he'd read of in an Australian newspaper was the battle of Majuba Hill. That had been ... when he'd stepped into Queensland ... more than ten years ago ... into the heat ... the flies ... the shock of it all.

Pilgrim allowed his mind to wander, fleetingly, to his mother and back as he traced his finger along the image of the spear that the Zulu held, and the shield that stood tall as the man himself. What was it made from? What was its weight? Would it protect the naked body from a bullet?

Suddenly, he realised that he hadn't written his mother in over a month, so he quickly flipped the pages of the newspaper to the 'shipping intelligence' column to find out that a ship was due to leave for England the following day. He padded over to his writing desk, found a section of clean pages at the back of his notebook, sharpened the tip of his pencil on the edge of his chair and scribbled out a long letter. The dream niggled away at the back of his mind.

It was noon by the time he had finished. He pulled himself together to face the day. As he dressed himself for a trip into town, two pennies and a sixpence clattered onto the floor out of the pocket of his pants. He picked up the three coins and examined them in his hand wishing they might multiply, but after a moment, he shook his head, cursed the dog and dropped the coins back into his pocket. Pilgrim pulled on his coat, picked up his letter-book, and ran down the stairs through the kitchen and out of the front door. At the end of the path he stepped over the low gate, and then slowed his pace and walked along Raper Street. As he walked, he rolled up his notebook and shoved it into the lining of his coat. He strode all the way into town to spend his last sixpence on postage for the letter to his mother and on another copy of *The Bulletin*.

§

By half past two on August 4, 1894, the sky over Sydney was in a bad mood. Everything was stained sepia in the darkening afternoon. With his last tuppence in his pocket, Pilgrim stood clutching the newspaper. He opened his new copy of *The Bulletin* and folded it back at page fifteen. Holding the paper between two hands, he flicked out the wrinkles. Snap. Hungrily, he scanned the page under the heading 'Answers to Correspondents' until, at last, he found his pen-name.

Pilgrim: You may be 'A Comical sort of a bloke' as you assert, but you are a bloke whose comedy doesn't look well in writing. At least, this bloke thinks so. Try some other bloke ...

The newsprint blurred. Why, after ten years in a colony of his own people, did he still feel like an impostor? His verse was every bit as good as 'Clancy of the overflow' and, he struggled to understand, why were Lawson's morbid lines snapped up? Perhaps he *had* lost his sense of humour. Ah, he was homesick. Just homesick,

he told himself. And maybe the colonials had lost their senses of humour, too. It wouldn't be surprising in this lonely country.

He wrinkled his nose. A stench wafted up. Horse dung not yet collected by sparrow-starvers steamed in scattered balls along the street. Blowflies that should have been content seemed disappointed with the world. They closed their wings and, depressed by the moisture in the air, walked all over the sticky mounds. Pilgrim spat to the side. City horses. They stink. They're sick.

And if the horses were sick of this town, then so was he. He was tired of colonial life, of poverty, tired of the country and its people who made no sense to him at all: tired of this place at the bottom of the world.

§

Crooked twigs of lightning crackled around the city, flashed behind buildings and burned green streaks onto the retinas of his eyes. Thunder grumbled: low and cantankerous.

A bell sounded. Clang.

How *that* sound took him back.

The Bridgewater cows had worn bells. You could hear the muted clack-clack, as the animals roamed about in the fog on the old farm, back in England. And at Devon, hunting bells echoed through the woods, calling to the Stevenstone Hounds.

And Daisy, too. She'd had a bell ... and there he was. Back in Queensland. The day they'd met.

As he stood there, looking across Sydney with its bruised backdrop of blue-black clouds, the sound of the tram bell reminded him of Fanning Downs Station. He recalled how he'd been riding out to catch the tail end of a muster, when a glint of sunlight caught his eye and he'd stopped and looked toward the homestead to see what it was. Daisy had been standing on the stoop of the little cottage. It had been nine o'clock in the morning when he'd seen her, shading her eyes from the sun with

one hand, the other arm dangling by her side, school bell in hand. Dust swirling at her boots. She had lifted her hand with the shiny bell and brought it down.

Clang-a-clang. Clang-a-clang.

The children had dropped from a peppercorn tree, one, then two, then three and had gone running to the house.

The mare that Pilgrim was riding had turned her ears forward to track the fading tintinnabulation. Stockwhip in his hand, Pilgrim had nudged the mare in the ribs and it galloped to the homestead as Daisy herded the children indoors, and then, halfway through the door, holding it open, she had turned to face him. Their eyes had met ... and clang.

But ten years and two months had passed since then...

And yes, Pilgrim had to admit, he had fallen for her too quickly. She had attracted his attention like a flash of light. The prim figure in starched apron and skirts, the tidy waist, the big bundle of hair scooped into a bun behind her neck. How he had loved *her*.

Eight years from now, he will close his eyes and think of her for the last time: a sharp sting in his chest, a crack in his ear and a flash. He will see the exact moment that her hand had crossed his cheek. The last thought he has will be of Daisy's strong, gritty face bearing down on him as her curled lips tell him to get lost.

§

There he was that Saturday afternoon with *The Bulletin* in his hand. He inhaled a lungful of damp air. In the storm-light, the city seemed ancient. He surveyed the tall buildings lined up along Pitt Street noting how their facades, pressed so closely together, resembled a limestone cliff-face. He saw how some of the buildings could have passed as Egyptian temples. They might have been carved, he thought, from naked rock during the last millennia. Their pale brickwork contrasted with the street whose paved woodblocks glistened black. Pilgrim gazed along the street that slid through the city, his gaze passing over creamy statues inset into the corners of

buildings: Captain Cook and Governor Phillip. In front of the Union Bank a gas lamp rose out of the street like a prehistoric tulip. The wet road reminded him of the Thames bleeding through London at night.

He was standing in front of The Hatters and Merchandise. The veranda was rooved with corrugated iron and was supported by wooden posts. The roof was rusted like a farmhouse shack and needed replacing. Beside one of the posts, Wong Pat had placed a dented milk pail for collecting rubbish. Beside one of the posts, Wong Pat had placed a dented milk pail for collecting rubbish. Pilgrim leaned with his back against the post, and, with one ankle hooked around the other, he gazed out across the wide intersection of Pitt and Spring.

And then, his mother's voice came to him in her urgent Irish tone telling him to straighten up. If she'd seen him there in Pitt Street in his rags she would have told him that even if your moleskins are faded and you have nothing but the tired coat on your back, you can stand tall. He remembered her visits to the Uncle's estate when she would look Pilgrim up and down in his new clothes and feign objection. Her poorly disguised pride leaked into a half-smile.

'The clothes doesn't maketh the man,' she would say.

'Ma! The clothes maketh *not* the man.'

'Oh! Well they don't, m'boy, stand up I tell you.' And he would salute.

On Pitt Street then, Pilgrim turned up the frayed fabric at the ends of his sleeves and tucked in the loose threads. Pull yourself together, he told himself. Straight'n up.

The sky was all storm-cloud. He was reminded of the day he had waved goodbye from the deck of the *SS Waroonga* creaking outward on the ocean toward Australia. It was a day of muted pain. He'd kept his eyes fixed on the church spire, grateful for the resonating gongs from the church bell after his sister's snorts and sobs had left him unhinged. It had been April Fool's Day in 1883 and what a fool he'd been. If he'd realised then what he realised now, he would have gazed more closely at his mother's profile as she waved, or he might have thought about diving into the icy ocean and swimming back to shore.

An opaque mist, like an omen, had descended on Plymouth that day as he found himself being cast away from England for no reason other than his stupidity. Ten years later, the foul weather settled around Sydney as he stood, with nothing better to do than sulk.

He glanced up at the bell tower. An image came to mind of a London cop, the tower's dome like a bobby's hat. On its face the clock-hands made a straight horizontal line, and with its top like that, his imagination let him see the face of an Englishman, stoic at the lip. It was a quarter to three.

Spire-topped buildings appeared to jump about as lightning flickered behind them. Flick-flick-click. He closed his eyes until the green streaks faded from his retinas and he waited for the answering grumble of thunder, counting the seconds, two, three, four ... five. Boom.

§

Clang.

I could die here, he thought. I could die here and never see Devon again. He watched as the tram approached. It was near enough for him to see the people inside. They're bottles in a box, he thought. They move around like puppets, bump into each other, not caring about where they belong or what they're doing here. It's as though their faces are painted on.

Pilgrim waited at the side of the street, watching for the driver to look away, waiting for his moment to hop onto the back of the tram for a free ride toward home. He thought he'd timed it perfectly and made a sudden dash for the tram. He leapt toward the step from behind, and at the same time as he realised the tram was moving faster than he'd anticipated, his foot slipped in horse dung. He slid along the road with his hands and elbows scraping, endlessly along the street. Finally, his legs came to a stop between the tramlines. He let out his breath, long and slow and looked up as the tram rolled forward. The puppets, the ones leaning over the back rails, looked down at him. As usual! Pilgrim thought, searching for blood.

He waved. 'I'm aw-right,' he yelled, 'All's well.'

A baritone voice yelled out. 'Foolish larrikin.' Several rude fingers pointed down at the tracks. Someone else shouted, breathless and excited: 'Right there. That's where the last accident happened ... '

A woman wagged her finger at him as the tram moved away. 'Serves you right. That's what you get for trying to get a free ride.'

That's right, Pilgrim thought. He tingled all over, eased up from the road, brushed his hands together and flicked away a stone. The newspaper had fallen into the shape of a tent beside him, and, despite his bitterness toward the editor, he stooped down and rescued it. He hobbled back to the sidewalk, grinning and feeling stupid. No free rides around here.

The tram peeled away.

§

Pilgrim heard voices as a woman with a fat bosom appeared in the doorway of The Hatters and Merchandise. There was a young filly of a girl beside her, clutching a parcel. She wore a robin-blue dress that matched her eyes and a silly bonnet that was, even though she was eighteen at least, too young for her face. He sucked in his stomach and tipped his hat. The older woman stopped abruptly and scowled.

The young woman looked at the tramline and then at Pilgrim. He tugged downward on the sleeve of his coat to cover the scrapes on his arms.

'You fell?'

Pilgrim shrugged.

The girl went on. 'There was an accident happened a week ago ...' Her voice was soft, whispering. It set his heart pounding as he waited for her to continue. 'A fellow...' her voice trembled, 'was broken up by a tram.' Pilgrim knew this. Between the metal of the rail and the tram wheels, the youth's legs had been crushed, described by a journalist who had drawn it all in crimson detail: the mangled foot, the

obscure angle between the young man's femur and hip. Always looking for blood. The girl stared at Pilgrim, her eyebrows drawn together in a frown.

He nodded at her. 'A mere fall from grace. It's going to take more than that to kill me,' he joked. A large drop of blood slid off his fingertip.

She swayed. Her face went white. He moved in time to catch her fall, and as he gently placed her on her feet he smelled the scent of lavender and looked deeply into her eyes as they opened.

'Thank you,' she sighed. He was certain it was a sigh.

The mother scoffed. She picked up the package and whacked it with her hand. Mud flew off.

'Fool. Come along, Mary.' As they went off, the woman nagged. Pilgrim heard snatches of abuse. It's no wonder some of them come out nasty, he thought, and Daisy came to mind.

The sounds of the street mulled around. Voices murmured. Feet crunched on loose road metal. Dreary horses. Snort.

'Clang.' Another tram approached with more puppets aboard.

Pilgrim stared along the street. People could think whatever they liked of him.

And his mind wandered over an image that he wanted to hold in his memory: an image of the young Mary.

§

A gust of warm air had followed Wong Pat out of The Hatters and Merchandise as he emerged from the shop into its doorway, biting a long white pipe between his teeth. His red and gold hanfu flowed around his legs and ankles. In front of Wong Pat's shop, a large wooden packing box rested on a tilted cart. In big black letters, stamped on the box, were the words: 'Wong: Pitt Street'.

Wong Pat stepped further out from the shop front, well out onto the pavement and waved into the distance. Pilgrim looked along the street, but couldn't see who Pat

was waving to. The women were gone, and only a young boy could be seen, running toward them, running like a thief.

Pilgrim shivered involuntarily and turned his attention to the shop-front. In the display window, surrounded by skeins of fabric, a manikin with a blank face, draped in calico, posed with an arm bent to the hip, the other arm raised in a dumb salute. Pilgrim tipped his hat.

Wong Pat glanced at him, and then at the mute model as he took another suck on his pipe. Smoke coiled lusciously from his nostrils. He tilted his head, returned his attention to the street and continued to wave. 'Arvie,' he said and stepped forward, gesticulating madly. 'Hey, Arvie! Come in.'

The boy's grey shorts flapped around his knees and his loose-soled sandals slapped the street as he trotted toward them and slowed down.

'No time, Wong Pat.' Harvey stopped running, paused in front of the shop, and then stared straight at Pilgrim's face. 'Got to find Fryingpan,' he said, keeping his eyes on Pilgrim instead of on Wong Pat. Just as Pilgrim was feeling uneasy, the boy turned around and started to walk again, this time with his head twisting backward as he went.

The child's face was so familiar that Pilgrim felt a slight tickle in his throat and gently cleared it behind his hand as he looked back at the boy.

'Do we know each other?'

The boy, Arvie, shook his head and Pilgrim put his feelings of familiarity down to an un-lodged memory from his past. He had seen plenty like him: the ratty clothes and oily hair, a loaf of bread tucked under an arm. They all looked alike; they all had the Oliver Twist way about them. It was a memory he'd have preferred to have shaken loose; the workhouse boys with their small fists pounding his flesh. Eyes shining like the eyes of starving rats—like the eyes of a boy he will one day murder.

§

Pilgrim watched Harvey as he started to run.

‘Ah. That boy,’ said Wong Pat. ‘He knows how to talk. Never stops talking.’ Wong Pat moved his head slowly from side to side. ‘You have a son?’

‘Children?’ said Pilgrim. ‘No.’

Wong Pat looked at him as if he’d been asked to bite into a lemon, and then disappeared into his shop with smoke trailing him like a thin tail.

When he was alone, Pilgrim rolled the newspaper he’d been carrying into a cone and brought it to his eye. Using it as a telescope he scanned the rooftops, from steeples disappearing into the clouds to telegraph wires strung carelessly across the street. Not too unlike home, he thought. But then, he remembered: a workhouse casting a brown shadow on a dozen angry children throwing punches and stones. His sister, Annie, crouched in the corner of their mother’s dim room, knees drawn up, dripping snot and tears onto the fur of a dead cat and telling him to ‘go away’.

Having missed his free ride home, Pilgrim decided he might stay in the city for the evening and see if he couldn’t find a mate to shout him a beer or two. He wondered if Nicker would be in town. If he is, he thought, he’ll be at The Brooklyn. He’d heard of The Brooklyn; there were women who lived in the upstairs rooms ... if he had a few pound to spare he’d ... He pressed his cheek into the veranda post, half sheltered by the corrugated iron roof above the sidewalk. After a while, he emptied his mind and simply stared along Pitt Street waiting for four o’clock to roll around.

When he moved, it was sudden. He straightened up. Pulled himself together. Aimed the rolled up paper and speared it into the milk bucket.

‘Well then, Mr Archibald,’ he said, as it banged into the empty barrel, ‘I say you can get lost.’ He peered into the pail, watching water from the bottom seep up into the newsprint. The paper unfurled itself slowly. A living thing.

The long hand of the clock shuddered toward the twelve.

2

Catherine is drawn to the sound of ticking that comes from the long-case clock that stands in the corner of her grandfather's bedroom. She is merely a child, but these memories made in 1844 will stay with her for the remainder of her life. Twenty years from now, when her Pilgrim son is born, the sound of passing time will be taken up by the beating of a tiny heart.

Catherine is staring at the clock's pendulum. She is approached by the great-grandfather of her yet-unconceived and unimagined child. Head turning from side to side, she has become hypnotised by the rhythm of the golden disc that swings as if moved by magic, back and forth. Occasionally, she blinks as the chain moves up a link and the pendulum shudders. The old man kneels on one knee beside her, and places a huge arm around her waist. She wraps her little fingers around his large, sun-browned thumb and hugs it to her chest.

'You see, Catherine?' he says. Simply.

For reasons unknown to her, she will forever remember those words and that moment: the way the scent of tobacco rises from his hand; the whiteness at the tip of this thumbnail; the way his soft wrinkled cheek presses gently to her own.

'Every tick is an increment of time and space,' he says and he explains what he means by the word 'increment'. She repeats the word, over and over, with the rhythm of the ticking clock. Increment. Increment. Increment.

'Each time you hear a tick, it makes a line in the air.'

She looks around, searching for white strokes floating around the room.

'Metaphorically,' he says, and then shuffles uneasily, using his big hands to turn her body to face him. He frowns and bites his bottom lip as if waiting for her to respond. After many ticks, he breathes again and says, 'like a fairy tale.'

'Only thing is,' he continues, 'it *is* real. This is real, child. Every time that clock ticks, it slices away a piece of you. That's what time is. Time is the thief that takes away your life. And look at this thing.' He nods at the clock.

She begins to tremble. The sound of the clock grows louder and the ticks hurt her ears.

‘Look at this thing that we have invented.’ Grandfather raises his voice and his eyes move quickly as if following the movements of a bee, darting around the room. ‘This ... this contraption that tells us how little time remains of our lives.’ And then, he snatches at the air and catches a little tic of time in his hand before uncurling his fingers before her eyes. She stares at the empty hand and feels a soft teardrop fall from the bottom of her chin.

That night, she wakes up screaming. Her mother strips her naked, pulling back her ears, searching in her armpits and groin and meticulously going through every hair on her head in search of ticks.

Many years later, when the old man dies, Catherine sits at the reading of the will. She is given, not the hall clock that she had expected, but, a small hand-made, gold-plated Gaydon alarm clock. She turns it over to read the words engraved on the back. ‘He that loses his life, shall find it’.

3

Catherine wishes her father would speak, just this one time, but instead, he twists his hat in his hands and looks out of the window toward the freshly ploughed field where dark ridges knit the paddock into a neat brown square. Her father's eyes are glassy and his cheeks and neck are covered in grey stubble. The skin on his face is drawn downward and his lips tremble. Moisture glistens on the balding top of his head. He sits on a kitchen chair beside Catherine's mother who has arranged herself in the easychair, brown skirts and white apron tucked in beside the arms. Catherine faces her parents.

'And Edwin doesn't know about the affair?' Catherine's mother glances at Annie who is sitting on the floor, sucking on the hem of her dress. She seems to sense the mood in the room as her face is sombre and her eyes are wide. Recent tears track down her cheeks. She has been woken from an afternoon sleep.

'Edwin is ill. It'll kill him to know the truth.'

Catherine looks past her father and gazes out through the open door of the farmhouse. She sees George, the Clydesdale, at the gate, nudging the sliprail. The bottoms of his white socks are matted with mud. George stomps and shakes his mane. For a moment Catherine feels a touch of nostalgia, but she checks her smile before it emerges onto her face.

Catherine's mother leans forward in the easy chair where the midafternoon sunlight, streaming in through the door, paints her face pastel pink.

'You break our hearts, Catherine. Adultery! Why?'

Catherine exchanges an apologetic glance with her father. When her father sees her, his eyes turn away. His voice is low and surprisingly gentle. 'Stay with us on the farm, Catherine. Keep out of sight. We'll take care of the ...' He gestures toward the doorway and beyond into the fields. Catherine understands the irony in her father's words. The child will be taken *care* of. She searches for his eyes and meets his gaze, hard but brimming with tears. She turns again to her mother and whispers.

‘How would I explain my absence to Edwin?’

Catherine’s mother sighs. ‘You’ll never see him again. This ... *Admiral!*’ There is so much bitterness in her mother’s tone that Catherine feels it piercing through her. She looks at the floor and shakes her head, ashamed to admit that she has searched for him at the markets every month since their first encounter, and she will search again this month. It is urgent, now. The bulge in her belly is beginning to show; it will no longer be hidden. She reaches for her mother’s hand, feels the roughness of her mother’s fingers and allows her own fingertips to brush against the calloused knuckles. ‘I’m sorry, Ma.’

Her mother snarls through her teeth. ‘You’ll not see him again! Do you understand, Catherine?’

With tears stinging her eyes, Catherine cries, ‘I must! I will demand that he take the child.’

Her mother’s reaction is unexpected: sudden. Her hand whips free of Catherine’s grip; she stands and walks to the door.

‘Don’t be a fool. Do you think any Admiral will want to ruin his career over a bastard child with the likes of ... *you*? He’ll deny the fact until his death, and he will do so, because he *can*.’ She reaches for both sides of the doorframe for support. From behind, Catherine sees her mother’s silhouette as a dark shape in the doorway. The voice of her mother is low and foreign, growling: resigned.

‘Tell Edwin the child is his.’

4

1864 has not ended well. It has certainly not finished in the way Catherine has expected. Her mother has not written her since the visit to the farm. She has a daughter that toddles around and her belly is swollen with her second child. Her husband is dead.

If the life of a man can be summed up, she thinks, amazed at her own clarity at this moment of desperation, it is by the number of candles that are placed at the altar in a church above his coffin.

Catherine sits on the pew in the front row of the little church that the workhouse shares with the Methodists. She stares at a box draped in white pall. She is aware that behind her a woman weeps softly, but Catherine's tears are silent. They stream down her face and drop on to her bosom, soaking into the fabric of her dress. She attempts to brace the flow, but the more determined she is to stop the tears, the more quickly they come. Her vision wavers as she concentrates on the candles so hard that everything around them disappears to whiteness and the minister's voice murmurs in the background.

She counts the candles, first in one direction, and then in reverse, one to thirty-seven. Thirty-seven to one.

In her trance, her eyes remain open, unblinking, and the dome of light above the candles glows yellow and then slowly changes to orange, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, through a spectrum that keeps her mesmerised. The light. The Candles. The colours. Nothing else.

When the choir of two men and two women begins to sing the twenty-third psalm she stands. The pallbearers lift the coffin, and then step by step edge down the aisle of the church, carrying Edwin away. They take him in the opposite direction to that which she had, four years before, step after step, moved toward him, in her wedding gown.

At Edwin's funeral, Catherine watches one of the pallbearer's feet, focussing on his heels as she walks behind him, and she counts the number of steps he takes

from the front of the church until he reaches the door. At seventeen, she stops counting. Pilgrim rolls in her womb.

5

Catherine moves, still heavy and exhausted after the birth of her son. From the master's parlour she can see down into the women's exercise yard. The women huddle for warmth on benches around the perimeter. They will sit there for their prescribed daily hour in the open air. She lets the curtain fall and backs away from the window, turning to the round cedar table. She pulls out a chair and sits. Behind her, a ginger kitten hooks its claws into the hem of the window's white curtain and stretches downwards, dragging the fabric in an arc. It then swings back to bump into the wall. Catherine senses the movement, but does not turn to see the damaged lace, or bid Annie to hiss the cat away. Instead, she dips the quill into the inkwell and taps it on the side of the tiny crystal jar. It sings like the Angel Gabriel.

She is aware of Annie padding back into the room; standing by the crib, hanging a hand on the white wicker basket that rests on a low wooden stand. Annie appears to be gazing into the cot, and Catherine is reminded of a porcelain doll standing motionless, until Annie speaks.

'Mama!'

Catherine hears, but does not respond. In her peripheral vision she sees Annie standing by the crib, looking in. Perhaps the child is entranced by her brother's sky-blue eyes that are always laughing. Catherine turns, gazes at her children as Annie reaches over the crib. All that can be seen of the baby is his tiny hand that waves upward and latches on to Annie's outstretched finger.

'Babby.'

A minute drop of ink sprays the table, and Catherine, dreamily, uses the tip of her ring finger to smudge a long, thin line across the polished wood. It doesn't matter anymore. Nothing matters.

As a drift of snow outside floats past the window, she turns her attention to the fireplace. Flames curl around glowing embers in the hearth. They draw her into the fire, with its tongues of red and yellow and white, licking around the lumps of coal. The scent of burnt pine cones lingers in the air. She is warm, or so she believes,

and staring into the pulsing embers feels she might stay that way, forever in that place, her body sitting in a high-backed chair, but she, away somewhere.

A tear surprises her when it splashes onto the paper. Is she crying, still? And in the crib by the fireplace, ten pink fingers and ten pink toes test the air. The baby makes a small sound. She sits up straight, makes eye contact with Annie, waits for another sound and, when it doesn't come, drops her shoulders, bends her head and stares once more at the registration form with its hideous blank spaces. What will she write? Whose name will she give to this child now that Edwin is gone? She cannot do this thing alone.

The room, Annie, the cat, the fire, all vanish as she gazes at the papers on the table. Around her, there is only white mist. The edges of the pages glow, pulsing in her vision as if at any moment they might lift and fly away, a magic carpet sweeping up at the corners first, and then rising up, up to take a swift circuit of the room before gliding through the window and away across the snow-covered fields to the town, where they will furl themselves into a scroll and lodge themselves in the register: unnoticed by the knot of women, who are gathered in the street, in their frocks corseted so tightly as to squeeze bitterness up to their faces and their nasty-toed brown boots buttoned to the shin. They know. She is certain they know her secret and she lives in fear that at any moment, with a flick of the tongue, any one of them may betray her.

Catherine's mind drifts back to the time she had stood swathed in black, heavily pregnant, swaying with indecision at the doors of the church, Edwin's death certificate shaking in her hand. She hears again the women's lowered voices, their false sympathy, their sarcasm: surely, she must find another husband to support her, soon. She wonders, how could they have known the truth that she denies, even to herself?

Edwin. She can barely utter his name.

She has tried. Oh, but she has tried. But the name catches, not in her throat, but deeper. It sticks to her heart, claws at the inside of her, so that every time she moves her lips to form his name, her throat closes up.

Now, this newborn babe gurgles from his cot. She has heard it said that a child will not smile before six weeks of age, but Pilgrim has smiled at three.

She stands and drifts over to the crib, lifts him out and carries him to her lonely bedroom. Ed ... A shadow moves across the baby's brow. He mocks her with his cheeky smirk, and fat bow-legs that kick for joy at the sight of her face. As if challenging her to speak his name, his eyes—all black pupil—stare upwards from the bed wild with love for his mother. Already active beyond his age, the yellow crocheted bonnet slips across his forehead in a gesture of wilfulness, as a young man will tilt his hat sideways to catch the eye of a young lady. Catherine knows that it is not possible, convinces herself that she has not heard the sound that has come from his lips as his legs bounce. It is an involuntary squeak. It is a coincidence. For years afterwards, she will tell herself this, over and over.

But, the smile falters on the baby's face. One eye, its cornea edged with a rim of wren-blue, winks. The rosebud lips open and close as his body bounces in rhythm with his kicking legs. 'Me? Me? Me?'

§

Catherine dozes by the fire.

A small voice calls her back.

'Ma?'

Annie is at her side. Her hand, pink from the warmth of the fire, rests on Catherine's forearm.

'Mama!'

Annie shakes her with childish urgency. Catherine awakes violently.

'Aagh,' she says, annoyed that she has been so rudely jerked out of slumber.

'Ma. Baby is crying.' Annie's fat hand points at the crib.

'Oh? Yes.'

She raises herself from the chair, and moves heavily to the cot. The baby's face is screwed up and red, his fists are jerking and wet with saliva as he tries

unsuccessfully to direct a hand into his mouth. It slips across his cheek. When he feels Catherine's hands beneath him, he stops wailing and makes a desperate 'ah, ah, ah,' as he turns his face and opens his mouth.

'Annie,' Catherine says. 'Go fetch the goat's milk for Ma.'

The toddler looks up at Catherine, confused.

'Bottle. Get the bottle. Quick.'

Catherine lifts the boy to her chest. His cheek turns toward her as his hands reach wildly to clutch at her covered breast. She holds him close, lifts him so that she can kiss the soft fuzz on the top of his head and feel the pulse of his throbbing fontanelle with her lips. The softness of his skin melts against her mouth. With so much shame, she closes her eyes and remembers the scent, not of her husband, but of her lover: the softness of his lips on hers. And there. His warm, gentle hand on her breast.

'Oh.'

Annie gazes into Catherine's eyes, seeing, or so Catherine imagines, her shameful thoughts and feelings. In her confused grief, Catherine thrusts the baby towards his perplexed sister and, in a deep throaty voice that frightens Annie, growls. 'Take him. Take him now. Get him away from me.'

6

Cypress trees and oaks decorate the lane. With their leaves of red and gold glistening with moisture, they remind Catherine of the colour of the candlelight at Edwin's funeral, two and a half years ago. As she drives a sulky along the country lane, her baby boy sleeps in a basket on the seat beside her. A leaf falls and lands onto the face of her sleeping child.

She lets it rest on his cheek.

She drifts: back to when she and Edwin were at a gate similar to the one she is now approaching, gazing over meadow and mossy rock. A brook bubbles around rocks making small whirlpools that gather flotsam into spinning nests.

His dreams: way beyond their workhouse salaries. There would be a cow, and four nanny goats to supply milk for the new baby. Edwin would breed thoroughbreds: Clydesdales. And the great red setter would come too. Catherine feared it would lick Annie's face right off and leave it blank, but she had grown to love the workhouse dog. We keep the dog. And ... Annie and the new baby would have a pony, each one of their own. They would grow up on the backs of horses, show-jump and play polo with the aristocrats.

Edwin had slid around behind her as they stood, pressed his chest against her back and held his hands on the mound of Catherine's belly. He had kissed the nape of her neck. His breath in her ear gave her gooseflesh down her arms.

Gazing out across the green, she had said, 'He will be the son of a Gentleman.'

'He?'

'Yes. The son of a Gentleman.'

'My son?'

'Yes. Edwin. Your son.'

Her knotted stomach. The lie: *Tell Edwin the child is his.*

§

Catherine had prayed, so often during her pregnancy, that Edwin would never know the truth, not dreaming, then, that God could answer her prayers and punish her with one deft stroke. On this red and golden day, with the baby just two years old, Catherine reaches the gate of the Admiral's family farm, and halts the horse. Annie, who had been dozing with her head on Catherine's lap, sits up straight and hugs the bundle she has been holding in her sleep.

'Are we there?' Annie's eyes, although sleepy, shine with anticipation.

'Yes, Annie. Look.'

A blue tit hops from the ground, perches on the wooden gatepost and puffs out its pale grey feathers. 'Seeseedu.'

'Do you know what it's saying?'

'I see you?' says Annie, her wide-eyed gaze fixed on the bird, as she holds her breath, as if to breathe would frighten it away.

Catherine pulls Annie close with an arm around her waist. 'It's out of season,' Catherine says. Annie snuggles in. 'It's a message from Heaven. From my Daddy.'

'Of course.' Catherine wants to believe the child. It is a message from Edwin: this trip to see the Admiral is the right thing to do, for the boy. He has forgiven her.

§

Pilgrim is climbing out of his basket. It puzzles Catherine, how he awakes, smiling and ready to run. Before she can stop him, he seizes the bundle that Annie has been holding.

'Mine,' he says, and twists away from her.

'My clock,' shrieks Annie. 'He'll break it.'

Catherine eases the bundle from Pilgrim's grip and re-adjusts the rags that wrap the clock. She sets it down in the basket, and then she lifts Pilgrim on to her lap. She has brought the clock to offer as a gift to the Admiral. The boy's fat hand points to the sky.

‘Star,’ he says.

Annie giggles.

Pilgrim’s body is warm from sleep and as soft as bread dough as Catherine moulds him against her belly. She runs her hand along his arm and up to the tip of his finger before encasing his hand in hers. She kisses his temple.

‘Rainbow,’ she whispers.

‘Rainbow,’ he says.

‘If you stand under a rainbow ...’ she begins, but he arches his back and wriggles free.

§

They move through the gate and toward the manor. The rainbow moves ahead of them, just out of reach. Lush grass grows so tall that, as it passes beneath the sulky, droplets of dew flick up from the blades of grass and sprinkle Catherine’s face. She feels each droplet as small as a star. The workhouse mare that Catherine has borrowed for the day tosses her mane in a proud feminine salute as they pass alongside a hedge of blue conifers.

She remembers the scent of the Admiral’s naked body, and although she doesn’t want to desire him anymore, she tingles all over as she approaches the big white house. She recalls the softness of his fingers tracing figures-of-eight at the base of her naked spine, and the way her body shuddered at the touch of his lips against her neck. The manor looms ahead of her. When she sees him, standing on the grass, examining the wilting leaves of a strange tree, her body awakes and her senses become alert. Autumn sunshine reflects off the white of the Admiral’s collar and cuffs. When he straightens up and looks at her, she begins to tremble.

‘Catherine!’

She draws up the horse and stops on the grass beside him. Although she sees that he is agitated, she cannot contain her happiness. He is beautiful, she thinks. Still beautiful.

‘What tree is that?’

Keeping his eyes on her, he growls, ‘Frangipani. It’s dying.’ He is almost as tall as the withered bottom branch.

She nods. ‘Your brother ...’

He glares. ‘Go on.’

‘... told me you were back from service in Basutoland,’ she says. Pilgrim wriggles on her lap. His feet dig into her thighs as he balances on her legs. She holds one hand around his waist.

‘It’s not his business to invite you here,’ the Admiral says.

The Admiral’s brother runs from the house with his arms stretched wide, ready to embrace. ‘Catherine. Catherine. You came.’

The Admiral glares at his brother. ‘You asked her to come? Why?’

‘Of course I invited her.’ The Admiral’s brother reaches up as Pilgrim squirms off his mother’s thighs and moves to the step of the sulky. The boy bends his chubby knees and, as the man stretches out his arms to catch, Pilgrim pounces. The Admiral’s brother catches him and swings him around, laughing.

Annie struggles to get down. As she attempts to hop from the trap onto the grass, her skirt catches on the step and reveals her pantaloons as she lands. She grasps at the fabric, and, after wrapping her skirts around her legs, she lifts an arm and pokes it through the wheel spokes. The wheel is almost twice her height.

The brother is entranced by Pilgrim’s face. ‘Hello, young man,’ he says, ‘Hello, indeed.’ He looks into Pilgrim’s face for a long while, lifts the boy out of the sulky. And then with the boy latched to his side, the brother offers Catherine a hand to help her down from the carriage.

The Admiral strides toward them. ‘Don’t bother getting down.’ He stops right at the step of the coach, stands glaring up into her face. He keeps one arm dangling at his side, the other digging into his hip. His face reddens, and she recognises in him one of Pilgrim’s tantrums. The Admiral swings around to face his brother and the child.

His voice comes out dark and throaty. 'This is the boy? You claim he's my son?'

The brother jiggles the boy on his hip. 'Come now. Come. You only have to look at his eyes to know,' he says. The brother's head is moving from side to side. 'Unbelievable. He's your son, Digby. A million times over.'

'He is no such thing,' the Admiral shakes his finger at Catherine. 'Go away this minute. Leave us alone!'

She smells Cognac on his breath. It is the drink that the Admiral had offered her the night Pilgrim was conceived. The drink had lowered her inhibitions at the Inn. It wouldn't have been necessary. She watches his lips move. 'Leave,' he shouts. 'Now!'

'Please,' she says. 'He's your son and, the workhouse ... They'll throw me out because I haven't a spouse.'

The Admiral snatches Pilgrim from his brother's arms and lifts him roughly onto the trap. 'I'll speak with the management committee and have them keep you on as matron.'

Pilgrim stands bewildered in the tray of the sulky, and shoves his thumb into his mouth. Catherine twists around to lift him onto the seat beside her and snuggles him into her side. She wants to soothe her little son, but she is too emotional to speak. Instead, she looks away into the distance where the low moss-rock walls creep up and over crest and down into rolling valleys. It is like the ocean, she thinks, and those are the reefs that batter ships.

Apologetically, the brother reaches down to Annie and, gripping her under her arms, lifts her up. He puts her onto the sulky and then reaches toward Catherine for the reins. For a moment, the two of them are connected by the thin strip of leather.

'My brother is embarrassed.' He shakes his head in his usual slow, unbelieving way, still gripping the reins, 'He'd like to forget the whole affair ever happened. He's a lot at stake: his reputation, his friends, his marriage and his chances of advancing in the services.'

Catherine lets him take the reins and lead them. Silently, and occasionally glancing at Catherine, he walks the mare back along the track with the conifers standing like sentries to their left. When they have reached the gateway—the boundary of the property, where the rock wall lays low and sleepy, where she had dared to dream—they pause. The blue tit hops from the rocks to the gatepost and then flutters off into the sky. Catherine sobs. The brother lifts the reins over the mare's head and hands them to her.

‘I'm so sorry, Catherine,’ he says. He leans forward and strokes Pilgrim's face.

For six more years, the truth haunts her, heavy as a rock in her belly. She has felt the tendrils of guilt wrapping around her, like ivy, the weight of it pulling her downward. She notices that, as she passes her reflection in the looking-glass in the parlour, her shoulders are stooped and her back is hunched. She sees herself haggard and witchlike.

She moves into the kitchen where she sees the cook bent over the table, and as Catherine silently takes up a paring knife, she remembers the day she had met her lover. Twinged with that ever-present guilt, she forces a smile at her frail son who is swinging his legs over the edge of the little chair in the corner, gazing into a study book. She notices he is eating, and vaguely notes that she must remember to tell the boy not to take apples without asking. Catherine returns to the mindless work where her memories are free to roam. She feels the pull of the past, in the mystery of the Borough Market, and suddenly she is there.

Borough Market had writhed with people and the smell of the ocean swirled around the flip-flop of dying fish. Skinned, purple-fleshed rabbits were hung out in rows from the eaves of the only meat-seller's stall. The colours of red tomatoes and purple carrots pulsated from vegetable stalls. Cabbage leaves wilted over the edges of wheelbarrows, emitting an unpleasant odour. Mostly, though, she remembers potatoes: barrel upon barrel of potatoes, and her corset that pressed on her ribs causing an ache that intensified to a knife wound.

Once a month, dressed in her only good dress, she used to walk amongst the stalls and imagine her life away. She had so desperately wanted to be somebody other than a workhouse matron. She would plan her escape from poor Edwin and from the workhouse. Oh, how she longed to sweep up Annie and run away from the stink of poverty and the hatred aimed toward her and Edwin. During those trips to the markets, Catherine would dare to dream. She would feel the flow of expensive fabric around her legs in the dress that was a gift from the committee who insisted that she

adequately represent the services they provide to the poor. She would close her eyes and will them away.

Catherine remembers that on the day she had met the Admiral, she had been busy cussing the fruit sellers, telling herself that if another one had made eye contact or placed an apple in her hand to test its weight, she would upturn the barrel and send fruit rolling around the muddy feet of shoppers. Didn't they know who she was? Potatoes were what she had gone for, a month's supply of potatoes for the workhouse, potatoes for her to peel and wash and cut until her hands would become raw and wrinkled from starch and water.

She had rushed the order, feeling only a slight twinge of guilt that she may have secured a better deal, found a fresher crop of potatoes for the inmates to enjoy.

In her haste to escape from the barrels of potatoes she had momentarily forgotten about the corset and turned too quickly ... and to this day, that moment of sharp physical pain couples itself with a similar stab of pain in her heart. A rib in the corset had bent inward and sliced her in the side of her chest. When she tried to gasp, the lack of oxygen caused her stomach to cramp. Catherine had dug her thumb into her waist and fallen forward.

Buckled in pain, she had heard a voice near her ear. She recalls how it had resonated, sending warm waves through her and she lifted her face. And there he was.

'Perhaps I can offer you an arm up?'

As soon as she saw him, she had forced herself to stifle a giggle. The Admiral was wearing a long duster over a silk waistcoat, a white shirt and bow tie, and a top hat, but it was his pants that had amused her. They were grey-and-white striped and ridiculously high-waisted. She held one hand over her mouth as she straightened up.

He smiled warmly. 'Lady. You have the most beautiful laughing eyes.'

Beside him, another man dressed in American fashion tugged on the Admiral's arm. 'Come *along*, Digby.'

But the Admiral was insistent. 'Come. Dine with us.' His eyes had reminded her of a clear sky, a rare thing. He was beautiful. She had been mesmerised:

intoxicated with the pleasure of his attentiveness, so drunk that she neglected to wonder why. Instead, she hid her wedding ring behind her back.

§

Months later, Catherine had hustled through the marketplace, determined that, this time, she would find him again and tell him of her parent's offer to take *care* of their child. She had decided that she would try to appeal to his sense of ... she stopped.

When she saw him walking toward her, she was paralysed with emotion, entranced by the gold buttons and the tassels that swayed from the epaulette on his dress. She had counted stripes on his cuffs and stared, but her attention was drawn to the thing that was hooked around his elbow. It was the fine white hand of a woman.

The Admiral's brother and the Admiral, with the woman attached to his arm, were surrounded by shops and the brown walls that made up the centre of London.

'Digby?' Catherine had called.

The Admiral's brother looked at her and then swiftly spun on his heels and turned his back. He caught the Admiral's free arm as he turned, but the Admiral stood his ground.

'Digby?' she called again. The Admiral looked through her.

The woman on his arm glanced up into the Admiral's face, puzzled.

'Yes,' the Admiral said.

The brother turned back and nodded in recognition. His expression showed a daft concoction of fear, horror and sympathy.

Catherine had been in the habit of using her cape to conceal her protruding belly. When she had been certain that the Admiral had recognised her, she had slung back the cape to reveal the bulge.

The Admiral whispered something into his brother's ear, and promptly passed the hand of the woman he was with to his brother. The brother took the woman's elbow and directed her into a nearby café. The Admiral watched until both were out of sight and then stepped toward Catherine.

‘How dare you? That woman is to be my wife!’

‘This is your child,’ Catherine had said, holding her belly like a ball, in both hands. ‘And your brother is my witness.’

‘It is not my problem,’ he said. ‘Tell it to your husband.’

‘My husband is ill. The child is yours.’

He had bent downward, then, and placed his hot lovely cheek on hers. Catherine remembers feeling a sensational pulse of desire travelling through her, and she almost lost a grip on her own terrible reality. She moved her face to feel the softness of his skin on hers. His breath had been warm, but his voice was cold. ‘I’ll deny the fact until my death.’

Catherine had stepped back and, through the glass window of the café she had seen the fiancée and the brother seated at a table, oblivious to her as she trembled at the echo of her mother’s words, and realized that she was afraid and helpless.

8

Catherine curses the cook. She has treated her with every kindness, has helped her in the kitchen when the only thing she was required to do was supervise. So? This is her reward for her hard work and her empathy: a jealous employee who has caused another child to be sent, needlessly, into the mills. Because of the cook's accusations, Pip and Annie are no longer welcome at the workhouse. Catherine has been ordered to send them to work with the other children. 'Either they work, or they leave,' she is told, and she curses the cook. It was an apple; one, rotting apple ...

They approach the small door of the windowless factory, its horrible flat brickwork and square structure a testament to the deadening and repetitive grind of the labourers inside. Just watching the outside of the building, Catherine feels the shape of her own body being compressed and she stiffens at the sound of industry. From outside they can hear the rumbling of the weaving looms working in the shed, and the dust that hovers around the factory itches her throat.

Annie's lunch is wrapped in her spare apron: a slice of bread and a boiled egg. She hugs the bundle to her chest, and rocks from side to side. Pilgrim hides in her skirts.

'I'll be good if you let me stay home,' he says, his voice muffled. 'Don't make me go in there. It's noisy. I'm scared.'

'Think of it as thunder,' Catherine tells him, desperate to ease his mind. 'The machines. They sound like thunder. You mustn't be afraid of thunder. It's only a sound.' Her eyes glisten with tears. Pilgrim looks up, pleading.

'Be a warrior for your ma.'

Mr Knowles, the merchant, answers their knock at the door. He is a tall, thin man who smells of hair wax and tobacco and speaks in a molasses voice. As he steps outside, he looks up and down the street, rubs his long hands together and then slowly entwines and squeezes his fingers. He steps toward Pilgrim and leans over him.

'Let me see your hands,' he says, reaching out. Pilgrim, wide-eyed and tearful, holds his hands toward Mr Knowles.

‘Fine hands. Fine. Very fine indeed.’ Knowles nods, first at Pilgrim, and then up at Catherine. ‘He can knot the threads with his sister.’

Pilgrim steps to Annie’s side, and throws both arms around her waist.

‘I’ll look after him,’ Annie says. ‘Come on, Pip.’

Knowles claps his hands together. ‘Yes,’ he says, ‘I’ll take good care of them both.’

He claps again and ushers the children toward the door, a little too vigorously to Catherine’s mind. As the door opens, the rumbling from within the shed escapes for a moment, and then is captured and pulled back inside as the door slams shut, leaving Catherine in the street, alone.

Once they have gone, Catherine lets down her guard. ‘He’s only six,’ she sobs into her apron. From behind the cold, hard door, the sounds of the booming textile machines remind her that her son is afraid of the dark.

9

It is a cold winter in her son's eighth year, but good news has come, at last. Catherine adjusts the collar of her tea dress. She flattens it down with her fingertips as she waits in the icy courtyard at the entrance to the workhouse. She is aware that the third button down from her neck is cracked and bigger than the others, and self-consciously she checks its stitching by wriggling it with a gloved fingertip. It is firm, neat, but she is disappointed that she'd been unable to find a matching button.

She glances upward toward the dormitory window. A stench has wafted down. Up there is a blocked trap that allows stinking ammoniac trails of faeces to ooze underneath the beds. She shakes her head to escape the odour, blinks rapidly and turns her attention to the long straight, stone carriageway that runs from the workhouse arches to the street.

Beside her, Pilgrim shivers. He will be eight in a few weeks' time, but he is fragile and Catherine is afraid for his life. At least his shivering with the cold disguises the nervous complaint that has been with Pilgrim since the accident at the textile mill. She watches Pilgrim, and wishes that he would at least stop trembling, and even if he refuses to speak, could he try to smile?

'Why,' Annie begs. 'Why not me?'

Catherine does not know how to explain the circumstances to her daughter. She is sworn to secrecy, and the letter is specific.

My Dear Catherine,

It has come to my attention that since your late husband was a Mason of Lodge Number 494 your son is eligible to attend the Royal Masonic Institute for Boys. If he is successful in his application, he may receive a scholarship of three hundred and eighteen pounds, five shillings and sixpence. In order to receive this scholarship, he is required to sit an examination. Being that he is the child of my brother, I anticipate that young Edwin would possess a superior and worthy intellect. It is my belief, however, that workhouse conditions

and his employment in the textile mill would directly interfere with his ability to learn and give full attention to the examination. In this respect, I beg that you would accept my offer of my private tutorage.

In exchange for my tutorage, I would become the trustee of the scholarship and you would relinquish any claim to the funds and, indeed, all parental interference with the child. In addition to this, the boy would come to live with me at the manor and I would expect him to contribute to the running of the property by way of manual labour and in helping me with the animals. Finally, I must beg of you to never again mention my brother's name in relation to the paternity of your child. This, I must ask as much in protection of your son's right to a scholarship with the Masonic lodge as for the protection of my brother's career and his marriage.

I will visit you at the workhouse this coming Sunday, immediately after the service, and if you are agreeable to this arrangement, have the boy ready to be released from the workhouse.

Catherine is relieved. The uncle would have his much wanted child, and she would be unburdened. Only, now that the Sunday has arrived, she is suddenly faced with the reality that her child would soon be gone, and as if her own feelings of grief are not enough to deal with, she is forced to cope with Annie's disappointment.

Exasperated, Catherine cups her face in her hands. 'Enough, Annie.'

'Why?' Annie moans, 'Mama? Why must *he* be allowed to go and not me?'

'Enough, I said.'

It is important, Catherine thinks, that she shows her gratitude and so she has brought the children outside, to wait with her, in the cobble-stoned courtyard at the workhouse steps. She worries that the cold has seeped into Pilgrim's chest, as his breath no longer comes out in clouds of steam. Steam would mean he is warm inside, but she tells herself to wait—just a moment longer. They must meet the Admiral's brother at the door, and as they wait she struggles with the urge to growl at the

shivering little ghost that was once her vibrant son. It is not his fault, though, that the accident has changed him, and she prays, begs the Lord that this introverted heaviness will cease. He is sitting, huddled like a rag doll on the top step, leaning against a pillar. His eyes are downcast as if following the trail of an insect on the ground.

She is suddenly afraid. She fears that the brother will change his mind. He'll renege on his offer. Fear makes her feel like screaming, but instead, it turns to anger. She turns it on the boy. The pain; the endless melancholy of these past years have tightened her vocal chords, and the words come out shrill. 'Straighten yourself up, m'boy.' And more harshly, still, as the anger floods through her. 'Sit up tall.'

He does not move. His pathetic little form cannot hunch any further. Suddenly she regrets her tone and catches her breath, slows her breathing so that the ribs of the corset move up and down with her chest. She aches to envelope his fragile body with hers and to wrap him up in her skirts to keep him safe, but she restrains herself. She must not kneel on the wet stones. It would soil her dress. The corset would pinch her. She would faint. Instead, she looks down and tries to picture him in proper shoes and with flesh on his bones.

She asks herself again, how could she let him go?

'I can't keep you, my little one.' The words escape her lips. Annie glances at her, puzzled.

Catherine, for the hundredth time, recalculates her options, stopping at the chilling probability that he would soon die here of tuberculosis or small pox amongst the other bastard children, surrounded by cripples, idiots and felons. He must go. She eases her conscience by reminding herself that she is allowing the brother to rescue her child from this place of pease-pudding and capital punishment—she will never forget the scene she has labelled in her own bitterness 'the tenderising of Henry Coles'. As she tries to block the memory of child beatings from her mind, the image of Henry Coles' battered body flashes into her head and she sees the master excited by his fevered administration of a bone-cracking flogging by which he demonstrated

to the visiting committee the proper use of an approved rod. It is a rod that could just as eagerly find its way around her son's spine. But she must let him go, forever.

'Rainbows,' she whispers toward the limp child. 'Think of rainbows.'

She hears the horses clopping along the street toward them, and looks up as the cab approaches. She quickly dabs her eyes with a tattered handkerchief, and then screws it into a ball in her fist. No more crying.

She pulls Annie close, and plucks a piece of lint from her thin shoulder, smooths the fabric down. 'This is his last chance to get away from here,' she says, 'So, sh.'

The brother alights from the coach. Although she has seen him many times, she is immediately struck by his clean-shaven gentility. She sees in him the face of her lover, except that the sharp edges of her lover's face are softer in his brother. The brother has cheeks that wear the imprint of frequent laughter, although today, his expression is sombre.

The dog, Red, trots up to him, and attempts to lick his hand. The Admiral's brother sidesteps its advances and pulls away. 'Get off. Filthy dog,' he says. His voice is too sharp and, instinctively, Catherine reaches for the boy and pulls him close. Annie catches Red by the collar and leads him around the corner of the workhouse, out of sight. The brother's face creases into a frown as he watches her go, but as he turns to Catherine, his face smooths into a smile.

Uncle points his chin toward Pilgrim. 'Is the boy cold?'

Catherine shakes her head. Pilgrim springs up and runs to his mother's side. He buries his face in her skirts. Annie has returned without the dog and speaks out of turn, 'He's scared because of the accident at the mill. I saw it all.' Catherine could strangle her.

Uncle raises his eyebrows and turns to Annie. 'Explain to me what happened, young Annie. I want to know what you saw.'

Annie lifts her head, sucks in a deep breath. It's too late for Catherine to stop her.

'Me and Mary Robertson ... we were under the looms, knotting threads.'

Annie had not spoken of the accident in detail, but had been able to give only fragments, in broken sentences. Catherine had gleaned as much detail from the other workers as she cared to have had. Why now? Why must she be telling it all, now?

‘There was blood. Lots of blood all over the floor.’

‘Enough.’ Catherine’s voice is too deep, too rude. Immediately she realises her mistake.

‘I mean, please don’t make her say it, sir. Please.’

Pilgrim slides down his mother’s legs and curls up at her feet. He places his hands over his ears and begins to wail. The uncle looks downward to see the child writhing on the ground.

Catherine stoops. Her heart is pounding in her chest and she feels her cheeks gaining heat. She is furious with Annie and glares at her. She lifts Pilgrim and he clamps his arms around her shoulders and his legs around her waist. He is heavy, but he clings to her so tightly it is as if his body has melded into hers.

The uncle’s face is etched with concern. He glances at Annie, apologetically. ‘I’m terribly sorry. I didn’t mean to upset him.’

Pilgrim hugs his mother tightly. Annie’s shoulders slump, as the Uncle turns to stroke her brother’s back. He buries his face into his mother’s shoulder.

Catherine eases onto her knees in front of her son. Their faces are level and she wonders, briefly, if his growth has been stunted by malnutrition at the workhouse. Her guilt deepens when she attempts to hug him, and she feels his bones through the skin around his ribcage. The street stones press against her knees. Moisture seeps through her skirts where later there will be two round smudges for her to scrub. She knows it, but doesn’t care any more. She will keep them as dirty tokens of this day.

‘You’ll be safe, now,’ she says.

Pilgrim looks away. It hurts her. He turns instead toward the big red dog as it pads reluctantly over the cold stones toward them, glancing fervently at the strange man who had, moments before, growled at him. Pilgrim wraps both arms about the dog and squeezes hard enough to cause a small squeak to escape its jaws. She

watches as he buries his face between the dog's shoulder blades. There is a solemn look to her son's now blue-grey eyes as he looks out from under the fur of the creature's neck.

Desperately she tries to appease his sadness. 'I'll visit you on the farm. Every Sunday, I promise. Think of it as a journey. A pilgrimage.'

'No.' He squeezes the dog harder. The dog growls and snaps. Runs away. He stares after it.

Catherine catches his hand and gives it a squeeze. She wishes she could feel the skin of his bare fingers, but it is too cold to remove their gloves. 'My boy ...' she is barely able to speak through her emotions, 'It's ... kind of your uncle ... to take you in. And it's almost Christmas. You'll be warm at the manor.'

To her relief, his eyes look up.

It is a gift, to hear his voice after a week of silence, even if it is a voice that is quietly sad. 'Will there be a Christmas tree, Ma?'

'Of course.'

He throws himself around her again, but before long enough, the uncle peels him off and lifts him, gently, into the coach and follows him up. As he takes the reins he turns to Catherine. 'We will take good care of him.'

When the carriage has disappeared past the gate, Catherine turns to Annie, who presses her bonneted head against Catherine's chest and sobs. 'Why Mama? Why?'

Catherine can think only of her blue-eyed boy: the lingering scent of his sleep, the endless lively chatter of his days, the bruised knuckles from defending himself against those ... she glances at the ring of workhouse urchins who have gathered to say farewell. They shove each other about, laughing at their own silliness ... those utter brats.

The children shout, 'Bye-bye.' Their faces are scrubbed and their shoelaces tied after morning church.

'Shoo.' She waves an irritated hand.

They disperse, flashing their rotting teeth and sneering at the world at large.
The dog barks and turns away.

‘My son,’ she sneers, ‘never did belong in this place.’

10

So many years have passed since her husband's death and Catherine wonders what would have become of her boy had Edwin survived his illness and raised the child as his own. She smirks at the thought. All things come to balance in the end, for under the Uncle's tutorage, Pip has not only successfully completed school, but has excelled. He has grown into a strong, handsome young man. In the end, she has won: the Admiral be damned. And, as to her promise to Edwin, she really has borne the son of a gentleman.

Catherine scowls at the cook, the same woman who has betrayed her more than once, scoops a shovelful of coal from the basket on the floor, hurls it into the stove and slams the door. She wipes the back of her hand across her forehead and nods pointedly at the clock. It is a quarter to nine. The cook snarls and returns to the pot, turning gruel with the old wooden spoon. Look at her, Catherine thinks, the bitter, nasty old hag, still turning gruel with her own two children in the graveyard. All things come to balance in the end.

Meanwhile, the inmates are outside picking oakum. Soon they will pour in to the dining hall with their smocks barely hiding their filthy dresses. Oh, how Catherine has come to detest the sight of that striped sea of mucky blue and white as the women file into the dining hall for breakfast. She has come to loathe their poverty-withered faces, the fear of death lurking around each of them.

From the kitchen, she can see into the dining hall. It is filled with children who eat before the women come in. As she watches them, Catherine feels her chest constrict. She stares at their greasy heads bobbing over bowls along the long, damaged, and pitted tables. Despite the sunshine that shafts in through the small windows that line the dining hall and warms the backs of their heads with sunlight, they are, every one of them, ill and she despises them. Year after year! She sighs. New children arrive year after year, but the numbers here don't increase: so many of them die. Catherine, herself, is sick, and yet she sees no end to this ordeal. The

workhouse has crept over her, like the vines that have claimed the walls outside. Lord have mercy.

The children, she notes, seem to be immune to abuse. They continue to giggle or fight on, rubbing their heads, scratching at lice. The mess is incomprehensible. She can't bear it any more. She heads upstairs for her 11am inspection of the women's quarters. As her knees ache at every step, she reminds herself that she has been lucky, at least, that her children have survived.

§

From the upstairs windows, Catherine is able to keep watch out over Northgate. When she sees the carriage turn in through the entrance gates, she cuts short her inspection. It is the Uncle. What could he want at this time? In a panic, she rushes to the Master's parlour. Quickly, she smooths down her hair with the palm of her hand, and then as she reaches the top of the stairs, pauses to take a deep breath and then hurries, as quickly as her knees will allow, to the Master's entrance.

Uncle is already standing in the entrance hall. He leans on his walking cane with both hands, and, as she steps toward him, he greets her coldly. 'Catherine!'

She nods, reluctant to look into his eyes. When she glances to the side and catches a glimpse of her reflection in the glass face of the hall clock, she curses inwardly. Her hair is dishevelled and her apron is crumpled and dirty.

Uncle leans to the side and looks around Catherine and into the empty dining room.

'We can sit in the parlour,' she says, gesturing toward the stairs.

Uncle shakes his head. 'I haven't time,' he says. 'I've business to arrange in town. I must deliver this news in person. I shan't take up any of your time.'

Uncle's deep voice reverberates through her, and she feels surges of disbelief as he lectures: Pilgrim's lack of respect, his foolhardiness, his ingratitude for all that has been offered him; health, education, an opportunity to join the Navy for which he spat in Uncle's face, the list goes on as Catherine drifts away. How can this be?

‘Catherine? Do you hear me?’

She is confused. ‘Yes, but what has happened? What terrible thing has my son done?’

‘What ...?’ Uncle’s face reddens. His voice rises a pitch.

‘He ... has disgraced us. The father of a young woman found them in a barn, in a ... compromising position.’

Catherine raises her eyebrows.

‘The girl is sixteen!’

‘Oh! No!’ Catherine’s feels her heart shudder. She can barely breathe. ‘Is the girl ... with child?’ She sees, in her mind, another mouth opening for food. ‘Am I to be a grandmother?’

‘Of course not ... ’ Uncle stares at her with a baffled expression. ‘No. Not at all. I mean. I don’t know for sure if it went that far.’

‘No child?’ Her relief is immeasurable.

‘The father of the girl has demanded retribution. Pilgrim will be sent to Australia.’

‘Australia!’

Uncle bangs the point of his cane onto the floor. ‘It’s settled.’ At that, he spins around and leaves her standing in the hallway, staring after him; a dark figure limping stiffly away. She sees him nod at the porter who hurries to open the door. She realizes she has been staring at an empty space, long after he is gone.

Later, Catherine watches the workhouse children over the evening meal. They run amok and she suppresses the urge to scream at them. Grief pulses through her as she remembers the years her Pilgrim and Annie had endured the same: another beaten child, another death, another round of typhus surging through the dormitories killing the children, one by one. Catherine focuses on each of the faces and realizes that she is not reminded of a name, but of a place in a row of beds, a position at the dining table. She becomes aware of her hand that is on the bib of her apron as her muscles tense, the apron scrunches up. With an uncontrolled rage, she wrenches her apron

over her head and rips it into two ragged halves. She balls it together and flings onto the floor.

‘Fuck you,’ she says, and runs up the stairs. ‘Fuck you all!’

11

It was five o'clock by the time Pilgrim had finished walking the distance from Pitt Street to The Brooklyn hotel on August 4, 1894. He sauntered in and looked around. City bars were much the same as each other, except that this one was full of arches: perhaps a little too ostentatious for a shearing team, but Nicker had never mentioned any place other than The Brooklyn. A long, jarrah arch stretched over the bar, other, more ornate arches curved above the doors to the men's facilities, the kitchen, above the alcoves and over a shonky staircase. The staircase, itself, was a piece of work. The balustrade was shiny from use, the steps worn out, naturally, with dirty red carpet, in some places, worn through to the grey threads over the floorboards. The steps led up to more dirty red: velvet curtains and a row of dim lights along the balcony. That would be the attraction for Nicker, Pilgrim supposed. He squirmed, looked away.

In the downstairs area, tobacco smoke curled upward and surrounded the chandelier. It made the room seem warm, softening edges and angles of tables and dimming the entire room to a sepia hue. Adding to the haze, an open fire smouldered with mallee roots, over in the corner. The smell of the smoke, he noted, had grown on him, but all the same, he tried to remember the scent of burning coal and pine cones. It's strange, he thought, how the little things remind me of home.

Pilgrim squinted through the haze and focussed on the shapes along the bar. Ah. The shearing team was in town after all. There they were, lined up against the bar, and despite the haze, Pilgrim could make out the black armband stretched around each bicep and tied in a knot: a warning to anyone thinking of undercutting the union. The men were preoccupied with drinking and telling jokes as they squelched their boots on the footrests of the bar stools. Pilgrim searched along the faces. And there he was! Nicker! The old boy was flexing and turning that thunderbolt of a wrist. He stretched and twisted on his stool. Pilgrim stared in Nicker's direction until they made eye contact. Nicker glared back. He could send a shiver up anybody's spine. Pilgrim took an involuntary step back. He'd been standing next to a hatstand and his

movement knocked a rosewood walking cane to the floor. He picked it up. Nobody had noticed, so he hung the cane over his forearm, straightened up and strode to the bar.

‘Nicker,’ Pilgrim shouted as he sidled up to the old shearer and bumped him with a shoulder.

Nicker peered into his eyes. ‘What do you want, you bloody joker?’ He rolled up a sleeve. ‘You owe me twenty quid.’

‘Give a bloke a break,’ Pilgrim said. But he could see Nicker wasn’t in the mood for charity. Nicker continued to glare.

‘Come on, Mate,’ Pilgrim pleaded. ‘Pass the hat around, would you?’

Nicker shook his head, determinedly.

‘I’m down on me luck, Mate. Pass the hat around.’

Nicker glanced at the bar manager who tugged downward on both sides of his waistcoat and turned his back, and then he gave Pilgrim a smug glance and slid around on the stool. Pilgrim found himself looking at the back of a brawny, sunburned neck. He turned his attention to the barmaid.

The barmaid was all breast and bounce. Pilgrim slid his hand into his pocket, found his two pennies and slapped them on the bar in front of her. She glared down at the coins.

‘What about you?’ he said, ‘Would you give me a sleeper? Go on, sweetheart.’ He laid the cane across the bar.

‘Thruppence,’ she said, ignoring the cane.

He put a finger on each of the coins and slid them over. But the barmaid reached under the bar and grabbed a smelly, grey rag. She swiped at a puddle of beer, deliberately left an arc around the coins, and then tossed the rag behind her. It plopped into a basin of water and dirty glasses. Ignoring him, she dried her hands on her apron and then moved along the bar, clicking empty glasses into a tower as she went. She came back, loaded them in to the sink and then paused. She put her hands on her hips and turned around to face Pilgrim. ‘What? What now?’

‘A beer? For a poem?’ Pilgrim said, lifting his hand to point at the coins.

She sighed, loud and abrupt. 'I saw the two pennies, Mister, but they're no good to me without a mate. Sorry.'

'Can't I have one beer for tuppence ... *and* a poem?' He pried her with a wink.

'I can get you a whisky and water without the whisky,' she said. 'It's thruppence for a long beer.' She doubled his exaggerated wink.

'I know you'd love a poem,' he insisted. 'What would you like to hear? One of Lawson's?'

She glanced at the manager's back, and then at Pilgrim and mouthed the word, 'no'.

'I'm a bit deaf, you know?' Pilgrim glanced in the looking-glass behind rows of brown and green bottles. Nicker also looked into the glass and made eye contact. Good. He held up the cane so that the barmaid and everyone around could see, banged it three times on the bar and shouted, 'Can't a poet get a *drink*?'

The manager turned around to face him. The barmaid folded her arms across her chest. She nodded, slowly. 'So, you're deaf, are ya?' she said. Keeping her arms folded, she leaned toward Pilgrim revealing more of her breast than he felt comfortable with. He forced his eyes upward and concentrated on discovering the colour of her eyes. They were green. Her lips moved. 'Well, come 'ere', she said, 'and I'll tell it to you nice and clear.'

Pilgrim offered her his ear. She leaned in, and their cheeks touched. Before she spoke, he felt the hot flush of her skin.

'THARR-UPPENCE!'

He stumbled backwards, knocking the beer out of Nicker's hand. The Ringer jumped back to avoid the spill.

'Oi!' Nicker fiercely glanced around. Spittle flew out of his mouth. 'Watch it!'

The manager scowled at the barmaid as he reached across the bar and took Nicker by the elbow. 'I'll shout you another beer,' the manager said, urgently, before nodding at the barmaid.

The barmaid raised her hands and widened her eyes in disbelief, shaking her head slowly. She gave Nicker a vicious glare as she slammed a clean glass on the bar and filled it to the brim. The manager watched until the glass was full, and then he leaned in and spoke quietly to her. 'Let him recite a poem. It can't hurt. He can pass the hat around, take up a collection and pay for his own beer.'

Nicker jerked back. 'I'll take it out of his hide, for you,' Nicker said, sneering. 'And I'll keep the bloody hat.'

Pilgrim grinned, grabbed the cane and stepped back from the bar. He gave the barmaid a satisfied glance.

The barmaid nodded. 'G-warn, then. Let's hear it.'

Pilgrim looked at Nicker. 'I'll buy you a round. After the poem.' He held out his hand to shake on it. Nicker raised a fist.

The room went silent.

§

Pilgrim stepped forward. The patrons were already twisted around in their seats to watch and listen.

'Err. They lie, the men who tell us ... in a ... loud decisive tone ... Ahh. Drifting past, drifting past ...'

He turned in a circle as he tried to remember the words of Henry Lawson's 'Faces in the Street'. He stalled. Winked at the barmaid. She winked back, sarcastically, and then sneered. He moved around the pub, trying desperately to recall the first line of the second verse, couldn't and so skipped to the last line ' ... to the scrape of restless feet ... ' He exaggerated the pause between stanzas two and three, using the time to step into an alcove where a group of men were sitting around a table. They looked up and stopped talking to listen.

'In hours before the morning ... uh ... dawning ... '

The table had had been hidden from his view behind a partition. He stopped. Bile rose to his throat. Right there, in front of Pilgrim, held in his seat by the hand of

a mate on either shoulder, sullen and steaming, was Henry Lawson. Shoulders pulled up, arms folded, one long leg slung over the other. Lawson glared.

Pilgrim coughed. 'Sorry. Mate. It was worth a try, though. Wasn't it?'

The barmaid yelled from behind the bar. This time, her voice was kinder, resigned. 'Ahhhh. Let him finish, Harree.'

Lawson sprung to his feet. 'He has no right,' he said. 'That's my poem. He's murdering it.' In a higher voice, he continued, 'And *that's* my cane.'

Nicker jumped up. 'I'll get it for you, Harry.' He strode forward. 'I'll flatten the blarsted larrikin,' he said. 'It wouldn't be the first time.' A crescendo of laughter erupted from the direction of the bar.

A stool cracked to the floor. The manager shouted, 'Hey!' He dashed around to the front of the bar. 'Nicker!' He held his hands out wide, as if he was trying to hold back the ocean. The manager turned his head wildly from the shearers to Lawson to Pilgrim.

'Hold back. Harry. He's doing you no harm. Nicker! He's doing him no harm. Harry! Sit *down*.'

Lawson's voice was high. 'Thief.'

'Mate. I didn't realise you ...' Pilgrim backed up. As he turned toward the exit, the pub doors swung open. Two boys came in off the street.

The manager screamed. 'Ere! Didn't I throw you out? Git out. Right now.'

Nicker stood, fist poised in the air, a slow grin moving across his face.

The boys ignored everyone. They scurried, giggling past Pilgrim, up to Lawson.

'Henry Lawson, I knew it was you. See? See, Charlie. I told you it was 'im. Didn't I tell yer, Charlie? I said it was Mr Lawson all right. Tell me I was right or I'll punch yer head.'

Lawson frowned and tilted his head like a puzzled pup. The boy said, 'Would you write me a poem, Mr Lawson? Only a line or two. I'll shout you a beer.'

'No!' Lawson yelled. 'What are you implying?'

Pilgrim stepped backwards and moved toward the exit, keeping his eye on Lawson and the boys, the shearers, Nicker, the manager. There were too many of them to take on alone, and he decided, this one time, to beat a hasty retreat. He was halfway to the door when Lawson called out.

‘Hey!’ Lawson shoved the boys aside.

Pilgrim bowed. ‘I’ve had quite enough shouting for one day. Toodeloo!’ He turned and bolted through the door.

A moment later the two boys flew out of the pub after him. They sprinted down the alleyway and past Pilgrim. He watched them disappear around the corner, one to the left, the other to the right. He laughed aloud at the way they scurried off like beetles, and he was amused until he realised he’d left his pennies on the bar. All he had now was the lingering smell of tobacco smoke on his clothes.

‘Ah well,’ he sighed. And then, the strangest thing happened. From way down the street, a little girl came hopping toward him, using a hoop as a skipping rope: flick-flick-click. She was singing in time with her skipping feet. ‘Oranges and lemons. ...’ And he thought of Mary Robertson.

12

Pilgrim had never spoken of the accident. He remembered it only as the sound of thunder, punctuated by the flick-flick-click of the looms working like nasty insects, and he remembered the heart-wrenching howls of Mary Robertson.

§

There are too many children running loose in this town, Pilgrim thought, as the girl skipped along Grosvenor Street, toward The Brooklyn, rolling the hoop in front of her in the fading light of the early evening. The usual sounds of raucousness had resumed inside the public bar, but the streets were almost empty. There were only two people: the girl with the hoop and a porter further along the street lighting the gas lamp in front of the bank.

Pilgrim backed around the corner of the adjoining building, keeping his eye on the little girl. She had stopped, stepped into the hoop, and was sitting on the path next to the step of The Brooklyn hotel.

‘What the devil? Pilgrim mumbled.

She tapped the side of the hoop with a stick. ‘When will yer pay me,’ she sang, tapping in time to the rhythm of her song.

As strange as it was to see a child on the street in the early evening, let alone on the steps of a public bar, the girl was even stranger. If she hadn’t been wearing a dress, she might have been mistaken for a boy. The fabric was so thin she shivered with cold and her apron was brown with dirt. Around her cropped head was tied a pink, dirty ribbon.

Pilgrim leaned out from around the corner. ‘Get lost,’ he hissed. ‘This is no place for a child.’ She lifted her head and poked out a pink tongue.

Pilgrim shuddered, just as two more children emerged from the ally-way on the opposite side of Lang Street, and sat beside the girl. They looked like twins. They had grown up through the bottoms of their pants, which came barely halfway down their calves. The ends of their trousers were frayed, and on the knees there were

patches over the top of older patches; despite red squares covering blue squares of fabric, their knees showed through, scabbed.

Children arrived in clusters and pairs until a large group of grotty urchins was crowded around the steps and spilling out onto the road, all raggedy, all wiping their noses on what was left of their shredded shirt-sleeves. The girl with the hoop looked toward Pilgrim, hiding behind the corner of the building. As she scratched the back of her head, a prickly sensation crept up Pilgrim's arms. He remembered lice. The itch, and the patches of bleeding skin in his armpits and groin, and the terrible burn of Kerosene oil that his mother applied three times a day. And he remembered his mother's strained voice as he retched at the smell while she tapped him on the back of the head with the brush, 'You don't belong in this place!'

The girl with the hoop had reminded him of Annie when she was young, about the time that he and his sister had worked at the textile mill: Annie darting under the weaving looms, tying up the loose threads, while he trembled with fear, scooped into a corner, frightened by the noise. Oh. And the screams that day when Mary Robertson's sleeve was caught ...

He peered at the boys and girls now gathered in a pack around the Sydney pub, and he discovered something odd. In their faces, he believed he could see the same wizened lines that the workhouse boys had worn, the same mean glint in the eye: a sharpness that reminded him of the sting of a tiny fist. The Sydney children brought to mind the workhouse brats who wore white scars across their cheeks and had raised welts from beatings across their arms and legs, whose milk teeth would fall out only to be replaced with black, rotting stumps, and whose breath stank. He had feared them as much as he had feared the plague, and now in Sydney the ratbags milled around the entrance to The Brooklyn. It chilled him. He tried to block his thoughts of the beatings at the workhouse, and the textile mill, and of Mary Robertson's sodden dress until his thoughts were interrupted.

'Ahoy!' Henry Lawson staggered out from the pub. Pilgrim sidled further around the corner as the poet saluted, his tall silhouette swaying, left hand against forehead, feet stuck hard onto the ground, body erect. His hand seemed to be

searching for his cane to lean on, but he stumbled forward and the children rippled back, giggling. As he spoke, Lawson's moustache moved, and he nodded at each child. Pilgrim realised, after a moment, that Lawson wasn't counting the children but acknowledging each, one by one.

The girl jumped up. The hoop scudded around her feet. Lawson reached out as though he thought she might fall, but she steadied herself, stood up straight, and held out her hand.

'Oh,' said Lawson, loudly. 'Is it Saturday? Already?' He dug into his pocket and fumbled around. He pulled out a coin and pressed it into the girl's palm. The girl dropped the coin in a pocket of her apron and reached up again.

'No. One each,' said Lawson. She stepped back as Lawson directed his attention to the other children.

Following the direction of Lawson's gaze, Pilgrim saw, at the back of the group, the boy he had earlier seen running past The Hatters and Merchandise. The name came back to him: 'Arvie.'

Harvey was standing amongst the group of urchins with his hands shoved into his pockets. From where Pilgrim stood, he could see that the boy was pushing mud around with a bare toe that poked out of the front of his shoe. Every now and again, Pilgrim noticed that the boy surreptitiously glanced up and then quickly downward if Lawson happened to look toward him. After a while, Lawson stopped handing out pennies and turned as if to leave. The boy started to cough and shake and bend double. When Lawson walked toward him, Harvey spluttered louder.

Lawson leaned over him, swaying.

'What's the matter, young Arvie?' He placed a hand on Harvey's shoulder.

'Oh. Just a little croupy, Mr Lawson. I'm all right.' The boy shrugged and glanced around. The children had begun to trail off. One, with a shock of chimney-sweep hair, headed toward Pilgrim and joined him behind the wall.

Pilgrim stuck out the cane, and used it to push the boy back. The boy moved away while Pilgrim poked his head around the corner again to listen.

'Say?' said the shock-haired boy. 'Isn't that Mr Lawson's cane?'

‘Sh!’

‘He won’t hear yer. Why’d you nick his walking stick?’

‘Be quiet, would you?’

‘Thief.’

Out in the street, Lawson was still talking to Harvey. Pilgrim heard him telling Harvey that little mites like him should be home in bed, and he was offering Harvey a penny, holding it between his thumb and forefinger, pointing it toward him. Harvey was shaking his head. ‘It’s no use, Mr Lawson. Me mother makes me put the pennies in the ’lectric metre.’

Lawson dug out a handful of coins, and said, ‘Well. The ’lectric metre won’t take ha’pennies.’

He paused to give Harvey a curious stare, his cupped hand, full of coins, outstretched. ‘How is your mother, in any case, Arvie?’ he said, ‘I haven’t seen her about of late?’

Harvey seemed suddenly agitated. He snatched at Lawson’s palm, grabbed all of the coins and ran. As he turned past Pilgrim he skidded on the wet pavement. The shock-haired boy took off after him, yelling as he went.

‘Aye, Arvie. Wait.’

Lawson straightened up and stared after the children. He took a couple of steps in that direction. ‘Hello Fryingp ... ‘ and then he stopped, shook his head, swung around and wobbled away. Pilgrim released his breath, and stepped out onto the street.

As he stamped his feet to relieve the pins and needles that had invaded his legs, Pilgrim detected the faint flicker of light and a low rumble of thunder. It irritated him as he started the long walk back to Raper Street where he’d find Mrs Gordon’s silly dog that howled at thunder; the howling that sounded like the moans of a little girl with her arm torn off by the mechanics of a weaving loom.

13

His feet hurt. He'd been walking all day, from business house to business house, begging for work. Anything. He'd resigned himself to the fact that he'd do anything for a quid, now; if only to save enough for a fare back to England. And the dull August sky made him feel worse, not because the dampness in the air hurt his lungs and made his nose run, but because it reminded him of Devon. The ruby-red soil. The soft damp clod. The smell of fecundity. The fleeces of fat sheep that drifted like happy clouds across the moor. The cypress trees that alternated between prime yellow and delicious green with the seasons.

He stretched out his legs and walked quickly. He was driven into reverie by the rhythmic pounding of his feet: the ground beside the street that was so unforgiving. It was rock-hard, with a sliver of mud across the surface. Over time, the walking had split his heels through the soles of bad shoes, and they ached, all of the time. So sore. He hurried to get back to Raper Street where he could fold down, cross-legged by the fire with Mrs Gordon's dog thumping its great tail, and use a razor to shave the bunions from his feet.

The cracks bled like the splits in his mother's dried-up lips—but no! He couldn't think of that now. He quickened his pace, and found that it matched the beat of a sad song with a happy tune. It went through his head. 'Singing too-rall, li-oo-rall, li-ad-ity. Singing too-rall, li-oo-rall, li-ay ...'

But his mother's image remained with Pilgrim that evening, with the moon moving across the sky and turning paler like the translucent skin on his mother's hands where the flat blue veins showed through. Like the half-moons in her fingernails. Like the clouds that had invaded her once-blue eyes, full of tears the day he left. The last time he saw her, his mother had pushed a bundle into his arms, a ticking bundle that she told him was all of his inheritance—a gold-plated alarm clock.

'Go on, Harry ...' She'd said as she shoved him onto the gangplank, 'You'll come back one day. I'll be here, waiting for you.'

A heavy mist had fallen over Plymouth, like the closing curtain at the end of Act I of his life. It had spread out behind the town and over the country. Like everyone leaving England that day, he waved goodbye to a big white cloud. And when they turned on deck to face the ocean—nothing but an expanse of slate blue, empty terrain—they realised, even he realised at the age of seventeen, that they were each and everyone alone: pilgrims on the sea.

In plodding back to Raper Street that night, he compared his every step with the passage of time, each moving him closer to the grave, each another moment away from home. He wanted to forget, so he started to whistle that cheerful song he'd learned. The tune comforted, but the words failed him. 'Farewell to old England forever.'

§

Three months had gone since he had first come down to Sydney for a spell from the bush. Pilgrim had found his Raper Street home in the 'to let' section in *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

Comfortable home. Kit and board. Garden view. Bath. Copper.

Apply on premises. Mrs Nelly Gordon. Widow with nice dog.

Not entirely all lies. It was in a small street, tucked into the urban network like an afterthought, or a check mark at the bottom of Phillip Street. There was just one dwelling on Raper Street, one that had been there since before anyone could remember. The building consisted of six terraced houses, a farriery yard behind the biggest at the end—complete with the reassuring tap-tap-tap-tap-tap ... tap-tap-tap-tap-tap—of consistent industry. Buckled like a wet book, and ready to be condemned, the building was full of rooms that were rented cheaply, mostly to widows or single elderly men who grew tomatoes and kept chickens, swapping eggs and vegetables amongst their neighbours.

As he had inspected the upstairs room for the first time, he had noticed that the bedroom door faced the bathroom, and that the bathroom window was jammed open with a brick. 'Won't the draft come through?' he'd asked, pointing out the one-inch gap under the bedroom door and then glancing at the window on the other side. Mrs Gordon had shrugged and directed him toward the bedroom. 'In here,' she'd said, with a nod. Despite the icy June weather, he'd been surprised to find the bedroom window was wide open, so he'd immediately gone over to it, and leaned down on the frame. It had moved a fraction, but stopped short of the bottom, leaving a small crack between the window and the frame. He supposed, aloud, that the gap could be stuffed with newspaper.

'I suppose,' Mrs Gordon had said, in agreement. She had been standing in the bedroom doorway, watching him as he fiddled with the window catch. Her chubby arms were folded across her chest.

'Now it's better, Mr P,' she said, leaning back on her heels, 'that the germs be blown out instead of being left to breed in the warmth and kill us all unexpectedly.' She had looked into his eyes then, and stared as if searching for symptoms. 'Of the plague,' she added.

After that, he negotiated the rickety steps down to the scullery, and went outside, undecided, to survey the place from a distance. He walked to the front of the building, crossed to the other side of the street, and with his head tilted to the side, thought, after all, that he liked the way it looked as a whole. It was inexpensive, besides. So, he'd gone back inside and paid a whole pound to secure the room for a month.

She had rolled the note into a small cylinder, slid it through the ring on her wedding finger, and closed her hand around it. 'So, Mr P. Welcome to your new home,' she said, bending down to rub the ears of the dog that slinked around her feet.

'A poet can hide away here,' Pilgrim had said. 'I can see myself spending many a quiet evening huddled over my copy book.' He had nodded, to himself, satisfied that he'd found an inspiring place to live and write. 'Provided I'm undisturbed, I can write well in a place like this.'

Mrs Gordon had laughed. 'From the ruins, great literature will emerge,' she had said, patting him on the shoulder.

§

Now, three months and not one par later, after a long day of job hunting, he headed back to Raper Street. He smelled the pea-and-ham soup as he turned up the path to the terraced house; he could feel it already warming his insides, the white heat of it, the salty, thick goodness of it. But when he entered the kitchen, Mrs Gordon was in her rocking chair, rocking back in the corner by the stove, a coloured patchwork of crochet covering her legs as she stitched, her fingers moving as if operated by some mysterious force over which she had no control. Her hands and mouth moved independently of her body as she greeted him.

'Hello, Mr P.' She did not look up from her knitting. 'Rent money?'

'No par, Mrs Gordon. Another week?'

'Oh. Another week. And another week. And another.' Her hands kept on with their rhythm of twist and pull, and her chair rocked and she did not look up.

'From the ruins ...' she began, but her voice cracked. 'Never mind.'

He glanced at the pot that was on the floor, with the great skinny hound helping himself to its contents, slobbering all over the pot with a tongue the size of a slab of steak.

'You just missed out on tea,' she said. She stretched out her arm and pulled on the thread. The ball of wool scudded across the floor.

'By a hair's breadth,' she said.

And his stomach growled for food.

14

A steady rain drilled onto the roof. He sat on the edge of his bed holding the gold-plated alarm clock in his hands. Slowly, he turned the key to wind the motor, occupying his thoughts with the way he could so easily turn the hands forward or back. His hands trembled.

If only he *could* turn back time. If only he could go back to England, to visit Annie and his mother, to beg Uncle for forgiveness. As he listened to the rain, droning in the darkness outside, he recalled the storms in England. He thought about Red, the dog, the great heaving rug of orange fur, and how it would cower under the rows of beds at the workhouse, trembling at the rumblings outside. He thought about how later, in his own bedroom at the manor, he had been too frightened to snuff the light and go to bed alone. Instead, he would stand for what seemed like hours in his long johns, shivering by the window, gazing out along the driveway, longing for his mother to visit. How he wished he could have turned back time, and not steal apples, and not be sent to the textile mills, and not fail his first attempt at the Mason's exam, and not be sent to the manor, and not fall in love with a girl in a barn ...

And then, as hard as he tried to avoid the memory, the weaving looms came back. He remembered, vividly, his first day. 'Think of it as thunder,' his mother had said. 'Thunder can't hurt you.'

Her words came back to him as he closed his eyes and lay back on his Raper Street bed, many years since his childhood and many oceans away from his home, clutching the clock to his heart. Tick. Tick. Tick. Water, dripping from the eaves of the roof. Drip-tick. Drip-tick.

§

He is aware he is dreaming. Thunder rises from the south; there is lightning in the west. His toes press into foreign red sand. A strange song invades him. He does not

understand the words. Pilgrim becomes a small boy whose feet begin to run. Pilgrim opens his mouth and tries to speak.

Mama! Silence. Ma!

A giant face looms in front of him, inches from his eyes, its mouth moving, the words entering Pilgrim's brain. The Zulu booms, his voice rumbling across the African landscape. The *Sydney Morning Herald* flaps down like a bird and lands on the shoulder of the giant Zulu who has grown out of all proportion, each foot the size of a park bench. He spits water into Pilgrim's eyes, opens his giant mouth and swallows Pilgrim's head.

A drop of water fell from the ceiling and landed on his temple. He touched it with his fingertip. As he rolled over in his bed, the alarm clock fell with a crash to the floor. The jolt set off the alarm, and it rang and rang.

15

Monday. He fell out of bed and dressed himself. When he opened his bedroom door the dog, who had been sleeping in the corridor, lifted its head, stood up and followed him down the stairs, through the kitchen and out the back door. It waited outside while Pilgrim used the toilet. It plodded along behind him, and then shot through the gate in front of him as he went through to the adjoining farriery yard. Pilgrim tried to ignore the dog as he headed for the workshop. No point in searching the news columns today, he thought. By six o'clock all the work would be taken, and this week, none of it was his.

The farrier watched him approach and looked up from the forge. 'Not wealthy from the poetry, Mr P?'

The farrier was a skinny man wearing a brown leather apron over his legs. A pair of clinchers was hooked over the edge of the pocket. His long white beard was recently singed at the end. The smell of burnt hair hung about.

Pilgrim blew out a disgruntled snort. 'Not this week,' he said. 'Can you spare me a day's work?'

'Half a day,' said the farrier. He handed him an apron and, with a blackened finger, pointed at the yard. Pilgrim noticed that the bruised thumbnail on the old man's left hand had recently been given a right-hand twin. He followed the farrier's direction to the yard. Two fat grey mares walked up to him. They nudged his chest.

'If I had any sugar,' he said to the horse, 'I'd have eaten it myself, by now.' He ran his hand over the mare's shoulder, down her leg and lifted her foot. Her hoof was tidy. All that was needed was a shoe. He sighed.

'I'm moving out,' the farrier yelled over the roar of the bellows. 'We've been evicted.'

'What?'

'The whole building. You'll have to find a job.'

Pilgrim mumbled to himself: 'Tell me something I don't know.'

When Pilgrim had finished with the brumbies, the farrier came over and inspected the shoes. 'What'll you do?' he asked as he placed a well-shod hoof back on the mud.

'I suppose I could learn to shear a sheep.'

The farrier laughed, scrabbled in his pocket and pulled out a handful of coins. 'It's all I can spare,' he said.

Pilgrim shook his head. 'Give them to Nelly, direct.'

16

It wasn't until late that afternoon, and after another fruitless day of job hunting, with Mrs Gordon's dog trotting along at his heels, that the farrier's words hit home. He was passing through the Domain on his way back to the quay when he realized there was no work to be had. For the first time since he had been in Sydney, Pilgrim noticed the goings-on in the park. He looked around, almost fearful of the shuffling of the homeless as they arranged the pages of old newspapers and flattened boxes around themselves to make shelters amongst the rocks and crevices. They were shamed into hiding from the law enforcers and from each other, lest one should recognise an unemployed poet, a banker whose job had become obsolete, a farm-hand come down from the bush to pick up a living when the hard times hit. He smelt the stinking waft of rats as they poked their heads out to pick up the remnants of food as the light was fading, and he saw the footprints of stray dogs that made circles, presumably as they sniffed and pawed at the movement amongst the rocks, seeking out a feed of fresh rat. He passed through the park as quickly as he could, on the verge of tears for the men and women whose body odours mingled with the smell of urine coming from around the bases of the trees. He sped up and started to jog away; he wanted to be as far from them all as quickly as he could move.

Eventually, he found himself on the eastern side of Semicircular Quay. A flurry of seagulls squalled about a shelter-shed opposite Talbot's wool stores. Nearby, Pilgrim made out the shapes of machinery protruding from large sheets of tarpaulin, and he heard the faint stirrings of what he thought were small animals. After listening for a moment, he realised that instead of animals amongst the plagues of rats, a group of children was playing in the great shadow of the woolstore. As he tiptoed closer, he heard them whispering, 'Sh! Be quiet'.

He was surprised by the appearance of a tall boy who stepped out of the shadows and was suddenly standing in front of him. The boy looked up at him and shouted, 'It's all right. It's that Mr Pilgrim feller who got kicked out of The Brooklyn.'

Puzzled, Pilgrim said, 'What are you children doing there?' He moved a little closer. One by one, scruffy heads appeared from under the tarps. Pilgrim looked closely at their faces. He'd expected to see savages, but they were not. These were not mean, angry children of the workhouse or the textile mill. There were no scars from whips or beating rods and their teeth were incomplete and yet clean. When he looked more closely at each face, he realised they were the same children he had seen at The Brooklyn. They surrounded him. 'I haven't got any money,' he said. 'Where are your mothers?'

The children murmured in chorus, some of them crowding around the dog.

'Does he bite?'

'Yes!'

The boy-girl with the pink ribbon tugged on Pilgrim's shirt. She looked up at him with round eyes, short strands of hair stuck to her forehead and around the edges of her fat cheeks, and she said, 'Arvie doesn't have a mother.'

'Really?'

Toward the back of the group of children was Harvey, hands on hips, blond hair sticking up all over the place. There, in the shadow of the woolstore, Pilgrim merged images of the boy: the cheerful running boy with a loaf of bread; the croupy little thief who'd snatched a handful of pennies from Henry Lawson's palm. It was the same boy. Harvey.

The girl went on, interrupting his thoughts. 'I got a mother,' she said. 'She comes home in the morning, and then she goes to sleep and I can't wake her up because she's been washin' all night.'

One of the children lifted a hand and waved it in the air. 'I got a mother. She goes washing too.'

'We've all got mothers ... 'cept Arvie,' said the girl. She pointed at Harvey.

Even in shadow with his face covered in grime, Harvey's eyes twinkled. With a start, Pilgrim realised that the problem he'd had with Harvey was not that he was terrified of a little boy. Nor was he afraid of how Harvey brought back to Pilgrim the memories of workhouse boys and their pounding fists. Pilgrim realised that he saw a

reflection of himself. It was in the way that Harvey was standing there, staring at Pilgrim as if counting the hairs on his chin one by one and sizing him up. It was because, if he could have combed the boy's blond hair, and dressed him in jodhpurs and a riding cap ... Pilgrim saw himself standing before a looking glass peering into his own blue eyes. One could end a war with a face like that. At least, that's what Pilgrim's mother had once told him as she had squinted up at him seated in the saddle of his fresh polo pony. When he looked into Harvey's face, mottled by shadows, Pilgrim understood what his mother had meant.

'Harvey?' Pilgrim said, and nodded at the boy standing with his hands on his hips.

'Yes ...' Harvey said. Harvey pushed his way to the front of the crowd of youngsters and looked up at Pilgrim.

'Where is your mother?' said Pilgrim.

'Arvie doesn't *have* a muvver.'

'Then where are your fathers?'

'None of us knows.' Harvey's eyes were cold, staring right through Pilgrim.

'We don't even know *who* our fathers is.'

He pointed a sharp little finger at Pilgrim's nose. 'Might be you, Mr Pilgrim.'

Pilgrim backed away.

17

When he got home, that evening, the place was not the same. The six terraced houses that confronted him were unusually dark for that time of night. There was a light on at number four, but all of the windows of the building were black and the chimneys were cold.

He lifted the latch, keeping his eye on the front door ahead. Remembering that the gate had long ago fallen shy of its hinges, he leaned down and lifted the little wire and timber gate, shoving it back against the unwieldy weeds. He gave it another shove. The gate lay back obediently and stayed in place, tilted at an angle against the short picket fence.

Without lights, or the glow of a fire in any of the chimneys, the street looked dead, as if it had been abandoned years before. The aroma of baked potatoes, salty ham soup or burning mallee roots, even the hint of melting candle wax, had been blown away, and the block now looked still, like a painting. Where were the chickens from number one, who by now would be huddled against the fence on the other side, issuing him warnings in long, low squawks had he disturbed them? Gone?

There was no movement, except for a dark breathing lump on the front step in front of the door. Pilgrim gave the dog a push with his foot. It turned viciously, snapped its jaws with a clack, and then rested its head on its paw. A large padlock was clamped around the door bolt. Pilgrim leaned over the dog, rattled the lock, pulled at it, twisted it, but the lock was too heavy.

‘It’s no use.’

Pilgrim turned to see the unmistakably round silhouette of Martha from number four stepping out of her front door, a large basket hooked under her arm and wedged against her hip. Martha pulled the door of number four closed, and then she turned and picked up the tilly lamp from the path where she had placed it as she had gathered her things. She looked up and saw him.

‘Mrs Gordon tole me to give you something.’

The bundle and the fat legs and the lamp waddled toward Pilgrim. He had often wondered how such abject poverty could have produced such a sturdy woman,

when his own mother had grown so thin. But he respected Martha, for she was honest and straight to the point, always. She put down the basket and fumbled in her pinny pocket. She held her arm out straight, holding a note. Pilgrim took the note and unfolded it while Martha held the lamp above his head. He stepped into the lamp light. For Martha's benefit, he read aloud.

Dear P,

I'd have warned you earlier, but you were home too late, and up too early of a morning. I haven't seen you for a week ...

Pilgrim looked up from the letter. 'Well, that's not true.'

Martha lowered her chin and looked up at him through a frown.

'Oh, Mr P, don't you go talking 'bout our Nelly that way. You know you bin drinking too much of late.' Martha put a hand on her hip and shuffled in close to read the letter over his shoulder. He felt the warmth of her body.

The owners want to dynamite the lot and build a pub so they've evicted us as of first light tomorrow. You know none of us could keep up with the rent, so don't be blaming yourself for that. You paid when you could and I weren't supposed to have a boarder in any case.

Martha nudged him with an elbow. 'Y'see how kind? Like a mother to you, she is.'

'She could have told me ...'

I've packed all your things into my old portmanteaux along with that wretched alarm clock (thank heavens I don't have to be woken up by that any more at any ungodly hour). It's all around back against the wall. You can keep the bag as long as you need it and

I'll be happy to know I helped a famous poet when he was down and out.

Don't worry about me. I'll be staying with an Aunt for a while.

It's been a pleasure, 'P'. Just you make sure you keep up the writing and bring me an autographed copy of your first book of poems. I'll be watching for it.

Yours and always,

Nelly Gordon.

Pilgrim re-folded the note and pushed it into the pocket in the lining of his coat. He reached out a hand and placed it on Martha's shoulder. 'What about you, Martha? You'll be okay?'

'We was moving anyways. Saw it coming since Christmas.' She nodded toward the dog. 'But he keeps coming back, silly mongrel. Must like it here.'

Martha led Pilgrim round the back of the houses and let him use the lamp to find the bag, which was stuffed with his belongings. He rifled through to find that everything was included. Even the sock which had been missing for weeks had been found and was neatly twisted into its pair.

'So much for free selection,' he said, waving the thick woollen ball of sock in the lamplight. 'But at least I have my spare pair of socks back.'

'Free selection? A farm? You got big plans, Mr P.' She turned away, her shoulders shaking in silent laughter. 'Well. Good luck to yer.'

Pilgrim stared long at the empty row of houses before he left. The dog lifted its head and sniffed at the air as if it had caught the scent of something moving past, and then got up and lazily followed a scent trail around the back of the houses. Pilgrim backed up a few steps, before turning around to leave his memories folded in a casket of warped timber and wonky doors. He glanced back to see Martha humping off with her basket of clothes in the dim yellow light of the lantern.

§

He did not look over his shoulder. As he strolled, without any sense of purpose up the shadowy lane, he experienced the Raper Street apartment block as a supernatural presence, looming behind him. It sent a ripple of gooseflesh up the back of his neck. Raper Street was so quiet that night, he could swear he heard the lapping of little waves against the rocks, all the way over in Semicircular Quay. Certainly, he could smell the rats that scratched nasty little holes in the sand and gnawed at the ropes that tied the ships to bay. Never, never look back, he told himself, as though he honestly planned on taking his own advice.

§

They had spent the night in Plymouth, all three, he, Annie and his mother, in the one-bedroom off the back of Uncle's coach house on Plymouth Hoe. All night long, they'd heard wavelets slapping against the hulls of ships, like a slow metronome, and all the while the clock tower in the town counted to the short hours with a bong on the hour, every hour. The town had been like a funeral parlour.

The room smelled of mouldy hay. At one point, just after the midnight gong had sounded from the bell tower, Pilgrim saw a rat that poked its head up through a crack between the blackened floorboards. It had looked at him, brushed a nonchalant paw across its nose and then vanished. Good riddance to you, too. But the rat had left a gift of lingering odour.

All in all, it hadn't been a fine farewell.

Pilgrim had slept upright in a three-legged Queen Anne wing chair in the corner, leaving the bed to Annie and his mother. When he awoke in the morning with pins and needles all the way along the right side of his body, Annie was snoring, squeezed along one side of the single bed. His mother had already dressed and was—well—she was at it again.

‘No, Ma. Not again,’ he said, as he rubbed granules of yellow sleep from the corners of his eyes. ‘Leave it be.’

She was biting her bottom lip, and concentrating hard on the stack of items balanced on the end of the bed on top of Annie’s feet. ‘You’ve enough clothes in here to sink a ship.’

Annie sat up abruptly. ‘Mother!’

Pilgrim’s mother glared at Annie, before realising what she’d said, and then apologised to both of them. She finished re-packing the large trunk that sat on the floor, pushed the lid down, and sat on it. Pilgrim pulled on the leather straps and anchored first one buckle, and then the other. The wide brown belts creaked under the strain. And then, when it was all fastened, once again, his mother shifted, turned and knelt before the trunk. She might have been in church, on her knees in front of a pew. Her voice was shaking.

‘Think of it as ...’

‘An adventure? I’m tired of hearing it.’

‘I was going to say ... a journey, but ...’ Her voice faded away and her gaze went off into some distant mysterious place that only Mother seemed to go, and Pilgrim took both of her hands and helped her to her feet. ‘It’s a pilgrimage,’ she said.

‘It’s temporary, Ma. I’ll return to England as soon as I’m able.’

She met his gaze before she rose onto her tiptoes, wrapped her arms around his neck and shoulders and held him—tight. Her whispered breath moistened his ear. ‘My boy.’

She squeezed. ‘Keep your chin up.’

He had tried to release her embrace, pushing back on her, but she gripped him all the more tightly. ‘And one more thing. Always look to the future.’

In Sydney, all those years later, as Pilgrim went on his way with his portmanteaux slung over one shoulder and Lawson’s cane in his hand, he did so with his head held high. He did not turn around to see whether or not he would have any

regrets or second thoughts—not that second thoughts would have changed anything. I'm not looking back, he told himself; it's just a glance.

18

The oviduct over the Tank Stream, at least, was warm but he had no intentions of staying there for more than a night. It was big enough for him to walk in, upright, and wide enough to lay at least two, perhaps three men head to toe across the bottom, but the floor was wet except for a narrow band of about two feet wide on either side. Moonlight lit the entrance of the drain and filtered through, giving him enough light to see dim shapes, so he scrabbled around in the portmanteaux until he found a tallow candle and a box of matches. He lit the candle and moulded the bottom of it onto the paved floor until it stood up on its own. The candle threw out an orange glow that highlighted the rough brickwork that arched over him, and glinted off the water that ran in a very thin stream that trickled down the centre of the drain, littered with sticks and various bits of flotsam. The water stank of an indescribable mix of dank mud and rotting garbage that had been steeping in it on its way through the streets above and down under the city. He pressed his back against the brickwork at the side and drew his feet up and away from the dribble of water that made a gutter in the silt. It was uncomfortable, but unlike the Domain, it was sheltered from the rain and, what's more, it was very private. When he felt that he was settled, he noticed a leech moving in dots and dashes along the side of his boot.

‘What would you do if I died here, eh?’ He pushed at the leech’s black spongy body as it lifted one end of itself and concertinaed another inch toward the bare flesh of his leg. ‘You wouldn’t love my blood so much then, would you?’ He plucked it off and stretched its body so that it became a long, thin band of living elastic. The segments of its body popped softly as he pulled on both ends of the creature and then flicked it off his hand. The leech stuck to a brick. He watched as it curled up and dropped onto the sand.

Pilgrim shook his head and sighed as he felt for his pencil and pulled it out of his top pocket. He rubbed the sides of the point along the brickwork to wear down the wood and sharpen the point of the lead, and then he licked the point of the pencil. He leaned his palm against the cool brickwork and started to write on the wall. ‘Pilgrim’s last word,’ he wrote, and underlined it.

‘Let’s toss a bumper down our throat,

Before we pass to Heaven ...’

He paused a moment to look along the length of the oviduct. At the end of the tunnel he could see outward to the moonlit street, and out in the sky he knew there was a big, lonely moon.

§

He tried to sleep, sitting upright with his feet pulled up onto the dry, his back curved forward, his chin resting bent toward his chest. A click beetle clicked and landed close to his hand. It clicked again. Pilgrim tried to settle but the erratic sound distressed him. He squinted along the surface of the drain while the beetle clicked several more times and then stopped, and then started, and stopped. Just like life, he thought. Unpredictable. But as exhaustion rode over him in waves, Pilgrim’s mind drifted and allowed the residual sound in his head to remind him of the claws of a Red Setter, ticking on wooden floorboards. And at that thought his mind closed down, and he swayed in and out of tingling slumber.

§

The dreams are vivid in his times of stress and here, in the gutter, Pilgrim senses that he is in a prison. *Sleep*, he tells his cell-mates, *is the enemy of life. It will steal away precious last moments, breath by breath.*

And as the moments file past like a row of toppling dominoes, a padre, known as Fryingpan, comes to visit him in this jail. *I brought your clock*, he says. The weight of it surprises Pilgrim, as he turns it over to read the inscription on the back. He winds the key, one last time, and holds it in his hands. As the hands of the clock begin to move, he calculates that the clock will tick 65,700 times in the eighteen hours and fifteen minutes that are left of his life. He tells this number to Fryingpan, who shakes his head and holds out a Bible with gilt-edged pages and Pilgrim’s initials engraved on the cover. *I am immortal*, Pilgrim says. And wakes with a start.

19

Red was such a big dog that when Pilgrim, as a child, was wrapped around him, the tips of his toes barely touched the floor. He remembered the warmth from the dog as it moved beneath him, his arms wrapped around its chest. He would lay his head against the dog's shoulder, listening for a heartbeat. Sometimes, he'd fancied he heard it there, tucked in between the red-haired shoulder blades: a deep throbbing sound.

§

Moonlight glittered on the paving at the end of the oviduct. A shadow fell across the mud, just inside the entrance.

'Anyone there?'

The silt absorbed his voice. Pilgrim heard his own breathing.

'Hello?'

No answer. His breath rasped in and out and then, when he held his breath to listen, he heard the quick, unmistakable pant of a dog. At the entrance of the oviduct he saw the outline of its shape and its eyes shining in the light. It took a step toward him. Pilgrim watched the silhouette that stood forepaws apart, head bowed, tail between legs.

'Go away.' His voice shook and he felt the pressure increase in his bladder. The dog's sudden appearance had given him a scare and a rush of adrenalin. It lowered its head and took another step forward.

'Git orf,' hissed Pilgrim 'Go!' His fingers felt around in the mud, searching for a weapon. When they reached a stick, he gripped it and pitched it toward the mouth of the oviduct. The stick scudded past the dog. It landed with a muted thud.

The dog emitted a low, doleful moan.

§

The shape of a boy appeared behind the dog. The shape's arm attached itself to the dog's head. Pilgrim whispered, 'Who's there?'

The shape didn't move. It stood like a statue of a trooper beside a horse. He tried to control the shaking in his voice. 'Harvey? Is that you?'

'I've been looking for you, Mr Pilgrim. I found yer dog.'

Pilgrim shoved the handles of the portmanteaux up to his armpits, grabbed the cane and clambered forward. For twenty-nine, his body was too stiff. He felt fifty. The cold had seeped into his knees. Each buckled step forward was marked with a razor-sharp jab of pain under his left kneecap, an old wound come back to haunt him. He staggered, wishing he could retrieve some of his childhood dexterity.

As he emerged from the Tank Stream, he was relieved to see that Harvey was alone. The clock tower chimed, once. 'Midnight?'

Harvey chuckled. 'Half past ten, Mister. If I didn't know better, I'd say you was in for a long night.'

Pilgrim threw down the portmanteaux. Half past ten? He stretched and tried to shake off the stiffness in his body while his eyes adjusted to the streetlight. The cold penetrated through his skin. He rubbed at the palms of his hands, clattered his teeth. His whole body shivered.

§

He looked all the way out across the city. In the distance, he heard the last train as it hissed in to Eveleigh, accompanied by a long, sad whistle that he could feel vibrating through him. The sound of Harvey's voice snapped him to attention.

'Mr Pilgrim?' Harvey said.

'Huh?'

'I said have you got food in there?'

The dog's head was stuck in the bag. It had sniffed out something inside the portmanteaux, and had its head under one of the handles. Now it pawed at its head,

while pulling backwards. Suddenly, it broke free and jerked sideways with a yelp, dropping whatever it had in its mouth. Harvey laughed. The dog cowered.

‘What’s ’is name?’ Harvey wrapped his arms around the dog’s neck and nuzzled its head. ‘I always call him Tommy,’ he said.

‘He isn’t mine,’ said Pilgrim, bending down to get a look at what the dog had dropped. The dog’s wet mouth collided with Pilgrim’s hand as it clacked its jaws over the bundle.

‘Ere, Leave my socks alone!’

He yanked back, but the dog had its teeth hooked into the fabric. It growled, curling its lips, revealing its canines. Harvey straddled the dog and grabbed it by the head from behind.

After a struggle, he said, ‘You may’s well give it to him. He won’t let go, Mister.’

Pilgrim twisted the socks around his hand. ‘There’s two reasons, Harvey, why this mutt can’t take my socks. Firstly, they’re my only clean socks and I need ’em.’ He yanked hard enough to break the dog’s teeth, but the socks were held fast.

‘And ...?’

‘And ... if he takes off with the socks, he’ll crawl in under the house that’s going to be dynamited and ...’ He yanked again and the dog slid forward, dug its front paws into the dirt. ‘He’ll be blown to bits.’

§

Streetlamps, now, threw golden arcs over the road, reflecting like sunrise on the quay. A horse and trap, clop-clop-clop, disappeared around the corner into George Street. A strain of electric organ music by Weigand wafted, barely audible, from the Town Hall and disappeared on the breeze, like a coil of smoke. Below him, he heard the Tank Stream as it burped and gurgled through a hidden artery under the city.

20

Harvey seemed overly excited. Pilgrim had agreed, wholeheartedly, when Harvey insisted that he would not to allow him to go back into the oviduct. Harvey wanted to share his place, and to Pilgrim's mind, it meant a house, a bed, something to eat, perhaps even some adult company. He was ready to know more.

'If you don't have a mother, do you live with your father?'

Harvey ignored the question. Instead, he ruffled the dog's ears and made incomprehensible noises into the grey fur while the dog grinned and whacked at the ground with his tail.

'You're sure he won't mind? My staying?'

Harvey shook his head, turned and started to walk. 'This way,' he said.

Pilgrim followed, too exhausted to argue.

'I saw you at Wong Pat's the other day, and I see you sometimes at *The Bulletin* office of a Saturday. Yes, you might not think so, but I do read *The Bulletin*. I like yer poems, Mr P.'

Harvey looked back at Pilgrim as if expecting acknowledgment. Pilgrim nodded. For a street urchin, he suddenly seemed a whole lot more articulate than he'd appeared earlier. It was a ruse, he thought, to get sympathy and money from foolish old Lawson. And what did Lawson have, anyhow? He was always drinking and giving more money away than he could possibly earn as a poet.

With the nod accepted, Harvey went on, talking as he walked. 'I like poetry in general. It was Polly, especially Polly, oh and Dot, and Ju, they gave me lessons in writing, things that they don't teach you in school, except arithmetic, they don't like arithmetic, the women ...'

Pilgrim almost bumped into Harvey who had paused again. He nodded, walked around Harvey and continued to stride onward. Harvey started again.

'If only I had a father ... He could teach me math. Maybe Mr P, you could teach me some math?'

Pilgrim nodded again. He couldn't see the harm in it. If there were time in the morning he'd teach the boy some sums in exchange for breakfast from his guardians. In his mind's eye, he saw fried eggs. Toast. Hot tea.

'They used to keep their books behind the curtains in their rooms. Did you know, Mr P, they have curtains to cover everything: their hairbrushes, their soaps and creams ...'

Pilgrim stopped. 'Who?'

'Molly. Dot. Ju. And my mum.'

'Oh. They taught you poetry?'

'They gave me a book of poetry for my birthday. And Mr Lawson helped some, but Mr Lawson's deaf. It didn't make his lessons any easier. And by the by, that's Mr Lawson's cane you're carrying there.'

Pilgrim swung the cane in a circle and smiled to himself. Of course he knew.

Harvey shook his head, and then went on. 'Mr Lawson's a terrific poet, and in fact, I like to think of Mr Lawson as the Thomas Moore of this century. Did you know, if you compare Lawson's work with Mr Paterson's ...'

Harvey turned and started to walk backwards as he spoke '... you'll see there's a whole lot of difference. Lawson's better.'

Pilgrim wanted to disagree but he stopped himself short. He felt himself being drawn into a situation that became stranger by the moment. The boy had grown in intellect, by years, and Pilgrim had the feeling that he'd been somehow conned into something outside of his control. Besides, he thought, it's not the type of conversation I would usually want to have with a child. He flinched with a touch of embarrassment, remembering the debacle at The Brooklyn. Lawson's poems were too difficult to recite; the words were too complicated and morbid. Why would a boy of ... twelve ... thirteen ... enjoy Lawson? He tried to turn the conversation.

'So, you don't like Paterson?' Pilgrim liked Paterson's characters. They reminded him of ... well ... of himself, actually. He thought of the brumby's he'd tamed and ridden out bush and felt that Paterson had described them well. He must remember to mention it.

‘No!’ Harvey replied. For a while, then, there was silence between them, as though at the mention of Paterson, Harvey had been offended. Pilgrim was only aware of footsteps and breathing, and the panting of the dog. They walked on in the light a streetlamp, in the shadow, and then in the light again. He followed Harvey around a corner and along a narrow side street where, in a boot shop display window, a line of rabbit pelts hung over a section of fence.

‘Have you been upcountry, Mr P? There’s rabbits. Everywhere. On the plain. And Fryingpan says that rabbits are going to overrun the country one day and there’ll be nothing left for the wallabies to eat. Fryingpan’s grandfather used to live off them. Would you catch rabbits with us ... Mr P?’

Pilgrim nodded, but Harvey’s story had triggered a memory of a poem by Paterson and how he’d laughed out loud when he’d read it for the first time in *The Bulletin*. Frying Pan was an Aboriginal boy who thought snow came from a giant flour bag that was shaken by God. Pilgrim covered his mouth to stifle a chuckle.

‘Has your Fryingpan ever seen snow?’

‘No! Fryingpan was born here. No snow in Sydney. And whoever said he was Aboriginal?’

Harvey’s voice deepened and was tinged with anger. ‘It’s an awfully bad poem.’ He stopped abruptly. Tommy ran into the middle of the street, sniffed at the woodblock paving, turned in a circle, baulked at his own tail and let out a yap.

‘Come here, boy.’

The dog trotted back. Harvey knelt and wrapped his arms around Tommy’s neck and mumbled something, inaudible into Tommy’s fur. Tommy moved rhythmically as he panted and waved his tail. Pilgrim stopped and watched.

‘What did you say, Harvey?’

‘I wish I had a father.’

Pilgrim inhaled sharply. He felt as though he’d stepped on a nail.

21

Harvey stopped at the end of an alleyway just past The Cricketer’s Arms Hotel.

‘Welcome to me ’umble abode,’ Harvey said, slowly. He seemed a little peeved.

Pilgrim looked around. ‘Where?’ he said. ‘What abode?’

‘There.’ Harvey pointed. Pilgrim was surprised to see a box wedged into the corner of two adjoining brick buildings. It was a packing crate. The weathered wood was camouflaged against the brickwork. At the front of the box, a small square had been sawn roughly into the shape of a door. From the outside, Pilgrim noticed that the entrance, or doorway, was covered from the inside by a curtain of red material.

He watched Harvey get onto his hands and knees and scramble through the opening. A soft light appeared inside, a flickering glow behind the curtain.

Tommy, with a sudden burst of energy, barged between Pilgrim’s feet, and trotted toward Harvey. The dog’s body stopped when he was halfway in through the doorway, and he waved his grey fern-tail, whipping it from side to side, whack, whack, against the edge of the box. Harvey poked his head out, leaning over top of the dog’s rear end, and waved him in. ‘Hurry up. Get in here.’

Pilgrim glanced around, reminded himself that he was only twenty-nine, and groaned as he knelt on the hard street. He eased himself onto his hands and knees and followed Harvey and the dog, sucking in his stomach and pulling his shoulders together so he could fit through the opening. It was deceptively big inside, and it struck him that the place smelled peculiar. Besides the odour of stale bedding, there was a hint of musk perfume.

About five feet square, the inside of the crate was lined all through with red-and-grey striped blankets and one wall was lined with newspapers. A rectangle of silk hung like a red cloud, attached at various points on the ceiling, flickering in the light of the tallow candle—sunset over the Thames. Pilgrim tried to stand up. His head bumped against the ceiling, forcing him to stoop, and his hair reacted with static against the silk.

Harvey’s eyes were on him; he felt them following his gaze to the ceiling. An uncomfortable silence had come between them. The candle was close to Harvey’s face as he held it in his fist. When he looked into Harvey’s eyes, Pilgrim saw two

softly spitting and flickering flames; one flame reflected in each of Harvey's eyes. He looked demonic. There was some kind of omen in that, he thought, as if candles for eyes could mean something.

Thrown into the corner of the box-house was a carpet bag stuffed with rags of clothing. A shirtsleeve hung out like a tongue. A smaller box made a table, with writing paper, a pencil, a pannikin and a tin plate stacked on a corner. Old coffee bags covered the floor, adding their own kitchen-aroma to the musky, musty smell.

Harvey melted some wax onto the smaller box and set the candle into it, and Tommy padded in a circle before curling around the sock. When the dog was settled, Harvey reached under the table and pulled out a bundle wrapped in calico. He unwrapped a loaf of bread and a lump of cheese. The bakery smell wafted out and set Pilgrim's stomach growling.

Harvey held up the loaf of bread. 'Hungry?'

Pilgrim broke off a piece and left the loaf on the table in front of him, while Harvey chipped at the cheese with his Opinel folding knife. Pilgrim pushed food into his mouth.

'You really are very hungry, aren't yer?' Harvey looked up from under his eyebrows, like a schoolmaster.

Unable to speak for the plug of dough rolling around in his mouth, Pilgrim could only nod. His ears buzzed with adrenalin. Oh, my Lord, he thought, I've not enjoyed food this much since ... the last bowl of Nelly Gordon's pea and ham soup.

The room was warm. The flame was blue and floated above the candlewick. Pilgrim's heartbeat slowed; he felt it throbbing through his ears. Everything was fine. And cosy. Until Harvey said something that ruined it.

'She's dead.'

22

Harvey's mother was buried in a cardboard box.

She had been lying dead with her eyes closed by the time Harvey got home from Grinders. When he'd burst in the door, Dot and Ju were huddled around the bed on their knees, Dot's body in the shape of prayer with a string of rosary beads entwined around her white-knuckled hands. Ju, whose grey tasselled shawl had slipped off to reveal the rounded mound of smooth brown skin on her shoulder, had her head buried in her hands, elbows on the bed near his mother's feet. She had been there since the end, where the cream coloured sheets were rucked up around his mother's waist, her legs bare, apart and bent at the knees. Nobody had bothered to cover her or conceal the lake of blood that soaked the sheets around his mother's lower half. He could barely tear his gaze from the clotted mess or the crimson towels that lay bunched and strewn where they had fallen from Ju's hands as she had, in a panic, pressed one after the other against the flow of blood. Next to Ju's feet, on the bare wooden floor, was what Harvey thought to be a bowl of blood, a solid 'o' shape against the placid green of the enamel. A damp, reddened towel hung over the edge of the bowl in flaccid defeat.

Dot lifted her head and looked at him, her face a wrinkled apple of pain. She reached out one limp hand as he approached. When he ignored her and yanked at the sheets to cover his mother's legs, Dot let her arm drop outstretched onto the bed, and buried her face beside her elbow into the bedding. He shoved her sideways. 'What did you do? Just ... what did you do to my mother?'

He leaned over the bed and grabbed his mother's face between both hands, and with his thumbs he peeled back her eyelids. Her eyes stayed open, and for an instant, he thought he had awoken her.

'See?' He screamed. The smile on his face was uncontrollable. 'She's awake.' He glanced furiously between Ju and Dot, and then back to his mother's face.

'She's awake. See?'

Only Ju and Dot didn't see it. They stared back at him, expressionless. Dot was still balanced on an elbow on the floor where he had pushed her.

He turned back to his mother and when he saw her empty eyes staring blankly at the yellow, fly-spotted light-bulb dangling above her, something inexplicable happened inside him. He slapped her face. He was angry. More than angry. He was screaming inside and out. The world around him was all blood and stupid, stupid ... He jumped up. Stupid! And stomped on Dot's foot.

They do things quickly at the city morgue, and Annabel Jane Doe was buried two days later. He had hardly time to comprehend what had happened as he lay across the limb of a magnolia tree, his arms and legs dangling on either side of a branch, for balance, and watched as two men lowered a rectangular box tied with twine into a hole in the ground. Fryingpan had told him that inside that brown box, his mother was sleeping with her arms across her chest, but Harvey was sure it could not be so. His grief had passed quickly from anger into fear, and by the time she was being buried on that sunny winter afternoon, with the coffin half in sunlight, half in the shadow of the steeple, and with warmth and cold pulsating through the air as the sun played in and out of the clouds, he was sure it could not be so. He could see, from his vantage point in the tree on a small hill, the outlines of Molly, Dot and Ju standing around the grave, shoulders hunched and shaking. Dot was angled sideways on a crutch, her foot bandaged. He smelt the scent of smoking gum leaves as Fryingpan stood below him waving a smouldering branch in figure eights so that the smoke stung his eyes—only the smoke.

They didn't need to speak. Fryingpan and he. A snarling magnolia tree with him in its embrace. No words. Just smoke wafting upwards and twirling around Fryingpan's head like a halo.

23

‘My mother died.’

Yes. Pilgrim nodded. He’d heard him the first time, but Harvey said it again. His voice was flat. ‘Two months ago. She let me sleep here. Anyway.’ Harvey uncorked a bottle of water, poured some into the pannikin and handed it to Pilgrim, handle first. ‘Before we made this ...’ He indicated toward his bedding with his chin. ‘I had to sleep under her bed and keep quiet, do you understand? I had to pretend I was invisible.’

Pilgrim took the cup and turned it around in his hands and looked all around at the silk hanging from the ceiling—a woman’s touch—and wallpaper made of newspapers. Harvey’s pupils were big black holes.

‘Me and Mum. We made it out of a packing box from Wong Pat. He let us have it for nothing.’

Harvey took a drink from the bottle and then pushed his thumb across the bottle top. It made a soft popping noise.

‘I work at Grinders.’ He made the bottle top pop again.

‘Grinders?’

‘Yes.’ Pop.

‘When she died, Harvey? Did anybody at the factory ... make sure you had some place to live?’ Pilgrim spoke through a mouthful of bread and pushed in another chunk of cheese.

‘No.’ Pop.

‘No?’

‘They think I’m sixteen.’ Pop pop pop.

Pilgrim gulped the water, almost choking. ‘You’re not sixteen!’

‘All right, fifteen. Who cares?’

There was a splinter sticking out from the corner of the table. Pilgrim peeled it off and used it as a toothpick, pushing it between the gap in his front teeth. He’d had enough to eat, and somehow, food seemed superfluous, now.

‘Fourteen, then,’ Harvey said, ‘But it’s my birthday in September.’ His face reddened. He slammed the bottle down onto the table.

Pilgrim stared into Harvey’s face.

Harvey snatched the pannikin and pelted it into the corner of the box. It clattered. A chip of enamel flew off. Tommy whimpered—lifted an ear.

‘I won’t go to an orphanage!’

Clenching his fists, Harvey shouted. ‘I’m all right like this.’ Then, more quietly, ‘My mum’s still there.’ He pointed at the roof of the box. Although they couldn’t see it through the cloth and wood, Pilgrim had seen the small window that glowed with a dim red light.

‘There’s a light always on. Nothing’s different from before. Only now ...’

‘Only now she’s dead. Harvey ...’ Pilgrim felt his heart pound. He shifted, his ankles aching from sitting cross-legged on the hard wooden floor and reached out a hand. He touched Harvey’s shoulder.

‘It’s all right, Mate. I won’t turn you in. The orphanages are safe from you.’

Harvey shuffled close, wrapped his arms around Pilgrim’s middle and pushed his head against his chest. Unsure of what to do with his hands, Pilgrim lightly touched the boy’s shoulders, half wanting to push away the smelly bundle that clung to him like a monkey. The boy sobbed. Suddenly, a great wave of emotion overtook them both, and Pilgrim welcomed the boy, embracing him with both arms. With one hand on the back of Harvey’s head, he pulled him closer and tighter as if by squeezing him he could push back together the pieces of a shattered heart.

24

Candlelight has its way of warming the things that are cold and softening the edges of everything. He knew it, and he wasn't fooled. Beside him, their harsh existence softened by the gently waving flame, the stunted boy and the dog grunted the world away in sleep and dreams.

On the walls the newspaper cladding was not random, as he had at first thought. Several satirical comics had been ripped around the edges and plastered, one over the other. One was a comic of an Aboriginal tracker with the caption: 'It is rumoured that Black trackers are to be imported into Great Britain for the purpose of running down "Moonlighters".' Two moonlighters hid in the background saying, 'We may as well surrender, they've turned the zoolilological gardens loose on us!' Beside it, stuck on the wall, was a tiny one-line clipping: 'There has been a murder at Chinkanjavjapmaloolie—the second this month and the villain has not been discovered.'

He read the word slowly, 'Chin-kan-jav-jap-maloolie', and practiced saying it aloud until he was fluent.

The 'Tattersall's' page yelled the headline 'Sporting Notions' and a Melbourne 'bookmaker' had been sent to jail for nine months for 'welshing' a thirteen-year-old urchin out of his winnings of five pounds. But everything else was poetry from *The Bulletin*. He frowned, and leaned forward for a closer look. It was his poem, 'Brown Sugar,' from one of his missing copies of *The Bulletin*, and he hadn't claimed his par. Carefully, Pilgrim peeled the poem down. It had been stuck to the wall with what might have been treacle. By pressing the sticky sides together, he was able to fold it without too much mess, and he slipped it into the inner pocket of his coat.

The cubby, he noted, was almost a complete house, with a pantry of a fashion under the box that served as a table, a handful of books stacked neatly in a corner, and some trinkets: a miniature hand-carved carousel pony with a red painted saddle and a mane that looked like gold; a puppy's tooth in a blue opium bottle; a collection of seashells that stank like rotten fish. Sparkling rocks in a little wooden box.

A jewellery box ... with money in it.

A silver spoon.

He picked up the spoon, fascinated that it was so shiny, intrigued by the thorough way Harvey had polished it and kept it free of tarnish. He turned the spoon in his hand, peered into it, looking for the mark of its maker, but what peered back was his own inverted reflection. It could only have been him in the polished silver, pale, thin and blurred, but he turned around all the same, to see if somebody was standing behind him. Only him there. Upside-down in the spoon. Hatless. Dishevelled. His cheeks unnaturally hollow; a dark fuzz emerging.

Pilgrim rubbed his face and cringed at the sound of the papery rasp against the dry skin of his hand. He turned the spoon over and tried to focus on the image, but his reflection reminded him of a spook fading backward into its surroundings, disappearing, gone. After straining his eyes for some minutes, he gave up and laid the spoon down. It wobbled on the wooden table.

The stack of books.

He eased the red one out, taking care not to damage the spine. When it was free, he tested the weight of it, turned it over, and opened the front cover. Hands trembling, Pilgrim lifted the tissue-thin fly leaf, and raised an eyebrow. Inside were the scrawled words, 'To Arvie, our little love. For your fourteenth birthday. Molly, Dot and Ju.'

He opened the book in the middle, and pushed it against his face to breathe deeply the irresistible, addictive scent of ink and paper.

Let but thy voice engender with the string,

And Angels will be born while thou dost sing.

These were the words from a poem by Robert Herrick that he had recited to Daisy. She had stood in her trim-set petticoat in the shade of the peppercorn tree, fiddling with the clapper of the cowbell. Dust clouds swirled around the toes of her pointed shoes, while the peppery scent of the tree intoxicated the both of them that afternoon,

in the fierce heat. One pink peppercorn had fallen in her hair, and when he reached out to brush it away, she'd stepped back and given him that side-on look that only Daisy could affect, somewhere between obduracy and tenderness. That was the day he discovered how to kiss a girl at exactly the right moment: after her initial surprise but before she became repulsed by him. As she had rolled her eyes, looking upwards into the branches of the tree, he had grabbed her around the waist and planted his mouth firmly over hers. She had struggled. Yes. But only for a moment before he had felt her hand in his shirt, twisting the fabric and pulling him toward her. The clapper fell from the bell and into the dust as a smothered giggle from a child sounded out from amongst the branches above their heads. Daisy's hand then, like a ramrod, had shoved him back and sent him sprawling into the dust. A cockchafer beetle pushed against his palm as he watched Daisy spin about, the ends of her skirt flicking dirt into his face. 'Marry me,' he shouted after her. But she stomped away. He made her stop and look back when he yelled again. 'I'm the son of an Admiral. In actual fact.' Their eyes met ... but that was ten years ago.

§

He was exhausted. But he couldn't fall asleep. His mind rattled over a poem he wanted to write, the lines repeating inside his head, back and forth with the cadence of a hacksaw, the irritating persistence of a nursery rhyme: Mair-ree Mair-ree, quite contrair-ree. And it wouldn't shut up. He picked up his notebook and ran his thumb along its edges. The pages rippled past. He caught glimpses of his own scrawled notes. There: an unfinished letter to Annie. And there, and there, and there: so many practiced excuses to Nelly Gordon. 'Sorry Nel, I don't have the rent this week.' 'Dear Mrs G, I'm afraid my circumstances are dire, not as expected ...' She'd always been gracious, of course, but not so gracious that he hadn't felt, more than once, an edge of bitterness in her tone of voice. 'Another week, and another, aaannd another ...' she'd say as she click-clacked those knitting needles at full tilt, like an automated knitting machine. Ah, well. He closed the book. It's over and done with, now.

He slapped the book down on the box-that-would-be-a-table, borrowed Harvey's pencil and tore out a page from one of Harvey's notebooks. Pilgrim hunkered down, and shifted into a writing position near the miniature table.

As he had done, time after time, he wrote the words: 'For *The Bulletin*.' They were the kind of words that sat on the page like an invitation to a lynching. Or a wedding.

He gripped the pencil so tightly that the callus on his knuckle hurt.

What did Archibald or Stephens know about poetry?

Harvey moaned in his sleep and rolled over. Pilgrim looked up.

'And you, little man,' he said, tapping the end of the pencil onto the page. 'You want a father, eh?' He watched Harvey's chest as it rose and fell. 'Don't we all?'

Pilgrim rubbed his eyes. He wished he could avoid what he saw, as though covering his eyes to it would make it all vanish and he'd be in a house, with a fireplace and a Red Setter curled around a cat on a rug. With his eyes closed, he went off for a while into the darkness inside his own head, the place where that poem bounced around: Mair-ree, Mair-ree. And there he was at the workhouse. Children dancing in a circle around his sister. 'Mary, Mary, quite contrary ...' He had hated the way those workhouse boys chased Annie about the courtyard, ringing horrible little bells and threatening to hang her.

When Pilgrim opened his eyes, Harvey was still there, in a sleeping ball.

Tommy twitched.

'Harvey?' he whispered, keeping his eye on the jewellery box, his hands itching for the money it contained. Ah, but a resourceful boy like Harvey wouldn't miss a few pounds, surely.

Pilgrim suddenly knew what he had to do. In the morning he would go. He'd head north for the shearing season and he could forget all about the little tumbleweed boy who had come to rest in a laneway, in a cubbyhouse blown into the end of a street, with a dog for a guardian.

Harvey's pale hand rested under his chin. A silvery line of dried snot tracked across his face from nose to ear. With his knees drawn up, almost to his face, he looked peaceful enough. Indeed, he looked like any child who might have been curled up in blue pyjamas, and for a brief flash of a moment, Pilgrim was the child who had been found curled on the floor under the glittering Christmas tree at Uncle's place. He remembered telling Uncle that he was afraid that if he took his eyes off it, the Christmas tree would go away, so he'd sat by it all night and fell asleep on the floor. But then, he remembered Christmas morning, when through his body he had felt the chilling slash of fear. He had thought it was Mary Robertson's blood under his fingernails, but Uncle had reassured him. It was only traces of paint that he scratched off while playing with the mistletoe berries.

The dog sneezed in its sleep.

Pilgrim lifted the pencil and saw that he had etched a deep black hole into the corner of the page, but had written nothing. He shook his head, and sighed. And so, as the candle sizzled softly, Pilgrim wrote another poem.

For *The Bulletin*

Oh Mary!

I saw her first, but momentary
Curved and soft, voluptuary
Linen pressed and scented sweet
With roses scattered at her feet—
That cherished glimpse I had of Mary.

How she, of highest titular
Stooped to greet the prolet-ary
Saw our hearts were quickly bonded
Gently bowed and fast absconded.

I thank the Lord who sent me Mary.

Of moonlight nights all bright and airy

Vivid stars and planetary

Scenes that make my heart go faster

Nothing heavenly, nor vaster

But none so passionary—

As that sweet and lovely glimpse I had of Mary.

25

As he watched Harvey's chest rise and fall in the softly wavering candle light, Pilgrim was not aware that some day he would kill a boy who was born in the same year as Harvey. Pilgrim reached over, surprised at the depth of peace in Harvey's features. He touched Harvey's hand, gently. Harvey did not respond. Sleep had taken him to a nicer place. Pilgrim extinguished the candle, and curled up for sleep.

The other boy, at that same moment, was having lunch with his family. His mother had just told him, in Afrikaans, that he should check the water trough in the house yard, and re-fill it from the well. She was worried that the birds had bathed in the cow's drinking water and fouled it with dirt and feathers. The boy slumped and heaved a sigh, pushing pickled cabbage around on his plate with his fork. In mock anger, the boy's father raised his index finger and wagged it in the boy's face. 'Laugh at the finger,' he said. The boy collapsed in uncontrolled giggles. *Laugh at the finger?*

The mother smiled and took up the dirty plates while the boy and his father reached for their hats, pushed them onto their heads and moved out into the yard. The sun was harsh.

It is the same harsh sun that will burn Pilgrim's skin when he finds himself bivouacked on the Spelonken with the carbine in his hand. Out on the veldt, he will be hungry, and tired of the Boer War. His blood will rise and his fists will clench as he stands over the dead bodies of his friends. After he has seen the mutilated and naked soldiers, a stranger will take control of Pilgrim's thoughts. And he will cry as gunshots rise from the veldt.

26

He picks a yellow daisy, plucks its petals one by one. She loves me ... she loves me not ... The petals float away.

Now green, the light at his chest. He knows but he doesn't know how he knows that one day there will be shattered bone and blood spilling from his wounded heart and from his hand that he will hold as a shield (or a gesture of remorse). Through the window, where he stands overlooking the street, he sees the top of a shattered packing box that has begun to merge with the corners of the buildings and fades into eucalypt green, like a hill and a valley and another rounded hill. It confuses him: the shape-shifting street, the shapes of kopjes, a word he doesn't know how he knows, but he knows it is a hill of ruined stones and that someday he will stand on the summit of a precipice of rocks and he will see more than he wants to see or know.

Tommy barks like a gunshot.

And again.

But he inspects his hand. *My* hand? It is heavy and hot, and smoke is rising which mingles with the ghostly hand that entwines his wrist, but in his hand is a smoking carbine. He wants to leap backward, drop the thing that burns his skin but in a dream he is unable to control what is in control of him, and the thing goes on smoking, gunpowder burning tiny holes in his hand. He smells burning flesh, and if he didn't know before the smell of human blood he knows it now, and he will remember, for one day his own blood will smell this foul but he will know it only for an instant.

27

The dog woke him. At least he'd dreamed it was Tommy. But it was a Currawong pecking at his toes with the nasty spike of its beak. Fluffing out its black feathers and its white tufts, its terrible black eyes blinked. Shut-shut. A trained voice scratched out of its beak. 'Wake up. Wake up. Go to work. Arvie. Go to work.' Pilgrim stretched. A beam of sunlight knifed at an angle from the crack at the opening of the box to the corner where Harvey should have been. The light had come in early. He kicked at the bird, but it must have learned to avoid the angry jerking limbs of a human wrenched out of slumber, and it flapped backwards and settled, hop-hop at the opening of the box. Hop. 'Go to work. Go to work.' Hop.

For once, the clock had failed. He didn't hear its angry trill as he had day after day since he'd come back to Sydney. Sitting up abruptly, reaching for his boots, he glanced fitfully around, like a boy afraid of the dark. When he couldn't locate the clock, in the corner, no, on the table, no, under his arm, no, he held his breath and strained his ears for the cheeky tic-tic-tic. Once he thought he heard it, but it was only the sharp claws of the currawong hopping on the cobblestones outside, tic-tic-tic. There was a note from Harvey. The clock was gone.

§

The words impressed the page. They left such an imprint into the paper that the poem written on the other side was almost obscured. The note was signed at the bottom, *A Harvey*. That was clear enough, but its beginning was a different matter.

Dear—, the note began. Dear 'dash'.

This irritated Pilgrim. Perhaps Harvey had thought that 'Dear Sir' wouldn't have done, and Harvey would have been right. It didn't sit with a starving poet having been dragged out of a gutter.

'Dear Mister', 'Dear Mate': were those salutations not worthy? Why not address the letter 'Dear Pilgrim'? *The Bulletin* always addressed him as 'Pilgrim', never anything more. But, of course, Pilgrim knew the reasons: that it wasn't only Harvey who didn't know his name. No-one knew.

So, Pilgrim thought, I am nothing but a pen-name, and without a poem, I am no-one. After all these years of trying to be one of those bohemians, trying to understand their drunken humour, suffering the heat and the blasted flies with a good heart, and in the end, all I am is a blank space: a dash. He had no identity, even to a boy who last night was so eager to belong to somebody that a failed poet was enough. Anything would be enough to a boy without a mother, without a father. It would have been, for him. For Pilgrim, it would have been enough. It would have been enough to have a man who was willing to call him his son. Pilgrim then remembered his own words as a child, glassy-eyed, staring up into the face of an uncle who had done everything but adopt him.

So I can then?

Can what?

The note was now shaking in Pilgrim's hand.

I can call you father?

And yet, Harvey had hesitated to call Pilgrim anything at all. '—'. Would he want to call him father, even though they were complete strangers? Pilgrim might be a murderer hiding out in the streets, or Jack the Ripper, but all Harvey knew was that Pilgrim was a poet without a poem. Both of them, fatherless, without a family line to cling to—alone. Heck, why didn't he just adopt Harvey right there and then? But the answer was all too simple and came to him in his uncle's words that had never faded from his memory.

No. Hell no!

And so, now, there was a dash: Dear dash. A thin line that meant everything ... and nothing.

Dear —

You know this poem will never be accepted by *The Bulletin*.

For a start, it doesn't scan.

For example, we don't say, mo-men-tary, or planet-ary, do we? We say mo-men-tree, and plan-et-tree. Passion-ree. And because of that, it doesn't even rhyme.

You have to figure out where the emphasis falls. Sometimes, depending on what words come before another word, the emphasis is going to change. But you can't change the natural beat of a word, just to make it fit into your beat. 'Heavenly' has the natural emphasis on the first syllable of 'heaven', but you want it to be on the 'ly'. I've never heard anyone say heavenleeeeeeeee.

Also, you've got to watch your metrical feet. You don't simply count on the syllable. Some syllables count for two beats, while sometimes two syllables will count for one. Like, 'proletary'. That has four syllables, whereas when we speak it, it has three, and so your beat is all askew. Have you been reading too much Shakespeare?

Anyway, the topic is trivial. Nobody wants to know about your love-life.

If you're going to borrow my pencil and steal my paper, write something better.

Yours sincerely,

A Harvey.

§

Outside in the street, morning yawned and stretched as he shoved the note into his pocket. Noises stirred all around. Pilgrim heard a soft whinny from around the corner, out of his sight. He heard the distinctive clatter of ice chips falling into a tray. Other sounds told him that two horses were tethered to the ice cart. One of the horses pawed with a heavy foot, at the road metal, scattering stones over the woodblock

paving. It clanked its iron bit and its movement rattled the tools in the cart. Clydesdale? And ... a smaller shoeless beast.

Pilgrim listened as the big horse shifted, bumping its hindquarters with a dull thud against the cart moorings. There was the chink of chisel as the ice man chipped at large blocks of ice. The birds had come to life. Sparrows chit-chitted, sporadically for a moment, and then, as though encouraged by the early risers, a whole flock of sparrows erupted into chaos. Gulls scowled and argued, probably fighting over the scattered ice chips. Beneath their din, Pilgrim heard hooves shifting slowly, and a lazy bump of tail against wood. Clydesdale! Definitely.

Pilgrim held his breath so that he could hear the tap-tap of the lighter footfall. The smaller horse was tentative on one of its hind legs. There was a rat-a-tat of hoofbeats as it shied, and yes, a tentative back leg. A high-pitched whinny gave it away. It was a colt. Ungelded. Perhaps a little lame. Pilgrim cursed that he'd lost the clock. With a horse, he could find work up country. It would have made a fair swap for the pony.

§

The pressure in his bladder had increased to the point that he had no choice, but to go. He reached for Harvey's jewellery box, opened it and checked that the roll of notes was still there. Without another thought, he stuffed the box into his portmanteaux.

Pilgrim tossed the bag out into the street and then struggled through the opening of the shelter. In daylight, he found himself standing over the drain that ran alongside the street. Stiff from sleep, he went tripping over to the wall of one of the buildings. He dropped the bag and walked a few steps before leaning against the wall. With his hand and his forehead pressed against the brickwork, he emptied his bladder into a drain. He watched the dark trickle of urine meander down the wall and steam into the gutter. Tiny droplets splashed onto his boots, and that's when he realised how tired he had become. Hungry. Desperate. Sick of town.

The nightmares had begun to disturb his daytime thoughts and melded with his memories ... like the memory of his sixteenth year. Uncle had allowed him to visit the workhouse where Catherine had been lying sick with pneumonia. He remembered her reaching out with her paper-thin hands to point to the mantle, at the clock, to tell him it was three o'clock and that he should hurry. She'd been delirious of course: there was no hurry. The clock had struck one. Annie's voice was thick and phlegmy and full of fear. She'd cried out, 'Ma, don't die.' It wouldn't have made any difference what Annie said. It was Ma's determination that saw her through and she eventually recovered to be stronger than ever.

The ginger cat had been there, ancient by that time. It was too arthritic to move from under his mother's hand, and the tiny furry chest finally lost the strength to rise and fall. The cat died that day, and Annie, confused and exhausted from her long vigil by her mother's side, seized the dead cat and held its floppy body against her face. She moaned, wiping snot and tears all over the filthy animal.

Pilgrim had tried to console her. 'It's dead, Annie. Give it to me.'

He'd wrestled the cat from Annie's grip, heard her mumble into the cat's still-warm coat, 'You're not even my brother, anyhow. So, get lost.'

Sydney was nothing like home. He had no place to be, and he had nowhere to go, and no way of getting back to England. He adjusted himself back into his pants. Perhaps I *am* lost, Annie, he thought.

28

Pilgrim was busy counting Harvey's money when he heard a shout.

'Dad!'

Harvey appeared from around the corner. Running.

Pilgrim stuffed the money back into the jewellery box, snapped the box shut, and hid it behind his back.

Harvey stopped. For a second, Pilgrim wondered why Harvey was glancing behind, but then, a policeman appeared from around the corner, gasping for breath at the end of the laneway. Harvey stepped forward, and within a moment, had his arms wrapped around Pilgrim's waist.

'Dad!'

'What ... ?'

Harvey pressed his head against Pilgrim's chest. Pilgrim shoved him back.

The policeman leaned over to catch his breath, and then stood up. He slapped his leather strap into his palm. More friendly than a London cop, Pilgrim thought, and tried not to laugh. All he needed, now, was to be caught red-handed welshing a thirteen-year-old. Or twelve. Or fourteen ...

'Eh-hmmm.'

Harvey looked at him, mouthing something that Pilgrim didn't understand. Pilgrim shook his head and tried to step out of Harvey's grip. Harvey clung.

The policeman took a step toward them. 'Mr Harvey, I take it, sir?'

Pilgrim narrowed his eyes into slits and looked down at Harvey. Harvey looked up, shrugged a shoulder, and then tightened his grip. His head was pressed against Pilgrim's chest.

'The lad's been holding out on us. Didn't know he had a father ...' The policeman looked Pilgrim up and down, and then added, 'of a sort.'

'Oh. Ummm.' Pilgrim's voice caught in his throat. 'Heh, hem.'

The policeman glared at Harvey's back. 'You know the divil created the half-caste? I've seen you round and about with that ... other boy.' Harvey hung on, still panting from the run. He glared at the policeman. 'What *half*-caste?'

The policeman shifted and spoke to Pilgrim. 'You realize the lad's been playing truant?'

'Ah. Yair?'

When Harvey stepped back, Pilgrim's chest went cold where Harvey had been pressed against him. He wondered if the boy really did have a fever when Harvey bent double and made his face go red. The boy coughed, hawked and spat a great glob of phlegm that landed near the policeman's foot. Pilgrim had to turn his head away to stop himself from laughing.

'The plague?' The policeman stepped back.

'No. Croup,' said Pilgrim. 'I'm taking him out country for some fresh air.'

'Oh.' The policeman seemed appeased, although his hand flickered near his mouth. 'Get him to a physician. There's some good tinctures about these days.'

'We'll go jackarooing after he's well,' Pilgrim said. He lifted the box to show Harvey. Harvey opened his mouth to speak, but stopped, and glared. Pilgrim winked.

'Take good care of the boy, then.'

'Of course,' Pilgrim said. 'Anything for my boy.' He reached out and put a hand on Harvey's shoulder. Harvey grimaced.

The policeman turned around and left, swinging his leather strap in a circle. Like any good policeman would do, Pilgrim thought. And watched him go.

About half a minute later, Harvey snatched at the box. Pilgrim spun around and held on to it. 'Why don't you come outback with me?' he said. 'One hundred and forty-four pounds would go a long way between two people.' The way he saw it, Harvey could either keep his money and face the authorities, or come along and share. He lowered his voice. 'Are you familiar with a town called Chinkanjavjapmaloolie?'

Harvey put his hands on his hips. 'You ain't going to murder me, are yer?'

He shook his head. 'So? Are you coming or not?' Harvey stared back, refusing to speak or move, so Pilgrim continued. 'We'll be needing a horse.' He took out all of the cash, rolled it up, slid it into his pants pocket and handed Harvey the empty box.

Harvey snatched it from him and turned to walk away. 'Thief.'

Pilgrim turned to follow him. He stubbed his toe on a protruding rock. Before he could stop himself, he had snapped at Harvey: 'Orphan!'

When Tommy came back, Pilgrim realised he hadn't noticed he'd been missing in the first place. The dog went panting and slobbering up to Harvey, holding a rolled newspaper in his jaw. He dropped the newspaper at Harvey's feet. The dog stepped back and looked up.

'Good boy, but not *now*.' Harvey tried to push the dog away with his foot, but Tommy persisted.

Pilgrim snatched up the newspaper. The corners of the address label had been eaten away by snails and glued with dog saliva, but the words were still visible. Pilgrim. Unit 6, Raper Street. Final delivery.

29

The colt was tethered loosely at the side of the ice cart that was stopped out the front of the Cricketer's Arms. Four thick wheels swayed under the weight of a new load of ice, and when the big clumsy Clydesdale saw Pilgrim approaching, it swished its tail sending a shiver along the entire length of the cart. The colt jumped sideways.

Pilgrim approached the colt with one hand outstretched, and the other behind to indicate that Harvey should wait. Harvey scowled and crossed the street.

'Sh'. As Pilgrim took a step forward, the colt shook its mane.

The man was preoccupied at the back of the cart. With one hand on the colt's neck, Pilgrim waited for the ice man to look up. His movements were as thick as the Clydesdale's, and Pilgrim watched as he sprinkled a handful of salt over a wound in the ice. When he was done sprinkling, the man clapped the salt off his hands, and, ignoring Pilgrim, sauntered around to the other side of the cart where he fumbled with a sheet of hessian. With one hairy arm, he pulled the hessian up, over the cart and back around toward Pilgrim, where he wrapped the end around the bottom of the ice block and, still ignoring Pilgrim, tucked it under. He huffed, heavily, sending out a cloud of steam. His shirt was torn at the shoulder, revealing muscles that were bigger than a shearer's, and the skin that showed through was shiny and red-brown with sunburn and sweat. He was lost in his thoughts. His lips were moving, making small whispering sounds. Pilgrim felt like an intruder.

When he spoke, his voice sounded thin and he felt ridiculous. 'That's a nice colt you have here.'

Without looking up, the ice man tossed his tongs and ice saw into the tray under the back of the cart. 'I'll be out of business soon. The ice trade's melting away.' He chuckled to himself and disappeared around the other side of the cart. He reappeared next to the Clydesdale and, for the first time, looked at Pilgrim. His line of sight moved down and up. 'Hello, Pilgrim. Still trying to recite poetry?'

Pilgrim shuddered.

The man ran his hand along the Clydesdale's back as he walked toward Pilgrim and stopped. 'The pony's lame,' he said. 'He was supposed to have been a race horse. I got him off Joey Cripps. I thought he might come good.'

Pilgrim stood back and mentally measured the colt. He nodded. 'You plan on having him gelded?' he said as he thought: Never! He stepped forward again and ran a hand over the colt's hindquarters. The man watched Pilgrim as he picked up the colt's back leg. 'How long's he been lame?'

'Day or two.'

'He's never going to be a racehorse, but you know he'd be all right as a starter for my boy there.'

'*Your* boy?'

Pilgrim nodded to the other side of the street where Harvey was leaning against the Commercial Bank window, still sulking, snapping the jewellery box open and shut. From across the street, Pilgrim heard the snap. There was nobody else about, except the policeman pacing along, keeping a surreptitious eye on the boy and glancing twice at the bank window. Pilgrim returned his attention to the colt and ran his hand over the colt's rump again. 'Ahhhh.' He tried to sound disappointed. Pilgrim told himself to calm down. Cool as ice.

'What do you think? Can he come good?'

Pilgrim shook his head, slowly. He picked up the colt's foot again, and examined the hoof. He put it down. 'Never make a racehorse.'

The ice man put one hand on his hip and rubbed the top of his bald head with the other hand. He made a clicking noise with his tongue and shook his head. 'You want to take him off my hands, then? Twenty quid.'

'Not for twenty quid! Ten!'

Pilgrim let the man have a minute or two to think it over and rub his head, and click his tongue and sigh a couple of times. After a while he said, 'He's cost me ten in hay. I could get six at the knackers.'

'Throw in the bridle and I'll give yer fifteen.'

When the deal was done, Pilgrim let Harvey lead the limping horse until they were out of the ice man's sight. 'Give me your knife, Harvey.'

A tiny stone had been wedged in the pony's foot causing him to limp. It had been almost invisible beside the frog. He flicked it out and kissed the bottom of the colt's hoof.

'That's it?'

'Perhaps.' Pilgrim nuzzled the colt's neck. 'He's a brave boy.'

He named him Cavalier.

§

If he could see into the future, Pilgrim would know that Cavalier will outlive him, but, unlike Pilgrim, Cavalier will never know the exact moment of his approaching death. He won't understand the meaning of gunshot, and will die mercifully in a green paddock with Harvey's loving hand on his shoulder, Harvey choking back tears as he aims a bullet into the stallion's old heart. Harvey's wife will be there too. She will be standing in the background, holding her bulging belly with Harvey's unborn son sleeping inside of her. The child's gift at birth will be the beautiful chestnut filly with a golden mane that was sired by the son of Cavalier. The filly and the baby will one day become poetry on the Hawkesbury hillside.

For now, Harvey and Pilgrim stood, one on either side of Cavalier, feeling the warmth of his withers and each sensing the gratitude that Cavalier must have felt for relieving the pain in his foot and for setting him free from the tethers of the ice cart. Pilgrim moved around in front and placed his hand over the star between Cavalier's eyes. Cavalier's eyes closed and he nudged forward so that Pilgrim could place his forehead between the horse's ears. He felt a deep love for Cavalier, and knew that from that moment onward, they would trust each other completely. When he was satisfied that he and horse had connected, he stepped back and turned to Harvey.

'Well? Are you coming with me, or not?'

Harvey nodded. Pilgrim wondered whether the boy was crying, but decided it was only dew he saw resting on Harvey's cheek. He winked.

‘Train leaves at three o’clock. Meet me at Wong Pat’s.’

30

Pilgrim felt waves of relief when he walked in to the Pitt Street Office with the copy of 'Brown Sugar'. *The Bulletin's* policy of only paying on production of a solid copy seemed irreverent to Pilgrim, but it was policy, and here, in his hand, he held seven shillings worth of poetry. He was vaguely aware of the dog, trotting along behind him, and he ignored the commotion it caused amongst the women in the office. As he walked along the corridor of wood panels and windows that separated the offices on either side, Pilgrim looked in to each office, searching for Tom, the cashier. He saw Archibald sitting at his desk and waved to him through the window in the corridor. He held up a finger to indicate he'd be back in one minute. Archibald waved back.

When he reached Tom's office, he ducked through the door and greeted Tom with a nod. 'Couldn't make it Saturday,' he said. 'Sorry.'

Tom raised his eyebrows when Pilgrim held out the copy of his poem. He spun around in his chair and turned to his shelf of files, and, scratching his head he found the ledger book, opened it on his desk and started turning pages. Pilgrim shifted, impatiently as Tom shuffled through the book, turning the pages back and forwards.

'July,' Pilgrim said. 'A bit late, I know. Sorry.'

Tom stopped somewhere near the back of the book and then looked up at Pilgrim, shaking his head.

'Screw's been claimed,' he said.

For a moment, Pilgrim felt confused. He was damned positive he hadn't claimed his par for that one. How could he have? He never received his copy ... Suddenly he let out a loud sigh. 'Let me guess. A boy about ... so high?' He held his hand in the air at about the level of the top of Harvey's head. 'Fair hair? Scruffy. Name of Harvey?'

Tom's face reddened. 'Let me check the ledger again ...' He ran his finger down one of the columns and then looked up at Pilgrim apologetically, tapping his finger on the page. 'I must apol ...' Pilgrim widened his eyes. 'How could you give away my par?'

Tom shook his head again and shrugged. 'Sorry, P. He was convincing. He had your dog with him ...' Tom leaned over and directed his gaze to a place behind Pilgrim. The dog had set itself down on the wooden floor behind him, its tongue, as usual, lolling and dripping saliva. At that moment, Pilgrim felt such hatred for the animal that he could have kicked it from where it sat clean out into the street. Instead, he spun about and, as he left Tom's office, deliberately stepped on its tail. Tommy yelped, snapped at Pilgrim's ankles and then got up and followed Pilgrim back through the corridor.

Archibald saw him coming and waved him in. As Pilgrim came through the door, he stood up to greet him from behind his worn-out timber desk, holding out a hand and leaning forward. They shook hands. As Archibald heaved his typewriter to the side Pilgrim lowered himself into the guest's chair in front of the desk.

'Can you give me an advance on this?'

He reached into his top pocket and took out the poem he'd written at Harvey's and flattened the paper onto the table in front of Archibald, watching the older man's eyes as he did. Archibald slid the poem toward himself, but when he went to pick it up, Pilgrim placed his hand on it. 'Just this side.' Harvey's notes showed through from the other side. Archibald looked at him over the top of his glasses and then lowered his eyes to read the poem, very slowly.

Pilgrim waited, almost too afraid to breathe. When the editor-in-chief finally looked up, Pilgrim said, nervously, 'I'm leaving Sydney today. Out to get some fresh air. Some shearing work. The poem's rushed, but I need the money. Edit it however you like.'

Archibald threw back his head and laughed. 'Sh ... hearing?'

Pilgrim gave him a half-hearted sneer. 'I'll ignore that. The poem?'

Archibald shook his head, slowly, holding his mirth back to a chuckle. 'Doesn't scan,' he laughed. 'Trivial. And who cares about your love life?'

Pilgrim stepped out onto the street. The poem was crumpled in his fist. He was furious. I'm going to strangle that boy, he thought, and murder that dog. But, then, as he unhitched Cavalier, his hand brushed against the bulge in his pocket. With a wry smile, he hopped up. Cavalier bucked and twisted in the air but soon realized he wasn't going to throw his rider. He settled, and with Cavalier snorting and stomping underneath him, Pilgrim rode bareback along the street. His plan was to get rid of some of Harvey's money. He stopped in at the bookshop and bought a pack of new notebooks and stocked up on pencils. He was thinking about his missing clock when he strolled in to the General Post Office, where he left instructions for forwarding his mail, bought envelopes and postage stamps, and sent a twenty word telegraph cable to his mother. By the end of all that he'd spent more than ten pounds, but he was still angry.

He took a stroll up to Clarence Street where he dropped in for a chat with Frank Grimley, Sydney's best saddler, and had Cavalier shod and fitted into a brand new saddle for twenty pounds, but he was still angry ... and hungry.

The roast beef and mashed potatoes he enjoyed at the Hotel hit the spot, but he was still unhappy so he went looking for a red and white barber's pole. Just for a laugh he confused the barber by tipping him tuppence after a haircut and a shave.

After that, he went back to Wong Pat's and, while he waited for Harvey, had himself measured for a new suit that he'd collect on his next trip back to Sydney. He tried on a hat and then paid five pounds to a grateful Wong Pat.

Then, he felt better.

31

While Pilgrim was attending to his business around the city, Harvey packed all of his belongings into his carpet bag, and he rolled up his blanket into a swag. When he was done, he backed along the alleyway and took one last look at the cubby house. It felt strange to be leaving. It felt like betrayal. He held the vision of the cubby in his mind for as long as he could bear to see the remnants of his mother's work. As his vision glazed over, he tried to remember the sound of her voice, but at that moment he felt so consumed with fear that he couldn't bring her back to his mind. Her face was fading from him, and, as he moved further back, the cubby seemed to shrink and dry up before his eyes. He realized, then, that it really was time to leave, and although it hurt to go, he knew if he didn't move now he would shrink and warp along with the timber of the old box.

His one consolation was that he knew that no matter how long he was gone, he could always return to Sydney and find his friend, Fryingpan, and know that their friendship would be unchanged. He knew exactly where he would find him. Fryingpan would be catching rats along the Quay, right on the water's edge on the Rocks side. That's where he was now, shirtless, hanging by one arm under the boardwalk, poking a long stick into the gaps between the rocks underneath. Harvey called out. Fryingpan swung up and around and sprung onto the platform, his pants dripping wet.

Harvey laughed. 'Are they long shorts, or short longs?'

Fryingpan looked down at his legs and his rolled-up pants. 'You think I should be in my Sunday best? Go to church like this? Might meet my daddy, hey?' He'd had his rat-sack suspended on a rope under the boardwalk, and he pulled it up like a fishing line.

'Got thirty,' he said, as he moved to open the bag to show off for Harvey.

Harvey peered into the bag and bumped heads with Fryingpan. The rats oozed together like a mass of black tar and blood.

'Thirty?' Harvey said, 'I'd reckon fifty.'

‘Nope. There’s thirty. I counted ’em.’

Harvey rolled his eyes. ‘Fry, what bugger is going to look in that bag and argue with you? If you say there’s fifty and Wong Pat don’t agree, you tell him to count the rats himself.’

‘What? Cheat Wong Pat? No. I won’t do it.’

‘Fry! Old Wrong Hat can get tuppence a rat from the council and he only pays you hay’penny.’

Harvey sat down on the edge of the boardwalk and dangled his legs over the side. Fryingpan was behind him, twisting up the top of the bag so the rats, that were already dead, wouldn’t get out. He set it down and came up next to Harvey and hung his legs over the edge.

‘I know it, Arvie,’ Fryingpan said. ‘But my mother says I have to stay away from them council men. I’d give ’em “what for” if I didn’t know they’d send me off and lock me up. And it in’t no orphanage where they’d send me. You know it, Arvie.’

Harvey looked down at his hands, white knuckled as they gripped the edge of the jetty and compared his stubby fingers with Fryingpan’s thin ones. Those not-quite-white fingers had abilities. He remembered how, a couple of years back, Fryingpan had found a piece of driftwood on the beach, and stowed it, waiting until he could figure out what he wanted to do with it. To Harvey the bare log looked like nothing, just a knotted-up piece of creamy coloured wood. But Fryingpan kept that wood, staring at it, turning it over in his hands and then putting it back in its hiding place until something triggered his imagination. And then it happened.

Fryingpan and Harvey had lined up for a ride on the carousel that had come to town with the travelling circus. It was all excitement in town; both of them were looking forward to the experience and lined up together. After they had waited for as long as half an hour to buy their tickets, the ticket-master called Fryingpan a devil and refused to let him on the ride. It shook Fryingpan’s confidence. He had come to Harvey then, and asked if he could borrow the knife. Harvey had been afraid that Fryingpan might do something awful, and so, after he gave him the knife, he

followed him down to the quay. From a distance behind him, he saw Fryingpan sit down with those long legs crossed, and he stayed there, staring toward the carousel.

After a while, Harvey had got tired of watching and so he'd gone to Fryingpan and sat down next to him. Fryingpan was hacking at the driftwood.

Now, sitting at the edge of the harbour, Harvey felt like driftwood. He was leaving town, and he didn't know where he was going, or how long it would be before he would return. He glanced at Fryingpan and then back across the water.

Harvey stared out across the bay to the other side where the hills and bush appeared to tumble into the water, a grey-green landslide. He watched sparkles over the water's surface and listened as the water lapped at the pylons under them. He looked over toward the great clawing branches of the old gum tree that was shedding its bark beside the tallow candle factory. He imagined it as a giant bony hand coming up out of a ground, dripping flesh. The sounds of tram bells and shouts and seagulls faded back. In the long distance, the bell tower rang out two distorted chimes. Merry-go-round music wafted in and out and in between.

'Fry?' The stillness between them snapped like a twig. 'I have to go.'

Harvey jumped up. It was two o'clock. He moved quickly across the road, stepped over the tramlines and, when he was on the other side, he looked back at Fryingpan who was standing with the rat-bag dangling from his hand. It was then, he realized, he hadn't shook his hand or even told him that he was leaving town.

'Tell him fifty ... Fry - ing - pan,' he yelled. Fryingpan didn't answer.

§

Harvey didn't see the devil in anyone, especially Fry.

This much, he knew about his friend: Fryingpan was his name, and he was proud of it. Fryingpan loved to retell the story his mother told him, and Harvey knew the story so well that he could recall it, word for word, in Fryingpan's voice.

His mother had been only sixteen when she was living on a cattle station when she knew she was getting big with a baby in her belly. Before Fryingpan could

be born, she decided to run away from home. She met a man who became her best friend. A Chinese cook who everybody called Frying Pan. He took care of her.

The cook gave Fryingpan's mother blankets and sneaked her food from the station larder while the baby was growing. She was afraid the protection board might take the baby away by mistake, so Frying Pan, the Chinese man, hid her. When it was time, the Chinese man helped Fryingpan's mother with the women's business of getting the baby out. Fryingpan believed that he only survived because of the way that fellow had looked after his mother. When it came time to give the baby a name, Fryingpan's mother had looked at the cook like there was no doubt about it in her head at all and said, 'Frying Pan, I'm going to name this baby for you.'

The only thing that bothered Harvey about Fryingpan's story was that it wasn't the cook's real name.

§

As to his father, Fryingpan had always believed his dad was a priest. Fryingpan liked priests even though Harvey did not. One day, before Harvey's mother had died, Fryingpan had decided he would prove to Harvey that his father was a priest, so he took him to spy. It was a Sunday, just after church. Fryingpan's mother, who worked as a servant during the day, was scrubbing a big pile of fabric against a washboard in the yard behind Durham Hall. There was a knothole in the fence.

'She knows I'm here,' Fryingpan had said.

Harvey shoved Fryingpan aside. 'Let me see.'

Through the knothole, Harvey saw Fryingpan's mother scrubbing at the wash trough, moving like a machine with her arms pumping like coupling rods. White foam fluffed up to her elbows and her face shone with sweat. Her apron was soaked through with water, drops of sweat and probably some blood. Every once in a while, she'd stop to lift the fabric, which looked like a bed sheet, and inspect it through the sunlight. She was never satisfied. She slapped the sheet against the washboard and scrubbed some more.

Harvey found a rock and rolled it to the edge of the fence. He climbed up and stood on tiptoes, peeking over the top while Fryingpan had his eye glued to the knothole. Harvey watched as a woman came out of the hall and walked up to Fryingpan's mother, who dried her hands, shook her head and backed off when the woman thrust a piece of paper at her.

Harvey remembered the sound of Fryingpan's voice; how strange it sounded from the behind fence. 'She can't read,' he'd said.

And then, the priest had appeared.

From the other side of the fence, Harvey smelled him. He was too familiar. It made him sick. That same dog-collar had come to his own mother the night before. Harvey's mother had told him to be 'extra good' lest God see him hiding there, under the bed. But the big man made the bed sag so far it almost squashed Harvey's nose in, as he'd lain, face up on the hard floor. Afterwards the priest handed over a package of money to his mother, and then went away. Harvey couldn't remember if he'd said anything.

Now, the same priest was talking to Fryingpan's mother. He tried to tell Fryingpan, but Fryingpan was getting ready to jump over the fence. Harvey pulled him back.

'Get it out of your head,' Harvey said.

Fryingpan struggled. 'I want to talk to him. He gives her money. Every month. I've seen him. First Sunday of the month, after church.'

'He's not your father!'

But Fryingpan never did get it out of his head, for he believed it with all his heart. As for Harvey, he had never forgotten the smell of bedsprings.

§

An alarm clock would be full of springs, Harvey thought, in 1894, as he read the inscription on the back of Pilgrim's clock. On his return from his visit with Fryingpan, he'd stopped in the alleyway behind The Hatters and Merchandise. He

peered out into the street where Pilgrim was waiting for him to come back. Tommy lay panting in the shade of the veranda at Pilgrim's feet. Pilgrim was puffing on a smoke and gazing around as if it were the first time he'd ever seen the big city. Harvey wondered about this man who'd fallen into his life, it seemed, to rescue him. Fate had thrown them together, surely. Like his mother had often told him, everything has a reason, and he summed it up as so: mother dies; Pilgrim appears shortly afterwards. Having decided that it was fate, Harvey felt the weight of the clock in his hands and felt a pang of guilt for having taken it. On the other hand, he thought, Pilgrim had taken all of his money and it was a fair trade. He put the clock back in its new home, the Arnott's special Christmas Issue biscuit tin, and pushed it into the bottom of his carpet bag. 'He that loses his life, shall find it' Harvey thought aloud, and in a quick analysis decided that all was as it should be.

32

You never know your luck in Australia. He'd been saying it a lot lately, as a way of staving off some of his cynicism he held over the place. He'd had enough of Sydney, and as he waited for Harvey, he took a long look around the streets, as though by absorbing every detail he would be able to convince himself to stay away this time. From where he stood, he could see at least two public drinking houses and it reminded him of the despair that surrounded him. In the financial depression, men seemed to find enough money to drink, and none to do anything else. And there they were: two pubs within spitting distance. They unself-consciously opened outward with steps that widened into the street like funnels tapered toward the doors. Pilgrim reminded himself that he preferred the country drinking holes. Those were shacks made of corrugated iron and fence posts, with beer barrels instead of tables, but at least, he thought, a man could have an honest fight in a country hotel and not get himself kicked out into the street. With that, he'd convinced himself he was ready. He'd had his taste of civilization, he told himself, and he was ready to go. At that thought, he threw down the end of his smoke. He was just rolling another when Harvey turned up. Pilgrim acknowledged him with a frown, pointed to the clock tower, and then held up three fingers.

Harvey held up his index finger, and then he dashed into The Hatters and Merchandise. Pilgrim growled under his breath. He dragged on his second cigarette until it was down to the stub and burnt his fingers. He was getting nervous and was just thinking he would be prepared to leave without the boy when Harvey came back, struggling with the weight of a stuffed hessian coffee bag.

'What's this?' Pilgrim said. He stepped forward, heaved the bag out of Harvey's arms and carried it over to Cav. 'Did you rob Wong Pat in broad daylight?'

'Ha,' said Harvey. 'Wong Pat has too many secrets.' He looked up at the top of Pilgrim's head. 'Is that a *genuine* felt hat, you're wearing?' Harvey was grinning, inexplicably.

Pilgrim told himself that he would not feel guilty for spending Harvey's money. No. The poem would have paid for a new hat and half a suit. Lord only knew how many other people Harvey had welshed out of a par and he, Pilgrim, was making it up to them. He grunted as he threw the bag over Cavalier's new saddle. Cavalier pigrooted. Pilgrim caught the reins and pulled down. 'Sh'.

When Cavalier had stopped his nonsense, Pilgrim pressed the edge of the bag with his fingertip and it left an indent. 'What's in there?'

'Tea, mostly. Flour. Some tobacco.' Harvey took a deep breath. He started to talk but stopped, short, when Wong Pat coughed.

Harvey turned and waved at Wong Pat. 'Thank you.'

'Bring me some wool, Arvie,' Wong Pat said.

Pilgrim gave Harvey a doubtful glance. He felt himself blush. Sheep-shearing!

Wong Pat was a small man in a mismatching outfit of Chinese silk robe, topped off with a black felt hat. He stood there, waving. From within the shop window, the faceless manikin also waved. Naked on her post, her shocking disfigurement was revealed. No legs. No breasts. No arms. Just a glove, ridiculously flopping over the top of each carefully twisted arrangement that resembled an arm when wrapped in fabric. But Pilgrim could swear that on that egg-shaped clay ball that represented a head, he could see the corners of a smile. Just like a woman, he thought—infinately unknowable beneath the metres of cloth they use to hide themselves. And then he chuckled. And he remembered: Daisy's knobbly kneecaps. He sobered up, though. It wasn't funny how she left him. It had smacked him out, cold.

§

The countryside beckoned to him like a nymphette. He could feel its pull as it led them toward a train that would take them out of the city. Cavalier was reluctant, but Pilgrim whispered in his ears and coached him along.

Harvey trotted beside Pilgrim while Tommy sniffed the ground like a bloodhound, running in and out and back and forth around the horse's feet. The mad, foolish dog. The Devonshire Hounds would eat him up. When they arrived at the station, Pilgrim bought them each a ticket to Parkes, they loaded Cavalier and Tommy on the stock car, and stepped into the B-class carriage. There, they walked along the aisle of the train until they found an empty booth where they could spread out, one along each of the facing benches. Pilgrim grinned at Harvey, whose face was half covered in dust.

'Now, when we catch up with Nicker, you're to remember this,' Pilgrim told Harvey. 'Nicker's the type of man who could break a man's nose. He can knock a man senseless at a bar. It might be an argument about the difference between a fly and a flea, but Nicker'll take it as serious as a black leg in a shearing shed. And he'll break your arm when he's twisting it to get you to join the union. But do you want to know something? Nicker has never, not once, not in his life, not ever ... has he ever cut a sheep.'

'Don't mind about the sheep,' Harvey mumbled. 'Already I don't like this Nicker.'

The train chuffed away with all the noise of a boy running. Ah, Pilgrim thought as he settled back into his seat, now for some fresh air. He was headed for Daisy country.

§

The movement of the train swayed him off to some deep place. As the countryside fled outwards from the sides of the train and behind in a wake of muddled grass, and trees, and hills, and as the temperature dropped inside the car as the mountains crept toward them, Pilgrim lost himself in his own most secret of places. It was a place where love comes to life, and a woman presses like a warm scone against the lips. Breasts like bread dough on the rise. The train rocked like a perambulator.

§

As he drifted in and out of sleep, Pilgrim wondered if he would ever feel at home in any place in the world. He realised that he had a habit of escaping into fantasies of being somewhere other than where he was at the time. When he was at the workhouse, he'd dreamed of Africa. And when he was on the farm he had wanted to be back at the workhouse with his mother. When he was up country New South Wales, he'd wanted to be in Sydney, and now that he'd been in the city for three months, he wanted to be back in the bush. It seemed to him, though, that wherever he was, and in whatever dream he found happiness, he could be woken with a slap in the face. And when you do wake up, he thought, you realise that somewhere else is no better or worse than home. The only truth is that when you are somewhere else, it sets up a craving to be home, which from the point of view of that particular somewhere else, is always somewhere else.

Catherine. She feels old, now. She *is* old. Time has sliced away so many increments of her life—and of his. Every year she has travelled to Plymouth on the anniversary of his departure. This is the eleventh. The first of April has swung around so quickly.

Jennycliffe is on the south side of Plymouth overlooking the grey, scary ocean that kneads itself against the south of England. Her legs ache where the varicose veins protrude, and so she turns to the park bench. She sits down on the end of the bench, where she is sure that over the years she has worn a hollow into the wood. The other end of the bench is mottled in sun and shadow as the tiny new leaves on the tree above it allows droplets of sunlight filter down. The section of the bench that is shaded by the tree is splattered in bird leavings and the pattern made by the various shades of white through grey is, she thinks, exquisite. It is a conundrum of filth and beauty.

She tries to imagine him as he would be today, at the age of twenty-nine. The years of hard southern sun would have mottled his face. He might have found some grey in his hair.

She panics. What if she doesn't recognise him? Her eyes sting. Don't be silly, she says to herself. Of course you will recognise him. Of course he will come home. Sitting on the bench, alone, Catherine has only her self-pity to converse with.

When they took him to the farm, I could cope with that. But Australia?

Catherine feels a connection with the ocean, with the world where it curves away from her. Where, just over the lip of the curvature of the earth, she knows a little ship bobs around, just out of sight, and on that ship is a boy of seventeen, *her* boy, as she saw him last. But of course, he's not seventeen any more.

Why must I torture myself?

But the ship *will* appear. At first she will see the tip of the mast, waving like a needle, and she won't be sure. But then, a sail. And her boy will come. She will know him from a distance. She will know because a mother can recognise her only son from one end of life to the other, through grime and sweat and filth, through a

patchwork of old and new. She will know her son when he returns. But her voice of reason collides with her fantasy.

He is never coming home.

§

She feels it in her bones, in the way the cold gets into her joints which ache so often now, particularly as she rises from the outdoors washtub and takes the five steps to the front door of her little home. She has negotiated the age of sixty, but has long ago given up fearing for her life. She turns at the stoop and looks out across the yard, pressing to her nose a little blossom that she has plucked from the plant by the letterbox. She is strong, she reminds herself, as only now, a fever rises in her chest. It is a rush of blood, too much excitement.

There is sunshine, now, even after her father's death. At last, she is freed from the workhouse. After selling her father's farm and settling the debts, she has finally been able to buy her tiny dream. A Hampshire cottage. How her father would have hated to have lost his land. She has no regrets.

The potted frangipani, so difficult to grow in a cold climate, thrives on the sunny porch of her Hampshire garden, its fragrance as light as its yellow and white blossoms. The secret to its health, she has discovered, is in preparing the potting mix so the water drains almost instantly, and in keeping the plant warm inside the house during winter. She touches the plant as if it were a child's cheek.

Mostly, these days, she keeps to herself, although the neighbours will sometimes wave at her as they pass the front gate. They give her sympathetic smiles whenever they catch her chatting to the plant. They must think her mad.

She hears a noise from inside the cottage as Annie clanks the kettle onto the hob. 'Tea, Ma?'

Catherine enters the house, walks along the passageway and into the kitchen. Annie's face is aging. Her cheeks droop. She has a rogue grey hair. Catherine offers Annie the flower. 'I'm old, Annie, but I'm tough.'

‘Yes, Ma.’

Annie refuses to take the flower and so Catherine tucks it behind her ear.

‘I might have died. But I didn’t.’

Annie turns toward the doorway. She wrings her hands in front of her, dries them on her apron. ‘I’m going to fetch some coal.’

When she is alone, Catherine pulls the letter from the pocket of her apron. She turns it in her hands, traces the writing on the envelope with the tip of her finger, brings it to her mouth, kisses the seal. As she touches the rough paper with her lips, she swears she can smell her son. It is not a dream.

My Dearest Ma,

It is true then. He’s alive. The fever rises, her heart falters. She reads again.

My Dearest Ma,

Tears sting in her eyes as she remembers him, a boy with a face as sweet as honey, eyes like a blue sky, a sparkle, a joke, his laughter, his illnesses—her loss.

A boat leaves from Sydney in the morning, so just a hasty note, before I head out to town. Once again, I found that the dog has eaten my copy of *The Bulletin*. I have to go and buy another copy.

I must apologise for my apparent carelessness in the matter of letter writing, but I have not had any chance of scribbling. If ever I sat down to write, the dog comes in and makes an effort at disturbing any minute of peace I might otherwise have had. And, for the Lord’s sake, Ma, don’t cry over me.

I’ve been having nightmares on and off through lack of sleep. Mostly in the winter, or when I’m hit with a fever. Mostly, they’re about the same things. Africa! I remember reading about the battle

of Majuba Hill. It often turns up in my dreams. I can feel the heat in the air. It's like I'm really there.

Sunlight appears in thin slivers that shaft upward like razorblades and slices of blue appear between the shafts. There comes a breeze that moves the grass like the ocean. He drifts up into the sky, higher, until he finds himself speeding toward the horizon where the sun becomes an orb that burns a hole in the sky and he is pulled through it, headfirst at a great speed. He is a bullet. He feels himself shooting right into his own heart.

I suppose you've heard of the trouble in Southern Africa. If the Australians are called to action, I shall endeavour to get in on it. If nothing else, it will ensure me a passage toward England and I would at once take some time out to visit you.

How is Annie? I do miss her. Send her my love.

Good-bye Ma!

Yours lovingly,

His Nibs.'

Catherine folds the letter. She drifts off to his childhood—her visits to the manor. He was just a baby. She remembers his nightmares; his fear of thunder. Poor child.

Annie returns with a basket of black beads from the coal heap. She places them by the fireplace, and then turns to regard her mother who is seated in the corner with a red, white and green crocheted rug across her knees. Annie stoops to examine Catherine's face. 'You're looking better, Ma. Younger. It must be that the colour in your dress brings out your eyes.'

'Yes, Dear.'

'But ... are you crying?'

‘They’re tears of joy.’

‘What is it?’ Annie returns to the stove and tips water from the kettle into the teapot. Steam billows out of the spout, and the aroma of breakfast wafts through the tiny kitchen.

‘A letter from your brother, in New South Wales,’ Catherine says, softly.

‘Well? May I read it?’

‘No.’

§

In bed that night, Catherine reads the letter again, and slips it under her pillow. In the morning she wakes to the sound of birdsong outside the window of her cottage. She reads the letter again. The words are still there.

If the Australians are called to action, I shall endeavour to get in on it. If nothing else, it will ensure me a passage toward England and I would at once take some time out to visit you.

She prays for the outbreak of war, and regrets it immediately.

Part Two

The Bush

34

Pilgrim and Harvey arrived in a cloud of steam at Parkes siding early that August evening in 1894. They detrained with Cavalier and the dog and secured their bags to Cavalier's saddle, and then they stood back from the wheels as the train whistle let off a melancholy moan. It heaved away from the platform, gradually picking up speed as it chugged off. They watched until all they could see was a dot on the tracks in the distance.

Parkes was silent until the locomotive was gone, and then the town seemed to breathe out. Insects came to life. First one cicada. Then two. And then a chorus. Pilgrim, also, let out his breath.

'We'll camp on the Goobang for tonight. Cummon Harvey. We have to hurry.'

Pilgrim looked around. Across from the siding was a stockyard, and further on, the paddock where Parkes held its annual gymkhana. The last time Pilgrim been in Parkes, he was thrown from a buckjumper in that very paddock, and had dislocated his shoulder. The shoulder twinged as though it remembered. He turned to the east and led Harvey and Cavalier away from the train stop. A little way along, he found the track that left the road and across a sheep paddock and up toward a line of trees that grew on the other side of the boundary fence, along the Goobang Creek.

As they left the town behind, the countryside wrapped itself around them. Harvey started to whistle, and Pilgrim made up lines of poetry and memorised them so that he could write them down later. The rhythm of his pace led the cadence of his lines and the chirrup of cicadas throbbed around them.

Pilgrim watched the eastern sky as they walked toward it, seeing the colour of the sky changing from raspberry to orange and then to a pale yellow colour. Along the eastern border of the paddock was the line of eucalypts that in the distance became black silhouettes that scratched at the sky. Directly to their right, diagonally across from the creek and about half a mile from where they were headed were the shearing shed and the sheep yards. Further back, huddled amongst a sick-looking stand of gum trees, were the shearers' quarters: two rows of hot tin shanties with

cement wash tubs between them and clothes lines strung between T-shaped poles. Pilgrim looked across, expectantly, and seeing movement in the yards near the shed, felt a sense of hope. The clotheslines were empty. The paddock they were in was empty, but the yard near the shearing shed was full of unshorn sheep, silent, except for the occasional bleat of a newborn lamb and its mother's answering low. They were settled: waiting.

Pilgrim and Harvey walked at a steady pace across the hard ground, crunching dried up grass underfoot. After a while, Harvey's comforting whistling became infectious, and the words of 'The Dying Stockman' invaded Pilgrim's thoughts. He forgot about composing new lines and sang, instead.

'Tis only a year since I started,
In the first flush of manhood and pride,
And now all my strength has departed,
In the lot of all men abide.

'Wrap me up in my well-worn old blanket,
And lay me in peace down below,
And tell all the old mates that knew me,
That I've gone where all good fellows go.'

They walked and sang. Just before reaching the line of gum trees, they climbed over the fence and entered a strip of low mallee scrub. Animals moved about amongst the undergrowth. As they moved downwards, closer to the creek, he started to remember familiar landmarks; the tree with the warped trunk that resembled a question mark, the huge misshapen mallee stump that the locals joked was the black stump. Trees closer to the water were bigger, and full of birds. Galahs fluffed their wings and settled amongst branches, ruffled leaves. Squabbled. A kangaroo thumped away. And then, at last, Pilgrim could smell the water.

When they reached the Goobang Creek, it was just on dusk and the last of the sunlight was going out of the sky. It was cooler in the valley. Pilgrim quickly found a clearing in a flat beside the creek and scurried around, searching for firewood. It was only after he'd gathered enough firewood for the night that he noticed Harvey was missing. He threw down the last armful of twigs onto the pile. Pilgrim looked up. He saw Harvey's shape from behind, up the creek bank, on a tailings mound, sitting cross-legged with his back pressed against the other side of a sapling. Ah. Leave him be, he thought. He's so little, so damned *skinny*. Pilgrim lit the fire. Made some damper. Boiled the quart-pot and then tossed a handful of tea and a gum leaf into the bubbling water.

§

Harvey saw that Pilgrim was preoccupied. He swiped Pilgrim's notebook from his portmanteaux and ran to the top of the creek bank where he pressed his back against a tree. He looked around to see that Pilgrim was still busy, and then opened the notebook.

Inside the front cover of the notebook Pilgrim had drawn a sketch of a Zulu. It was disproportionate, which Harvey at the time had thought comical since the figure was much bigger on one side than the other. The Zulu wore what might have been meant as a grass skirt. Dark clouds were drawn like pillows above the Zulu's head with zig-zags coming out of them. The spear the Zulu held was drawn well. On the end of the spear was a bunch of feathers and at the bottom, a puddle that might have been meant as a shadow or a pool of blood.

§

The pale yellow tint seemed to hang on in the sky. From the top of the bank, where he sat, Harvey could smell the stirrings of redfin and longneck turtles wafting up from the dirty water. Down near the creek, magpies warbled in the giant rivergum whose mould-green leaves captured the last sprinklings of light. Harvey saw it as a naked woman with mottled white skin, arms stretching upward. Streaky bark, alive

with insects, fell in strips from the branches as the magpies flopped from branch to branch. Beneath the tree, Cavalier shook his mane and blew air softly through his lips, ignoring the willy-wagtail that hopped from his back to pluck the softest hairs from around his ears. The light behind Cavalier made him look like he was made of gold.

Harvey remembered how Fryingpan could make his horse carvings look like gold by rubbing yellow ochre onto the driftwood. The thought of it took him back to the gates of the merry-go-round with the music from the barrel organ drifting over them both.

'That's not for you ...' the conductor had said to Fryingpan, and winked at Harvey.

They had stomped away, letting the droning organ music waft along behind them like a bad odour. Harvey realised, now, how much he would miss Fryingpan, and, even though he could smell the sweet scent of damper coming from Pilgrim's fire, he felt alone. He was reminded, once again, of the organ music and he wondered how such a melancholy noise could have come from something known as a merry-go-round.

§

Pilgrim called Harvey for tea and watched as he sauntered down the bank. Pilgrim handed over a blanket, which Harvey pulled around his stick-thin shoulders. His face, pointy as a pixie's, seemed angelic in the flame-light, tilted toward the sky as it darkened from slate to black. Fire-light highlighted loose strands of hair all over Harvey's head. He was reminded of the Christmas Angel that sat on top of a pine tree at his Uncle's.

'There's nothing spectacular about the Australian bush,' Pilgrim said. Australian bush, he told Harvey, was dull compared to the woods in England, which were green and upright and stood in geometric shapes. It was the utter absence of symmetry that made the Australian bush chaotic.

Harvey sighed. 'It's the chaos that makes it beautiful.'

In their cocoon of firelight, Pilgrim watched Harvey jab at the fire with a stick. A shower of white sparks sprinkled upward. The scent of sugared tea and burning gum leaves surrounded them, filling up their ring of firelight. Harvey twisted the stick to send up more sparks.

Pilgrim watched the sparks rise.

Tommy slept, huddled against Harvey. Cavalier, who was tethered to a tree, revealed himself only by the sound of his breathing.

'Will the stars come, Mr P?' Harvey's words resonated through the air. As if summoned, the evening star appeared like a beacon, and then the Milky Way faded in. And then, like a stray bullet, a meteor shot across the sky.

§

Morning came, eucalypt-scented and fresh. Pilgrim was disorientated at first. Despite the hard ground underneath his back, he'd slept deep and dreamless and was confused when his eyes focussed on gum-leaves instead of peeling paint. His wake-up call was the sound of a laughing kookaburra. He sat up. Noises were coming at him from down in the creek; clanking and splashing.

'What's this?' Harvey said. A dog snuffled around their campsite.

'We'd better pack up, Harvey. We've camped on somebody's claim.'

Harvey, who was busy with the stray dog, ignored him. The dog had the straight snout of the foxhound, but it had long floppy ears. Harvey twisted the ears in his fingers until the dog lay on its back and bared its belly. Tommy barked and ran back and forth and around Harvey. Suddenly, the stray jumped up and the two dogs pelted up the creek bank and headed for the paddock.

A loud voice called after the dog. Pilgrim recognised it immediately and felt relieved. It was Nicker! He stood up, walked to the waters' edge, and looked upstream where he saw Nicker, knee deep in the muddy water. He'd been panning

for gold and now he was looking up the bank with his hands cupped around his mouth.

‘Bettah.’ He called and then whistled.

Nicker’s shovel was pushed into the creek bank, and Pilgrim went over and leaned on the handle. ‘Nicker, my old man,’ he said. ‘Mate.’

Tommy and the stray came back and bolted, ker-splash into the water, yapping insanely. Nicker threw water up in an arc and sprayed all over the dogs. He turned around and waded out of the water and up onto dry land. He sloshed closer, water dripping down in rivulets from his big thighs. It was only when he’d emerged from the creek, with his trousers clinging to his legs, that Pilgrim saw the size of his thigh muscles. Nicker held his hand out to shake, but as quickly as he’d offered it, he withdrew. His hand formed a fist.

‘You!’

‘I’ll pay you.’

‘Good.’ Nicker turned his hand palm up and moved toward Pilgrim who stuttered, ‘I would ... I will pay you, only I need a job.’

‘That so?’ said Nicker, shoving his hand closer and taking another step forward. ‘Put my money there.’

Pilgrim shook his head. Nicker looked toward Pilgrim’s campsite where Cavalier was tethered. ‘Nice ride,’ Nicker said. ‘I’ll take the horse in payment o’ yer debts.’

‘I’ll pay you double,’ said Pilgrim, ‘if you get me and the boy here, a place on the shearing team.’

Nicker stared for a long time at Cavalier and took another squint at Harvey before he shook his head. ‘You’re a sack of dead rats,’ he said. He picked up the shovel and washed it in the creek. Pilgrim stood back.

‘Can the boy shear?’ Nicker said. It was rhetorical.

‘Nope.’

‘Roustabout?’

Pilgrim nodded.

‘You got a union ticket?’

This time, Pilgrim hesitated. He wasn’t interested in burning down woolsheds or paddleboats, or holding towns to ransom.

‘*I said*,’ Nicker growled, ‘Are you with the union?’

Pilgrim shrugged and lied. ‘Yes. I’m with the union.’

‘All right then. I’ll teach you how to shear. You can add your tally to mine until we’re square.’ Nicker said. He grabbed at his hips. ‘The boy works for half wages until he’s quick on the floor.’ He shook his head again. ‘We start the Parkes shed on Monday. There’re two months in it since the district shares the shed, so be ready for the long haul. And P ... you *will* pay me back ... or I’ll have the horse.’ He glanced at Tommy. ‘And keep your mongrel away from my pedigree. I don’t want any half-wit pups.’ He laughed.

Nicker strode over and hooked the panning dish onto the handle of his shovel and swung it over his back. ‘Blarsted larrikin,’ he said. ‘I’ve got rocks in me head.’

§

That afternoon when Pilgrim and Harvey swaggered back into Parkes with their humpies strapped to Cavalier’s back, while Tommy darted off in every other direction, across, behind and in front of them, Pilgrim felt better than he had in months after a night in the fresh air. And at last, he had a job.

For the first time in months, Pilgrim was able to look into the shop windows without a sinking feeling. Kelly Brothers General Store advertised ‘Boots & Shoes’. He looked down at his worn out riding boots and then back at the shelves lined up inside the street-level display window. A hand-painted sign boasted, ‘We sell everything from a needle to a haystack’.

On the other side of the street, ‘Lowe’s Hardware and Engineering Company’ advertised, ‘Farming Equipment. Patents Pending’. Further along, Gillam’s Bakery stood alone: a big, square, white building, butted up to the street, claiming to have a range of breads, white or brown. Pilgrim’s stomach growled. They passed a carriage

builder's yard, surrounded by a six-foot fence. Pilgrim was feeling so intoxicated and alive that he felt anything would be possible, and so, as they walked past the fence, it entered Pilgrim's mind that he could train Cavalier to jump. He reached up and grabbed a handful of mane and ear and, without meaning to, spoke out loud. 'Couldn't you boy?' he'd said. 'You could jump over that.'

When they arrived at the Parkes Hotel, he turned to Harvey. 'One last night of comfort before we have to share the shearers' quarters,' he said. As he checked himself and Harvey in for a night, the sun, setting behind him, resembled an enormous ball of gold.

§

It was heartbreaking to see the bony wreck of a boy who sat on the edge of his bed, slowly turning pages of a notebook with scabby hands. Pilgrim sat on the other single bed with its sagging mattress and faded blue and white bedspread in a tangle after a hot, sleepless night. The *Australian Town and Country Journal* had been pushed under the door, and he held it open in his shaking hand:

Desperate Pilgrim: Don't patronise us. We know there's nothing spectacular about the Australian bush, but we, who live here, love it all the same. We know your handwriting. Give up.

He looked over at Harvey who was engrossed in the notebook that sat on his knees; his scruffy blond hair in need of a haircut was sticking out like a hay-bale. He had made his bed and dressed himself in his shorts and had pulled his white socks to his knees. His toes pointed to make contact with the floor. Ah Lord, Pilgrim had thought, the bush has made him smaller. It's knocked the wind out of him. He sighed.

35

Two months passed slowly. By the end of it, Pilgrim had learned that shearing made every muscle in his body hurt. Finally, though, the shed was nearly finished.

The ewes fidgeted in the catching pens, and disappeared one by one, until Nicker pulled the last one out. Nicker held her to the floor between his knees and pulled on the rope. The handpiece jumped into action and, as Nicker snatched it up and started to shear the last sheep, Pilgrim felt his body responding to the prospect of some time off. The wool fell down in a long sheet off the ewe's back. Pilgrim was in awe at Nicker's skill. There was no sign of a ridge along the fleece; Nicker's even blows let it fold back in a wave as smooth as a woven blanket. Unaccountably, the ewe fell limp, her head lolled to the side as though the vibrations of the combs and cutters along the length of her body entranced her. Pilgrim realised, as he watched Nicker's arms move deftly about her, that the last time the ewe was shorn she would have been handled with shears. All she would have heard was the click, click, click snipping about her ears.

Nicker propped the ewe against his knees and ran his hand along her spine, gently using his fingertips to lift the wool away from her. The floorboards buzzed and apparently soothed her. She lifted her head and looked up at Nicker's face as he reached for the rope to stop the motor. The motor growled down. Nicker hoisted the ewe under the front legs, slid her on her back across the floor. He turned her in to the chute. She kicked once as she left the shed. Clunk.

The roustabout jumped in with the final call. It sent a tingle down Pilgrim's spine.

'Tally-ho.'

§

Pilgrim touched his pocket. If just one of the team didn't have a ticket ... war.

§

The manager kept his nose down over the tally book, and in the way the hand that held the pencil shook, Pilgrim knew he was worried. His face was white. Nobody could forget the *Rodney*. It was always floating through the backs of their minds, the smell of burning wool and flesh forever permeated in their clothing, mud on the soles of their moccasins.

Nicker never spoke of it. He wouldn't. By all witnessed accounts, he'd been in Sydney in August, 1894, when the steamer loaded with wool from a non-union shed was burned to the waterline on its way down from Bourke. The effects of the sinking of the *Rodney* rippled through time, so that whenever a shed cut out, the team was on edge. No blacklegs. 'No scabs in 'ere.' Pilgrim held his breath. The boss, in his tan-coloured pants and waistcoat, sucked the lead of his pencil and glanced up at the tally board and then at his notebook. The wool table tilted, like it might overbalance, as the shiny booted pastoralist lowered his tidy backside to sit on its edge. Almost unconsciously, and without looking up, the manager readjusted his seat and then concentrated more deeply on his book as though his life depended on it.

§

Over in the corner, the wool-classer agitated the wool in the bales, lifting a handful to examine it close to his face, plucking a thin strand of wool and stretching it between his fingers, tugging until it broke, minutely stroking and counting the ridges. He dove his arm deep into the bale and coughed. At the sudden sound, the boss glanced up, his clean-shaven face grim. He touched his hat and then bent over his notebook to record a number.

§

The shearers mulled around the tally board as the smell of lanolin and urine had settled around them. Their tired arms had hung at their sides. They had been waiting, keeping half an eye on the man with the pencil, wanting to snatch up their pay packets and run out, shouting 'Sydney here we come.'

The smell of sweat rose as the union representative wandered over to the landlord, his stride self-consciously, overly casual, one hand on a hip. 'Twenty

shillings per hundred.' He lowered his eyes and rolled his great bulging shoulder muscles. The manager looked up over his spectacles and nodded.

'They all got tickets?'

Nicker nodded. 'Yes.'

Pilgrim turned away. Nicker had never asked to see his union receipt. He'd never checked. Through the opening at the side of the shed, he saw that the sun was throbbing redly on the horizon where he saw a mirage. He pictured himself walking off into the sunset. He'd run if it came down to it.

While Harvey cleared the last scats of the wool and dags from the floor, Pilgrim stood up and twisted, pushing his hand into the small of his back. He stretched and glanced into the empty pen, where the floor glistened, wet with sheep urine. A hill of sheep dung collected in the corner where the boards were clogged and it hadn't fallen through the gaps.

Pilgrim grimaced, not willing nor yet able to disguise the discomfort that pulsed through his aching spine, nor the throbbing sores that welled around each of the sharp burrs that peppered his hands. A boil festered near his hipbone and aggravated against his clothing. But, it's over now, he told himself. Never again.

The generator stopped and the Wolseley sheep shearing machines sighed as they wound down. Out in the yard, Pilgrim heard one long low baaa, as Nicker's last ewe trotted indignant, naked and snow white into the dusty yard, shivering at the sudden loss of weighty wool. Pilgrim walked to the open side of the shed, and stood on the top step to watch. The ewe looked around for its lamb, baaad again. The ewe began at a trot, and then stopped just as suddenly, confused at the white and red thing that pelted toward her from the holding pen. It was the lamb that had its tail docked.

The docking board wept blood next to a pile of lamb's tails that looked like woolly snakes. A crow landed on the railings nearby, its feet, click, on the wood that had been polished by blood and wool. It wiped its beak, clack, against the wood, and cawed. Pilgrim turned, startled by the waft of blood-smell that the bird's flapping wings had disturbed. From the corner of his eye, he thought he saw, bent at the elbow and still dressed in a soggy woollen sleeve, the severed arm of a child writhing atop

the hill of bloodied lamb's tails. He blinked and it was gone. He shook his head, quickly, trying to shake out the memory.

§

A cheer had erupted. And then chaos. The Ringer had broken his last season's record by ten. He'd come smiling out of the shed, grasping his pay packet in his hand. The others had followed.

On the tally board Pilgrim came in last; half of his tally had gone to Nicker, but it didn't matter. It was over. The shearers' voices rang out across the paddocks, 'Click go the shears ...' the shearer's sang. 'Click, click, click.'

36

At the end of the long, two months of shearing, Harvey was dead tired. Each week had almost killed him, with only Sundays to regain his strength for another six days of work. Burrs festered in his hands, and boils in his groin. Even though there had been an endless supply of food, he'd been always hungry, and he'd noticed that in the two months he'd grown at least an inch and his arms and legs were thicker. But he'd had enough of it. He hated the noise of the shed. He hated the constant taunting of the other roustabouts, the running up and down the floor with the tar bucket. He hated Nicker, but most of all, he hated the smell of sheep. So, when 'tally ho' was called, he threw down the broom, and walked out of the shed.

Harvey walked across the paddock to escape from the noise of the shearing celebrations. His ears rang continuously, damaged by two months of constant noise, and as he climbed over the fence and gazed back across the paddock toward the shed he felt the relative quiet, as palpable as jelly, pressing against him.

Across the yard, he watched the cook prepare the last meal for some of the shearers who would stay one more night before heading back to Sydney. The cook was bent over a low bench with a bowl of water and vegetables. Harvey heard Nicker shout out. 'Ey. Tin Lung? You seen me dawg?'

That confirms it for me, Harvey thought. The man's a pig.

Nicker's whistle reached Harvey, all the way across the paddock. And then, just beside him, Harvey heard a squeak and looked around. He had found what Nicker was looking for.

Better was under a bush just on the other side of the fence where she'd hidden herself to give birth. She lay in a soft bed of freshly scratched earth and wool around the base of a bush, but she was laying still. She had blood all over her hind legs. Her pups wriggled blindly at her side, nudging for her nipples.

Harvey counted them, and picked up one of the pups. As it wriggled in his hands he knew straight away that it was Tommy's offspring, and he knew why Better had died. Tommy was too big. Clearly even one of the pups would have been too big for Better's body to have borne, and here, she'd given birth to eight.

Seeing the blood on Better's legs, the afterbirth and the newborn fleshy pups reminded Harvey of how his mother had died. His mind involuntarily flashed back to the hotel room where he'd found his mother in a sodden bed of blood. Don't cry, he told himself. Harvey's stomach heaved.

With the pup held against his chest with one hand, he wiped his mouth with the back of his other hand and looked up just in time to see Pilgrim coming toward him.

'Here you are,' Pilgrim said, reaching out to touch the top of the pup's head. 'So, she's had them?'

Harvey nodded toward the bush and let out a sob. 'What will happen to them?' He looked down at the mess at the bush where there was so much blood and sodden fur. Flies buzzed around Better's bottom.

'Well, they can't live,' Pilgrim said.

Harvey felt helpless as Pilgrim picked up each pup and placed them in a line along a flat section of ground.

'What are you doing?'

'I'm sorry,' Pilgrim said. 'It's better this way.' Pilgrim was searching for something, and stopped when he found a rock. He was poised over the pups with the rock lifted in the air.

'No!' Harvey sobbed, but he was paralysed with shock. Pilgrim killed every pup that was on the ground, and then he looked to Harvey who was cradling the last. It was sucking the top of his finger.

'Without her mother,' Pilgrim said, 'she won't survive. She'll die, slowly, of starvation.'

Harvey glanced at the bloodied mess of bodies.

'Cummon, Harvey. Give me it.'

Harvey closed his eyes and handed over the pup. He wanted to vomit again. He felt dizzy and confused. Without another word to Pilgrim, he picked up his carpet bag and started to walk away. He walked, blinded by tears, down to the creek, took off his boots, and let the cool, muddy water soothe his feet.

§

The creek was low, and mud puddles had formed where he remembered flowing water two months earlier. He scooped a handful of brown water into his mouth, sucking up the taste of tadpoles and spitting out grit. As he moved northward, the creek was wider. The bush thickened and the water was less opaque but tinted the colour of black tea. Rocks were wide and flat, encrusted with pale green lichen. Bush dragons skittled away from his feet and dashed under crevices in the rocks. There were sharp blades of water grass, topped with brown fluffy balls that spiked him from below. He pushed his way through a dense thicket that he thought would never end, and manoeuvred along the waters' edge until he was too tired to move any more. He climbed up onto a high flat rock and threw down his carpet bag.

Then and there, Harvey decided, was where his friendship with Pilgrim would end. 'He that murders puppies shall lose his friend,' he said. He rifled through his carpet bag. The old Gaydon alarm clock with its face all scratched had settled at the bottom underneath his long johns and his spare socks. 'And he that loseth his friend shall never find his alarm clock.' Without looking at it, he pulled out the clock and threw it with one hand into a bush. It landed softly and swung on the low branches like a Christmas tree ornament.

§

It was dark when Harvey got back into town and staggered, exhausted up to the Parkes Hotel. Tommy was out on the veranda, panting in the heat, and Cavalier was in the holding pen at the side of the building. When he went inside, the publican directed Harvey up to the room that Pilgrim had rented for the night. He entered to find Pilgrim slouching across one of the beds with a handful of newspaper cuttings spread out over the covers. As Harvey moved into the room, he was hit by the smell of alcohol. Pilgrim's eyes were bloodshot and his movements were awkward as he picked up the cuttings and started to read them out.

'September 22, 1894: Pilgrim: 'Shakespear' unsuitable. Learn to spell. September 22, 1894: A Harvey: 'McBoth' had us holding our sides, will publish your poem next week.'

Harvey ignored him, and fell face down onto the other bed, but Pilgrim read on, his voice, slurred: 'September 29, 1894: Pilgrim: A great noble-sounding truth, but it might be put into a much smaller compass if you simply said: 'Heggs is heggs' ... October 6, 1894: A Harvey: Homletts for breakfast powerful. Funny. Poignant. Will publish next week ... October 6, 1894: Pilgrim: A man and his son. You must be joking? Pull the other one ... October 13, 1894: A Harvey: Dad's mate, Metre perfect. Timing exemplary. Will publish next week ... October 13, 1894: Pilgrim: Down by the River. What is your problem? What river? Can't you think of a better title than that? What about, Out on the Murray? ... October 20, 1894: A Harvey: Oh the Murray. A wonderful poem. Will publish next week.'

Harvey's body ached for sleep, but Pilgrim wouldn't stop. So? he thought. Pilgrim's found me out. He had been re-writing Pilgrim's poems after they'd been rejected from *The Bulletin*, but at least they were being accepted. They were better!

'Cummon Harvey. Say something.'

Pilgrim staggered over to the bed and nudged him. 'Say something!'

Pilgrim opened his letter-book and tore out a couple of pages as Harvey turned over to face him. He shoved the pages into Harvey's face. 'Look here. You've been stealing my poems. '

Harvey sat up, and with a surge of energy fuelled by anger, grabbed at the poems, and read them quickly. 'All right,' he said, suddenly, snatching the pencil from behind Pilgrim's ear. 'Look here, P. The poems were no good. I can do better than you in my sleep.' He scrawled across one of the pages ... 'Look. Delete this. And if you move this line ... You see. As easy as murdering pups.'

'Shut up!'

Pilgrim grabbed at the book, shoved it into his shirt, and went out through the door, slamming it behind him. Harvey heard him stumble at the balustrade. 'Don't

break a leg,' Harvey called out as Pilgrim's irregular footsteps disappeared down the stairs.

37

Pilgrim staggered into the bar, stood at the door and looked around. Nicker was still there, slouched amongst huge wooden barrels that served as tables, and the outlines of the shearers' bodies blended with the pressed tin that decorated the front edge of the bar. Nicker lifted his index finger from the glass he held and turned his eyes toward Pilgrim as he took a swallow of beer. Pilgrim nodded and gained his bearings. The place was full of bushmen. The room closed around him like a glove. He pushed his way past through the crowd of men, toward Nicker.

Behind the bar was a line of hats. They were nailed to the wall. Each one was autographed. The Banjo. Mitchell's Mate. Pilgrim read along the line. There was a hat from Nicker. Another from Joe Cornstalk.

Pilgrim caught the publican's eye.

'D'y want *my* hat?' Pilgrim said. 'I'm a poet.'

The publican laughed. 'Are you *famous*?'

'Ought to be,' he said.

Pilgrim knew he'd drunk too much already and he realised he was as drunk as Nicker. Pilgrim flinched as Nicker breathed in his ear.

'Now,' said Nicker. 'About that debt of yours. Your tally covered the twenty-five pounds, but I reckon you owe me for the shearing lessons. So, tell me about the horse.'

Pilgrim leaned forward and spoke quietly back into Nicker's ear. 'What about him?'

'What can he do? Is he a racer? Can he jump?'

Pilgrim knew what he was about to say, and he knew it had the potential to end in disaster, but the beer in his belly had warmed him, and he forgot to be sensible. And then he said it. 'Can he? *Can* he?'

He heard the words slur out of his mouth, but he couldn't stop them. 'He can jump.' More words. 'You know the six-foot gate around the carriage builder's yard? He can jump a six-foot gate,' said Pilgrim. Stop, he told himself. '... by candlelight.' Words that he couldn't control came blurting out of his drunken face.

‘Half the winnings if he does it,’ Nicker said.

Within minutes, coins and notes began to pile up on the top of one of the barrels as men laid their bets. Men shouted. Pencils scribbled notes onto small pieces of paper. Bets were collected. Pilgrim found his hat. He turned it over and laughed himself stupid as it filled with money.

‘Over once, and then back again,’ he said. ‘Without a break in between.’

But, oh Lord, what had he done?

§

Later, at the hospital, the publican came to visit. He stood by Pilgrim’s bedside, leaning his weight first on one foot and then the other.

‘You see how fickle life can be?’ Pilgrim said. ‘One minute you could be collecting bets, and the next, crack! Dead!’

‘Never mind that, you’re famous, *now*.’ The publican held up a copy of the *Nepean Times*. ‘You’re known all the way down at Melbourne. It seems that *The Pilgrim*, poet, has broken a limb upon falling from a horse.’

The publican put the paper back on the chair. He fidgeted, fiddled with the bedside lamp, and then, as if in afterthought, handed Pilgrim his hat and stepped back. Pilgrim scrabbled amongst his things in a bedside drawer to find his pencil. He blunted it by rubbing the tip against a piece of paper and then very carefully pressed his name into the rim of the hat. When he was done, he handed the hat back.

‘Take it to the bar,’ he said. ‘See that it hangs with the others.’

The publican turned the rim to face him and read the name: ‘There could be only one of you,’ he said, ‘*The Pilgrim*’.

38

When he saw how much pain Pilgrim was suffering as he was being carried on a stretcher down the main street of Parkes to the hospital, Harvey had felt sorry for him. The next morning, as he stood at the siding and watched the shearers board the train bound for Sydney, he remembered the day he and Pilgrim had arrived. The ditty they'd sang together came back to him and he couldn't stop the verse from singing itself in his head.

'Tis only a year since I started
in the first flash of manhood and pride,
And now all my strength has departed,
In the lot of all men I abide.'

Harvey, too, remembered the relief he'd felt after their long walk across the paddock when they'd arrived at the creek and walked down into the valley into the cool, and he remembered how he'd felt comforted by the sounds of the crackling campfire and the smell of tea. He was a fool; he was his own worst enemy. As the train scooped up the team from Parkes and added them to its load of singing shearers and bushmen headed for the city, Harvey felt frozen to the spot with indecision. He stood there, until it was too late.

By the time he got to the hospital, Pilgrim was sat up in the bed, his leg stretched out in a sling, plastered to the knee, and he slurping tea from a saucer. Harvey dropped his bag onto the floor and pulled up a chair next to the bed.

'You didn't go back to Sydney, young Harvey?'

Harvey grimaced when Pilgrim tipped more tea into his saucer and lifted the little plate, with such delicate balance, to his lips, that Harvey found himself wondering if those were the same hands that could so effortlessly break in a horse, or slay a dozen newborn pups. But no. Pilgrim's smile was so infectious that Harvey had to smile back. Soon he found himself laughing with Pilgrim as he recounted his latest feat, which had resulted in his broken leg.

‘As I flew through the air,’ Pilgrim said, ‘I thought to myself, not today. I’m not going to die today.’

Where would he go? Harvey realized then, that Pilgrim had been as much a father as he’d ever be likely to know. But the man was impossible! Impossible to love: impossible to hate. Impossible to tolerate that slurping!

‘You’re a pig,’ Harvey said. ‘But, I think I might stick around for a while longer.’ He gave Pilgrim a wry smile. ‘You need me.’

39

The physician had told Pilgrim it would be two months before he could leave Parkes and six months before he could walk. The one consolation he felt, while he was convalescing, was that he had plenty of time to think, and as the shearing money dwindled, his writing became his source of income. It fed him, but barely. In desperation, and dying of boredom, he proposed a project for the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette*. They accepted.

It was a column on hunting. He'd write all he had learned back in England, from Uncle. He worked solidly on the column. Most days, he wrote as much as he knew of the difference between 'riding to hounds' and 'hunting', breaking it down into publishable sections of a column each. He finished up with a six-part document at the end of a week. Pilgrim had written all he knew, and the rest was padding and so, satisfied he'd done a good job, he had Harvey post it off. The column was published in episode form in the following six issues. It earned him ten shillings a week, and when the money orders arrived, he sent Harvey to the post office to cash them in. All was well until the final week when a letter to the editor appeared in the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette*.

To the Editor, Sir,

I have no doubt that your Pilgrim is very familiar with his images of red-coated riders, strong, sleek horses, and panting dogs that he brings back from England. He paints a very pretty picture, indeed, but is it not the sport of an aristocratic country? This is a big country, and unlike England, we don't have the pretty green pastures and mushrooms growing amongst the daffodils for a hi-stepping horse to tip-toe around. Here, we have real men, and real broad country, and real game to hunt. Let us see your Pilgrim's pleasantries being put to the test, try his steed's mettle, and his dog's sagacity in the outback. If he survives, I should like to see the result in his column.

Yours, &c, Democrat.

Pilgrim felt attacked. The Democrat seemed to know him personally, but hid behind a pseudonym. What form of democracy allows cowardice? he thought. As though it wasn't enough to make light of his knowledge, this bully had attacked his manhood. Pilgrim's leg itched in the plaster. After reading the letter, the itching became intolerable. Enough, he thought. He'd had enough of sitting around. Everything was hot and everything ached, and even his old shoulder wound gave him grief. Let that democrat compare wounds, and he'd soon see who was the bigger man.

Pilgrim tried to write a reply to the letter, but his pencil snapped under the pressure, and the more often he had to renew the point, the more angry and frustrated he felt.

By the time Harvey arrived for his daily visit, Pilgrim was seething. He tried to control his voice, but growled. 'Wheel me out to the gymkhana yards, will you? I need to practice my whip-cracking.'

The chair was hard. It had no suspension, and with his leg stuck out in front Pilgrim had no control so that every bump felt like a punch in the spine and he slid around in the seat. The trip from the hospital to the yards was agonising and slow and uncomfortable. When he reached for the wheels to take control from Harvey, he realized his hands had been bunched into fists. He took a deep breath to calm himself, but it sounded like a hiss.

Harvey gave the chair a jerk. 'If you keep up that swearing, I'll leave you here.' He wheeled him up to the fence.

The yards were dusty, but in the corner, the round yard was churned with fresh horse tracks. Pilgrim cursed and then apologised. The men had been out on the brumby run and he'd missed out. The horses were gone now, and so was his opportunity to make a profit on taming brumbies. He looked toward the gate, and saw that Cavalier's saddle was hung over the fence beside it. When Harvey accidentally bumped the wheelchair over a rock the jolt sent a bolt of pain up Pilgrim's spine. He swore again. This time he didn't bother to say sorry. Instead he barked. 'Wheel me over to the gate!'

Harvey's voice was abrupt, deeper than Pilgrim remembered. 'Why? What are you thinking?'

'I'm thinking I'll go insane if I don't get up on a *horse*,' he yelled.

He whistled toward Cavalier. Harvey heaved the chair. This time, Pilgrim was sure he'd done it deliberately. Harvey came around in front of the chair and looked down. 'I won't participate in whatever stupid thing it is you're intending to do, P. And I don't like your tone of voice.' He turned away. 'I'll come back for you in an hour.'

When Harvey was gone, Pilgrim reached up and pulled the saddle down. He whistled again. Cavalier trotted over and accepted the reins without any fuss. At Pilgrim's prompting, Cavalier kneeled on his front legs to accept the saddle and waited while Pilgrim pulled himself up onto his back. When he was in the saddle, Pilgrim forgot about his broken leg.

§

It was one of those days. His leg had healed and he was enjoying the respite, hidden away in the bush along the Bogan River. All was quiet and peaceful except for a magpie that warbled: off in its own world. Pilgrim had his notebook balanced on his knee and was dropping down a few lines of poetry. His head was lost in the sweet silence that would come over him if ever he had the chance to write. The moment was so enjoyable that he'd wanted it to last forever as sunlight found its way through the trees and made the sky into a backdrop that was as pink as a lady's lips. And then he heard the sound of grunting coming from the undergrowth. Some fool had let a pig loose. It was rooting around with its snout in the mud along the river bank.

It was one of those days when all of a sudden past hurts rise up and spew out of a man. The anger can't be quelled. Suddenly, all a man wants to do is kill something.

Pilgrim would think of that day, years afterwards, and wonder how it could be that his temper had so violently erupted. He tried to examine it with a detached

sensibility. As if anyone could understand the character of a man who could love a woman one moment, and the next, slay a pig.

§

To hell with the Democrat! Pilgrim jumped on Cavalier and hunted the pig on horseback for a good mile until its pace slowed and he felt he could hobble after it on foot. He'd slid off Cavalier's back and set chase on foot, forgetting his limp, his heart pounding less from physical exertion than from a surge of adrenalin. He was aware, only vaguely, of tiny twinges of pain in his shin where the bone had healed. After a sprint, Pilgrim cornered the pig into a thicket of mallee bush. He scooped its legs from under it with his foot. The pig squealed. With his knee pressed into the pig's shoulder, Pilgrim lifted the lancer's spear and aimed it at the pig's heart. There: a palpable silence. A pause.

Pilgrim would often think of that very moment, that measurable segment of time between when the knife was stationary, poised above his shoulder, and the instant decision to kill. He would try to recall what force drove his actions that day.

It was a surprise to him, how easily the knife had entered the flesh. Pilgrim ran it in a second time, through the pig's chest, again through its eye, and then through its cheek. Now, out of control.

The pig struggled, even after Pilgrim pulled back its snout and opened its throat with a slash. He stood panting over the pig as blood from a severed artery pulsed in a thin fountain about a foot into the air.

As he wiped the knife blade against a bush, he felt nothing. No regret. A bushfly landed on Pilgrim's eye, and when he pushed it away it lobbed down onto the pig's nostril and the oozing blood. He noticed only how quickly flies found it and swarmed.

Pilgrim carried the dripping pig over to Cavalier and slung it over the saddle. The pig kicked sporadically, its nerves still alive, while he trotted back to the campsite.

§

The boar turned on the spit all day, dripping sweet sizzles of fat into the coals. Pilgrim tended the coals while Harvey rode into Nyngan for supplies. The pig smelled of roast, and it took all of his willpower to wait until Harvey came back with a bundle of newspapers, two bottles of beer and some tea.

The beer soothed Pilgrim's body and, after a feed of fresh pork, he felt himself slumped somewhere between heaven and bliss. He opened *The Bulletin*.

July 13, 1895: Pilgrim: 'In such a night'. Will publish this week. 'The Admiral' next week.

'I thought you said they weren't publishable,' he said, conscious of the slur to his voice, and the pig fat melting from his fingers onto the pages. He held the paper out toward Harvey.

Harvey glanced at the newsprint and shrugged. 'I didn't say they were unpublishable, just not in the form you'd written them.'

Pilgrim pulled back the paper. 'Aren't you going to read it?'

'I've read it, and I tell you, Mr P, *The Bulletin*'s dropping its standards.'

Pilgrim lifted the page out of *The Bulletin* and slipped it into his breast pocket. From the fire, on the sizzling pig, a bubble of fat exploded.

Part Three

The Game

40

October, 1896. Harvey wondered again why he was still there, looking at Pilgrim after two years of roaming about the outback. He reminded himself that two years was plenty of time to escape, but still there he was, looking at that sod, Pilgrim. The Parkes hotel breathed in every particle of heat available from the outside and the smell of oil used to preserve the floorboards stung in his nostrils. He tossed aside *The Parkes Champion*, noting the sarcastic way the local paper scoffed at the optimism spouted about in *The Herald*. The country folk knew it was going to be another long, stinking hot summer and Harvey was not prepared for another day of it. The sound of blowflies caused his insides to churn, as the insects buzzed in the windowsills only to die and collect into black papery hills.

And Harvey had come to despise the way Pilgrim would slurp tea from the saucer and then gaze into his teacup as if trying to predict the future in his tea leaves. Once, Pilgrim had explained that drinking from the saucer cooled the tea enough to drink and that if he drank directly from the cup, it would burn his lips, but Harvey knew it was habit. Pilgrim tipped some more tea into the saucer, and swirled it around as though he were panning for gold. When Harvey heard the sound of slurping again, his fist clenched. He hid his hand under the table and looked up.

§

Pilgrim slurped the rest of his tea and swirled the dregs that freckled the bottom of the cup. It reminded him of Mrs Gordon and her psychic impressions. If only the future could be predicted, but life doesn't care what your plans are. If it did, it would allow you to sidestep the pitfalls and to arrive safely at your destination: one that could satisfy everyone. He looked harder and tried to make out the shape of a polo field full of ponies. All he saw was tealeaves.

Pilgrim's leg throbbed around the old injury. A gust of air, thick with the scent of honey and eucalypt, blew through the open French doors. The heady aroma filtered into the dining area and flowed between the jarrah legs of the tables and chairs. White tablecloths and sprigs of wattle blossom in blue jars decorated the tables. In the early morning, at the hotel in Parkes, Pilgrim reclined at the breakfast table working his way through a stack of newspapers. Light rains had fallen all over the country, they said. Farmers expected their wheat crops to thrive. Pilgrim was confident, too, that this season's load of wool would lift the economic depression and he could quit playing around with the dumbest animal ever domesticated. Two years he'd wasted on them, but things were looking up. Optimism glowed like a Chinese lantern. He tried to remember what Wong Pat had told him about the lantern he'd had in his shop: what with his charms and crazy talismans, old 'Wrong Hat' would never stop smiling. Apparently the subdued light in the lantern had something to do with bringing on prosperity—and if that wasn't optimistic ... Whatever the case, optimism was the word of the day. The sun was shining. And shearing was *done*.

And so too, was the damage that was done to his body. Instead of poet's hands, scars on Pilgrim's knuckles had blended with his skin. His hands were browned lanolin-polished leather blotched with in-ground dirt, and were covered in lines that reminded him of cuts from shearing combs, boils and infections from burrs that had taken too long to heal. The so-called poet's hands had been battered into submission and the poet was dried up. He sighed again and plopped a lump of sugar into his empty teacup. He watched as it dissolved and spread out in the bottom of the cup.

But this two-year period hadn't all been without its rewards. He'd won something, even if it was mostly to the credit of his trusty steed. Pilgrim noted with a self-satisfied grunt—his hat had earned a place. Nailed and labelled, it hung with the other hats that made a row on the wall of fame. The Mate, The Banjo, *The Pilgrim*. Good old Cavalier, he thought. He pushed a hand through his hair and turned side on to the breakfast table. As he turned, he caught a glimpse of his reflection in the mirror

on the opposing wall. He had to look twice at the fellow in the worn out suit with unruly hair. Is that *me*?

Being careful not to catch the edge of the tablecloth, Pilgrim crossed his legs and fumbled with *The Bulletin*. He knew exactly what to expect. The last of his poems was published in July ... 1895 ... fifteen months ago. Well, he thought, I'm not a poet, but habit compelled him to check, anyhow. He wanted to see whether or not his latest submission had been summarily shot down. As he let out a heave of a sigh, he folded the paper back at 'Answers to Correspondents', and snapped out the wrinkles.

Boko Tommy: Who patronises the Chinese? Who doesn't?

He reached for a scone. Ah well.

§

The bone-china cup was so thin that it was almost transparent. The light shining through it, dappled with the dark and light of the blue willow pattern, reminded Pilgrim of the way shadows blend away at dusk. Meanwhile, across town, the train left the station. Perhaps time had washed away the details. But when the sound of the train -whistle peeled through the morning as he sat at the hotel in Parkes, it took him back two years and a day. He held the saucer up to the ray of sunlight that came through the window behind Harvey. He saw the shadow of his fingers through the crockery and thought of how a setting sun can sometimes seem enormous as it melts like a ball of ice across the horizon.

Pilgrim placed the saucer on the table. He looked out of the window and into the yard. 'Harvey,' he said, 'Ed McDonald's asked me to try out a colt over at Mordialloc station for a buckjumping show. I reckon I can tame him. They call him Cronje.' He snorted into his tea. 'What do you think, Harvey? Can I make him into a polo pony?'

§

The publican came over and poured more tea into Pilgrim's cup from a fresh pot, and then placed the pot on the table.

'Shearing over?' he asked, as he collected the dirtied plates and turned to leave.

'Ah, yes. Never again. Shearing's a dangerous business,' Pilgrim said. 'What with the unions at each other's throats.'

The publican nodded. 'Yes. I believe so.'

'Here. The Bulgroo Woolshed. Another one burned to the ground.'

The publican went away quickly, rattling plates. Clearly he'd seen his share of brawls. Pilgrim shuddered. After the union had burned up the *Rodney* for carting blackleg labour up the Murray in 1894, the shearers had retaliated by shooting poor Billy McClean.

Now! There was a thought! The war in Africa was imminent and he wouldn't pass up the opportunity to shoot a few Boers himself if it meant taking a bullet for England. At that, Pilgrim was deep in contemplation over the idea of having a bullet in his flesh, when Harvey looked up from his copy of *The Bulletin*.

'I would think horse riding much less dangerous than shearing,' Harvey said, 'with the union wars still going on.' He nodded toward Pilgrim. 'You're serious about the polo?'

'You know it. But I want your help, there, Harvey.'

'Not a chance!'

§

Ah, but life was good and there they were sucking in the heat, reading newspapers and slurping tea from a saucer. Life really was good, except for the remote inkling of trouble at the back of his mind as he read the news: the unions, free-trade versus

protection, nationalism. Except that he was thinking of Africa and the Empire's dispute with the Boers. Perhaps it stirred in him thoughts of home and country and further muddled his already confused allegiance. With the Federation debate looming, *The Bulletin* canvassing for the capital city to be in the Snowy River region, and the rest of the country looking at Canberra, he felt a certain urgency to escape before he was compelled to write his opinion to the papers.

In *The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 22, 1896, there were two full pages with information on steamer travel to Albany or Fremantle. You could head for the Western Australian goldfields at 'special reduced rates'. You could steam off to anywhere in the world, as a matter of fact, and be there within a few weeks. It was entirely plausible that he could have enough money to go back to England. Or, he thought, you could travel to Cape Town!

Ah. He wished he could raise the fare to go home for a visit. And, in reading the papers, Pilgrim noted to his dismay that England's own Dr Starr Jameson and Sir John Willoughby would not be released from prison after all, and he pondered at the justice in it, as he closed the paper. Jameson took a risk, Pilgrim thought. My sort of fellow. Of course, if Jameson had tried and succeeded in inciting the uprising against Boers and had won franchise rights for the Uitlanders, despite ignoring direct orders, he'd be a damned hero. Damned if you do; damned if you don't, Pilgrim thought. That's the way of it. Sure, Jameson got a lot of men killed, but the name of the game was Empire building, and whosoever got in the way ... including this Federation nonsense.

His chair creaked. He had his own business to take care of, right here in front of him. There was an issue of trust he needed to sort out. He'd let it go long enough. He took a long slurp of his tea, and prepared for battle with Harvey.

§

Toast crumbs and a smudge of butter ran down the sides of Harvey's mouth. Mornings didn't become him. There was still that pout: the one that had a remnant of

young Harvey, the little urchin. But now, the childish pout sat askew on the face of a young adult. A blade of sunlight highlighted a scattering of dust motes that floated around Harvey's head like a shattered halo, a fact to which Pilgrim assigned a kind of semi-detached superstition. And both of us, he thought, different now.

Harvey's head moved from side to side in a slow shake of annoyance. In that expression, Pilgrim saw resentment. A tint of pink coloured Harvey's cheeks. One day, Pilgrim thought, Harvey's going to throw a punch.

Harvey hid behind *The Bulletin*. Predictably, he had turned to the Red Page.

Pilgrim watched Harvey's hand move up to his chin. There was a spray of pimples, as though somebody had thrown a handful of crushed raspberries into Harvey's face. In the changed landscape of Harvey's chin, Pilgrim saw that a soft new beard had begun, almost overnight. Ah yes ... time flies.

Pilgrim had not forgotten how it felt to be so young. He watched as Harvey's hand explored the new shape of his jaw. Pilgrim remembered: the surges of desire; the way women would look at you from under their bonnets. The girl in the barn, back in Devon. The way Daisy had looked at him on their wedding day ...

Today, all of Pilgrim's bones ached. He wasn't a young man and he resented the fact that he couldn't work as hard or as fast without pain registering a complaint about some unfairly treated set of muscles. Shearing. He hated it! The stench of tar and urine, the bending, the kneeling, the ... ah, the aching muscles. He wondered what had ever compelled him to give it a go, but then barely remembered that starvation is its own motivation. Still, he longed for a cattle station where he had worked when he was ... ah so young ... same age as Harvey was now. Seventeen. There was nothing quite equal to roaming horseback in the baking heat and dust when the day was topped off with a cup of tea from a quart pot on the campfire by the waterhole. And, then without restraint, he found himself pining back to Fanning Downs Station. Cattle work always reminded him of Daisy. The day she'd told him goodbye!

The cottage he had lived in with Daisy was planted in the middle of a hot, dry paddock with a tall gum tree growing in the front yard that sent its shade away from the house when it was most needed: mid-afternoon. A pair of peppercorn trees framed the front veranda providing some relief for the chooks who nestled under them in dusty hollows they'd scratched out. Unfathomably, Daisy would go inside at the exact time the mercury reached one-hundred-and-ten in the shade, when it was too hot for anyone to be outside, and she'd light the stove and try to bake; Daisy hadn't any idea of how to cook. Scones were her best attempt.

On the day she left him, Daisy spoke to him in her school-teacher voice. 'You are entitled to a name. In fact, I understand why you have chosen the name of your real father to marry me by.'

She sat at the kitchen table that was strewn with letters and documents—including their marriage certificate. As she spoke, Daisy whacked the pile of papers in time with her words.

'You *need* to have *family* and it's the *name* that makes all the difference. Connections. Blood lines. It makes you who you are.' The table wobbled.

The chair scraped against the hard dirt floor when he pushed it back and stood. As he moved, the heat defined his very existence. It tightened around him, making it hard to breathe and the scones were burning in the belly of the Pivot stove. Pilgrim opened the oven door and felt the hairs on his arms sizzle. He took the tray of scones to the table, tipped them onto the pile of papers and, looking for relief from the oven-like heat inside the cottage, looked out through the open window at the cows.

'Ask the natives,' she said. 'It's all about family.'

Daisy and her natives.

'I wrote to your Aunt, in fact,' she said. 'By all accounts, it seems you are entitled to claim the name you've taken.'

'Daisy, by what right ... ?'

‘It seems you distinctly resemble the Admiral’s brother. So, in this, I understand your having lied to me. About your name.’

She pulled on the corner of a letter and dragged it from beneath the hillock of crumbling scones. He took the letter from her hand, and scanned it. It told him ... it told *her* ... that he had relatives in Renmark, South Australia and that he should visit them, soon.

Daisy smeared butter on a scone.

‘And ... ’ She flicked crumbs from the table onto the floor. ‘I do understand why you were untruthful about your age.’

Pilgrim nodded. He had been only twenty and had changed his birth-date so that it told the minister that he was twenty-one. ‘I was in a hurry to marry you.’

‘Yes. Yes,’ she said. Her hand reached to her throat and she tapped her collarbone.

‘What I don’t want to understand ... ’

‘It doesn’t *matter*, Daisy ...’

‘What I don’t want to try to *un-der-stand*, is why you would steal a useless piece of jewellery and give it to me.’ She sighed. Moisture collected on the rim of her eyes. She turned her face away. Her small ear turned pink.

‘Daisy?’

She moved her eyes, and turned her head toward him.

‘I’ll make it right.’

He leaned toward her, reached a hand to her face, intending to pull her close, to press his lips against her—to reclaim her. His knee rested between her thighs. He pressed outward with his legs.

She slapped his face. ‘Get lost!’

§

When Harvey looked up, his expression suddenly changed and he appeared both sympathetic and exasperated. Pilgrim raised his eyebrow.

Harvey's top lip twisted sarcastically. 'It's about the shearing. It's too much for me. Not my cup of tea.'

Pilgrim felt his insides tense up. 'And you'll be heading back to Sydney? Get yourself a desk in a corner office?'

'That's the plan, Mr P.'

'There's better money in horses,' Pilgrim said. 'For me.'

Harvey was indifferent.

Pilgrim went on. 'I've decided to rent a paddock at Bogan Gate. Some mates and me, I mean. We'll clean it up. I can make some money out of training the players and their ponies.'

Harvey straightened up. His voice cracked. 'So what's it now? Steeplechase for Cavalier?'

'Polo!'

'Oh yes.' Harvey said, quietly. 'Polo!' Harvey shrugged his new, broad shoulders. He grimaced only slightly and returned to reading the paper. From behind the paper he mumbled, 'So long as it isn't bicycle racing. Although, there's nothing like a piece of metal to display your elegance.'

'Nor a sheep,' said Pilgrim, grinning.

Harvey laughed.

Pilgrim gave him a comical sneer and then drove his point. 'Polo,' he said. 'That's where the money is. I could use your help.'

Harvey snapped back. 'Not a chance!'

§

Pilgrim leaned forward. It was time to confront the boy. The newspaper was spread across the table. 'Did you know, Harvey,' he said, 'that if a man wanted to, and if he had the right lawyer, perhaps ... say some person who had a special interest in the rights of writers. Mr Paterson, for instance. If a man wanted to, he could sue someone for stealing his words and using them as his own.'

Pilgrim slid the paper around in a loop so that it was facing Harvey, right way up on the table. He pointed at the words that had caught his attention. It was a poem.

‘That’s a poem about Mrs Gordon,’ Pilgrim said, and, to demonstrate that he already knew the words, he closed his eyes and recited the lines aloud.

I’ve packed your kit in a carpet bag
and your wretched ungodly clock
I say farewell, to the merciless bell
I’ll be roused instead by the cock

‘I wrote that,’ he said. ‘I wrote it the day I left Raper Street and you found me in the oviduct at the end of the Tank Stream. That’s my poem. Harvey. How’d it get in *The Bulletin*?’

Harvey shook his head and shrugged.

Pilgrim grinned. He was getting used to Harvey’s insolence. ‘It’s published with the by-line A Harvey. I suppose you wouldn’t happen to know somebody with the by-line ‘A Harvey’ now, would you?’

Harvey tugged at the newspaper, but Pilgrim gripped it and stared into Harvey’s eyes. Harvey stared back, pupils, black and huge.

‘Stick to polo, Mr P?’

‘Oh, hear, hear, Harvey. I intend to,’ said Pilgrim, ‘I’ll be building that polo field.’ Pilgrim’s mind went back to an old insult in the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette*. He wondered if Democrat would have the courage to show up and defend the ‘real men’ against aristocrats and the gentlemen. ‘The first game I hold on that field will be the immigrants versus the natural-born Australians,’ he said.

‘And who will you represent, P?’

Pilgrim smiled. ‘I’ll be on the men’s team. And, since you’re so interested in my business, Harvey, why don’t you supply the trophy?’

That afternoon, Harvey sat on the edge of the bed in the hotel. He held in his hands the empty Arnott's Special Issue Christmas Tin and traced his fingers over the raised impression of the parrot. Suddenly, he stuffed it into the bottom of his bag, underneath his belongings, and he was ready for the early morning trip the next day. He visited Cavalier in the yard, to say goodbye. He threw his arms around Cavalier's neck and promised he'd be back in time to see him on the polo field. The game was set for December.

When he was done, Harvey turned to look up the main street of Parkes. Nothing changes in a small town, except for the seasonal flux in population. Shearing season would see the town full of rowdy shearers of a Sunday night, and during the off season, hawkers, swaggies and gold prospectors trickled in and out. Today, the town was falling asleep after the final brawls had ended, and all that was left of the shearing team was footprints, and empty bottles and horse dung littered along the street gutters. Across the road from the carriage builder's yard, the blacksmith pulled his gate shut for the evening. Harvey waved and then walked along the street, past the site of Pilgrim's accident, past the railway siding, over the lines and out toward the creek.

He crossed the paddock with a strange sense of nostalgia, feeling that an era of his life had come to an end, and, strangely, he had come to an understanding. There would be no regrets. Pilgrim had lived up to Harvey's hopes, and even though those hopes were never very high, Pilgrim had filled a space in his life; he had taken care of him when there had been nobody else.

When he came to the bush line, he was surprised to discover that he could step over the fence without having to climb up one of the posts, and realized that the last time he'd been there was over two years ago, when he was fourteen. When he had crossed the fence, he looked back to discover that it was the exact same spot as he had come to when he had run away from the cut-out din of the first shed he ever worked. And then, he saw her.

Better's bones had become bleached, and yet, the protected position under the bush meant that she had been undisturbed by wild animals. Harvey could make out the outline of her body, and amongst the bones, tufts of her yellow fur had melded with the dirt. He looked around for the pups, but found only one tiny fragment of a skull. The rest, Harvey presumed, had dissolved into dust. Harvey's arms prickled with gooseflesh as he remembered the way Pilgrim had lifted a rock and smashed the small helpless animals into pulp.

And then, in the back of his mind, Harvey heard Nicker's voice calling out for Better. It made him sick to the stomach. If he never had to hear that voice again, it would be too soon. Nicker had as much terrified Harvey as he had revolted him, but the old man's mantra played itself in Harvey's thoughts: 'Are you with the union? Good!' Harvey knew that it had been a lie.

He stumbled down into the creek bed, holding back the chilling thought that he might find Nicker there, all the while knowing that Nicker was already in Sydney, probably on top of a prostitute. And he thought of Molly, Dot and Ju and he remembered his mother.

She'd had hair the colour of mouse fur, but it was long and soft in Harvey's memory. It came to her waist. And it wasn't a wig. Her hands were pink and her fingers were long enough to have been able to play a piano, although she never did. Harvey was sure his mother would have been capable of anything with her superior intellect and her quick wit. She was funny. She was so very beautiful. Harvey knew that she had been well educated, but, growing up he had never questioned her occupation. He had only accepted it. It was just the way things were.

It wasn't until that day, when he had come across the bleached remains of Better's body, that Harvey knew that although his mother had died of a failed abortion, it was not what had taken her life. As he hunkered down next to a very familiar bush, he realized that it was the child who had lived that had robbed her of her life. It was the illegitimate child. It was him.

The very familiar bush had kept a secret for two years. The last light of the sun bounced off the gleaming metal casing of the alarm clock that had fallen to the base of the bush. Harvey reached in and pulled it out. The gold still shone, but the face was weatherworn and the winding mechanism had seized. It brought him back to Pilgrim and his wish for a polo trophy and, suddenly, Harvey knew what he would do. He would go to Fryingpan and commission him to carve a horse, and rub it with yellow ochre. He thought back, then, over his life and he thought about Pilgrim and his charms. Harvey realized then that even the ugliest piece of driftwood can be made to shine like gold.

41

When he saw the trophy, Harvey could have wept with pride. Fryingpan had used banksia wood to carve a three-inch-high brumby and a rider. The horse was pulling back, one front leg bent, hoof pawing at the air.

Fryingpan's carving had followed the honey-coloured grain that curved over the horse's neck to design the mane and followed it through the body of the horse to where it ended in a spectacular, thick tail that flared the full width of the horse's rump. Every second line of wood grain was raised to give the affect of individual hairs in the mane and tail. The horse's nostrils were flared, opening out so intimately that Harvey felt he could peer into the model's mouth and expect to see its teeth. The eyes were bright, painted black and polished.

The rider was detailed on a saddle with bag and wallet at the horse's side and his boots in stirrups. Instead of a polo stick, the rider carried a rifle and bayonet, the barrel resting on the horse's head, between its ears. With one hand on the reins, the rider gazed outward from under a slouched hat.

The horse and rider shone with polished yellow ochre, and was contrasted against its stand. It sat atop a wormy, rotting section of fencepost.

Harvey wrapped it up in rags, and placed it on top of the tin in the bottom of his bag, to protect it during the trip back to Parkes. It was a beautiful thing; the horse, the soldier and the gun, but as a polo trophy, it was absolutely inappropriate.

42

December had brought a heatwave but the polo field was ready. Pilgrim was happy with it, and on the day of the game, he proudly surveyed the field with Tommy trotting along at his heels. Spectators were arriving and mulling around. With dogs and children running about.

Forty ponies agitated, tethered in strings of four and six to the railings along the outside of the polo field. Their manes were trimmed to a hedge and their tails were braided; The British team's eighteen ponies were tied with blue ribbons, and the rest were in red.

Pilgrim had personally trained four of the ponies on the British team; Lady Smith, Kimberley, Cavalier and Cronje. Lady Smith lifted her head as Pilgrim walked toward her. He remembered how well she'd taken the saddle the first time. She was well behaved, but a little too placid.

Kimberley recognised him also. Pilgrim reached up and stroked the pony's velvety nose. The little Arab was agile. He could turn right angles at pace: Cavalier would be perfect if he could manage the same, Pilgrim thought, and at that, his leg twinged. But then again, he reminded himself, he had always expected much of Cav, who had proved he was an all-rounder: after all they'd both cleared that six-foot fence—albeit separately.

Over by the water tank, tethered on his own, stomped the most determined animal Pilgrim had ever known: Cronje. During his training, the podgy gelding had managed to throw Pilgrim twice. Cronje's rider was supervising the groom who was preparing the pony's legs, but cooperation wasn't high on Cronje's list of priorities. The lad was flung backwards onto his backside, stood up, wiped his hands together and tried again. The groom threw a rag into a pail of water, picked up a towel and reached for the pony's front leg. His voice deepened into a soothing murmur as he spoke to the beast and felt around behind him for a blue bandage. Pilgrim sidled up, smothering a laugh.

'If he shows any of that during the game, he'll be escorted from the field. He's downright arrogant,' Pilgrim said. Pilgrim knew, though, with a touch of pride

since he'd tamed that beast, that if anyone could win this game, it was Cronje. Although he was slow to turn, Cronje wouldn't stop at anything.

Pilgrim looked out across the field. Victor Foy, the Australian team captain, was squatted down inspecting the playing area, stroking the ground with his hand. The field was good and flat, but the grass was dry. Pilgrim walked over and asked, 'All set, Victor?'

'All's well,' Foy replied, nodding as he stood up to greet Pilgrim. 'Fine turf,' he joked. He stretched out his hand to shake, and as he gripped Pilgrim's hand, he turned his head to the side, running an eye over the lines of ponies. 'The competition looks a keen lot.'

Foy's voice deepened and he leaned forward. 'So, you're captain of the British team? Traitor.' He gave Pilgrim a friendly punch on the arm.

Pilgrim grinned. 'I'll give you a tip. Keep an eye on Cronje.'

Foy was a tidy jockey with his riding whip tucked into the band of his white pants and his red shirt was stretched too tightly across his chest. Despite everything, Pilgrim had an idea that Foy didn't understand at all the game of polo; it was in the training of the horses. He straightened up and ran a hand down his chest. The game was won already.

§

Pilgrim sensed something was wrong when he saw Nicker arrive. In the marquee on the other side of the polo field, a group of people had gathered under the stark white press tents. Pilgrim heard the thin clink of glasses and followed Nicker's movement toward the crowd. Nicker seemed agitated. His movements were jerky as he strode toward the press, turning his head from side to side as though he was in a hurry to find something.

Pilgrim kept half an eye on Nicker while surveying the crowd of journalists. He knew the editor of the *The Parkes Champion* had arrived, but he was looking for his mate, Andrew Paterson. At a distance Paterson cut an unmistakable shape with an

Akubra tilted upward on his head and his left arm tucked in to the side of his body. He found him. Paterson was with a thin lad with a waistcoat that sagged off his shoulders, the rotund Mr Stephens and some women dressed formally in gloves and hats. All of them drew circles in the air with their noses.

A light breeze flapped the sides of the tent as Pilgrim headed toward it. As he approached, he wiped his hands down the front of his shirt to dry his palm and strode up to Paterson with his hand outstretched. 'Gentlemen,' he said. 'Ladies ...'

Paterson looked sideways at Pilgrim, placed his beer on the table, swung around and reached out a hand.

'Impressive,' Paterson said, quietly but unconvincingly. He looked out over the field. For a moment, Pilgrim hoped that Paterson hadn't noticed the bumpy patch in the safety zone behind the goals. From this angle, looking out from the press tent, the field appeared flat and Pilgrim was satisfied when Paterson, at last, gave him an approving nod.

'Bit hard to get it green out here,' Pilgrim said, apologetically, and Paterson gleamed back, eyes smiling.

But, although the new club members murmured around Pilgrim with a soothing buzz, he sensed something heavy sitting in the pit of his stomach. Perhaps it was the twinge in his leg that plagued him, or perhaps the whole polo thing was reminding him a little too much of home—if it wasn't for the heat and flies. Perhaps it was the man with thinning blond hair and a thick chin who stood at the edge of the marquee staring inward. Pilgrim shifted on his feet, glanced at Paterson and twitched his head sideways to indicate toward the man. 'Know him?'

'His name's Bertodano.'

Pilgrim glanced away. 'Never heard of 'im.' He dismissed the uncomfortable feeling, telling himself he was over-tired. Nervous. Excited. That was all.

He chatted with Paterson, but kept an ear on the other reporters as they traded notes. He overheard Frank, the editor of the *Richmond and Windsor Gazette*, telling his companion that the game was the story of the year. Paterson had heard it too. He

sniffed. 'You trained many of these ponies, yourself? I see a few brumbies amongst them.'

Pilgrim knew it was meant as an insult, but took it as a compliment, instead. 'Never a horse we couldn't ride.'

Paterson laughed, a little too sardonically, and then pulled a pencil from his pocket and made some notes in a small notebook. As he was doing it, Pilgrim heard a familiar voice, and suddenly remembered Nicker. He spun around. The movement hurt the leg.

'Nicker!' Nicker nudged forward.

'Pilgrim.' Nicker said, elbowing people as he came. He seemed unhappy. 'Mate!'

Pilgrim brushed him off with a nod. Under his breath he muttered, 'Get lost. Bigger off.'

But Nicker surged forward, his face red with anger. 'You have some explaining to do.'

'Nicker,' Pilgrim hissed, turning his eyes toward Paterson, who was watching, pencil poised above notebook. 'Whatever it is, can it wait until after the game?'

Nicker glared at him. Pilgrim widened his eyes. 'After!' He repeated.

Nicker pointed his finger at Pilgrim's face. 'All right. After the game, P. I'll see you after the game. But I want warn you. You've started a war. And I intend to end it. Today!'

Pilgrim felt a blush rise in his face and glanced at Paterson, but The Banjo was enlivened. 'War, eh?' he said.

§

A thunderous noise distracted the crowd, and for a moment everyone went silent. Pilgrim shaded his eyes from the sun. He looked out over the horizon, where a mob of cattle rumbled in front of a team of dogs and drovers. They were heading for the

creek, he supposed, for a drink, and then they'd move easy along the new stretch of railway line from Bogan Gate to Coradgerie or Condobolin or on to Mordialloc. Above the sound of the drumming cattle, he heard the faint clatter of a shoed horse on a section of rocky ground, a sound that sent a thrill up his spine as he reminisced: the splendid vision of stock-hands as they crackled the whip; the clink of bit and of billycan tapping against saddles. Nostalgia washed him blue for just a moment.

Those were the days up in Queensland. Before Sydney. He'd spend weeks at a time ambling along behind a herd, teaching Aboriginal stock-hands the songs he knew and writing impromptu verse to the rhythm of the slow trot of his mount.

From the distance, the drovers and their horses looked like toy soldiers and there, also, a glint of light flashed off a belt buckle or a tin lid like a heliograph. Flash-flash-flash. Flaaaasssh. Flaaaash. Flaaaassh. Flash-flash-flash. Pilgrim turned away.

§

The trumpeter hailed the five minute call for the polo to begin. Pilgrim hurriedly excused himself from Paterson, ran across the field and, with a running jump, mounted Cavalier. The umpires called the players up. The dogs were sent to heel. In the centre of the field the players lined up on their ponies. A row of red. A row of blue. Underscored by a line of white. Pilgrim won the toss for England with a two-headed coin.

Swinglebar took the shot. The ball flew between the pony's legs and out behind the line of Australians, a metre off the ground. Swinglebar spurred his pony and went after it, following the line of the ball. He raised his mallet high in the air as he cantered forward. From twenty yards back from the goalposts, he took the offside neck-shot and sent the ball down the field.

Pilgrim held his breath as Bertie Balcome, on Kimberly, swung around at pace to trap the ball. He flicked it back, but Swinglebar trapped it, turned, and then bruised it forward. As Swinglebar leaned over the pony's neck to take another shot,

Arthur Pike on Suffolk cut across the line of the ball and the umpire blew the whistle. It was a penalty 1.

Swinglebar raised his mallet and hit. Keeping his eye on the low-flying missile, Pike cut through again. Pilgrim clutched his head. Pike! Just then, he heard a shout from the sidelines. He saw out of the corner of his eye that the spectator, Bertodano, had his mouth open. Before anyone could stop him, Bertodano had taken another breath.

‘Foul,’ he yelled.

§

Pilgrim saw a blur of black and white stripes as the umpire swung around and glared at Bertodano, but while the umpire was distracted, the head flew from Swinglebar's mallet. The cylinder spun end over end. Sailing through the air, the mallet head turned cartwheels, as the misguided ball clunked into Kimberly's front leg and rolled across the ground.

Like a missile the head continued to catapult upward toward Bertie, who, distracted by the hit on Kimberly's leg, leant forward to look for the ball. Behind him, Suffolk reared and got in the way of Lady Smith. Lady Smith slid forward, head down, and tried to stop. She threw Paddy Ryan over her neck.

The mallet struck its target. A streak of blood appeared on Bertie's face. Bertie slumped forward in the saddle.

Suddenly, as though from nowhere, Cronje appeared. He looked around, wild and excited, his nostrils flared and his ears back, teeth bared, and before his rider, Ed, could pull him up, he took a bite at Kimberley's rump. Kimberley pigrooted, dropping Bertie to the ground. The kick collided with Cronje's head causing him to shy to the right. Ed fell off.

The umpire threw both arms in the air. There was nothing Pilgrim could do but watch as the scene collapsed into a train wreck. Cronje was caught and taken off the field. The game was over after the first chukka.

§

Half an hour later, the field was cleared, Bertie was on a stretcher and the sounds of chaos erupted from the press tent. Pilgrim dismounted at the sidelines, scratched his head, and turned to survey the scene. He had some explaining to do. He hitched Cavalier to a post and headed in the direction of the press.

Nicker met him halfway across the field. He held a crumpled hat under Pilgrim's nose. Pilgrim tried to step around him, but Nicker stepped back, and with a mad grin, seized the hat between two hands and twisted it. 'Do you want to know where the rest of him is?'

'Who?'

'Your little mate, Harvey.'

Pilgrim stared at him until the words registered in his mind. What was he doing with Harvey?

'Follow me.' Nicker turned and strode away.

Pilgrim followed. 'What is this, Nicker? What are you on about? We've squared our debts,' he said as he followed. Nicker led him across the field and around the back of the outdoor conveniences.

'Nicker!'

When he rounded the corner, Pilgrim was confronted by two large men. They were on either side of Harvey, who struggled in their grip. Harvey looked up, his eyes glistening with tears. Four more men stood back from the scene, their feet parted, fists clenched. Two of them strode forward and grabbed Pilgrim by the arms.

'What is this?'

The man on the left of Harvey twisted a punch into Harvey's stomach. Harvey gasped and tried to crumple forward.

'That's a start,' said Nicker.

'You coward!' Pilgrim said. He struggled against the grip of the men.

Harvey groaned.

In a moment of clarity, Pilgrim heard the handlers behind the sheds, mulling around the horses with lowered voices. Feet scuffed over gravel. In his confusion, he thought about yelling for help, but realized it would be futile. One punch could kill Harvey before anyone heard. Behind the sheds, somebody dropped something metallic into a bucket and swore. Pilgrim looked at Nicker. 'All right. What do you want?'

Nicker's eyes narrowed. 'A little matter of a union ticket,' he said. One of the men, standing nearby, handed Nicker a three-foot length of four-by-two. Nicker stepped toward Harvey.

Pilgrim hollered. 'No!'

Harvey started a scream, but it was too late. The plank hit him in the face. His eyes were glassed over and his head hung. Nicker raised the plank again. Pilgrim heard the sounds of breaking bone and mashing flesh, but his eyes wouldn't focus. He pulled his arms so hard that he felt his shoulders pop out of their sockets. He was aware that he was screaming. Finally, Nicker threw down the weapon. With his bare fist, he swung back. 'And this one's for Better,' Nicker yelled, and then, like a single pistol shot, his fist smashed into Harvey's face.

A loud crack and Harvey fell.

§

Harvey didn't see Christmas. A month after the fight, Pilgrim sat on a park bench across the street from Sydney Hospital, feeling like a thief, with Harvey's carpet bag at his feet. He reached into the bag, felt around and pulled out a tin. Harvey was unconscious in a hospital bed. It wasn't good. He tapped the three-four beat of a hymnal on the lid of the Arnott's Special Christmas Issue Biscuit Tin. Pictured on the lid, a red and green Rosella pecked at a crumbling biscuit that it held in a dangerous claw. A sprig of holly decorated each corner of the tin, and Pilgrim ran his thumb over the raised impression. And he wondered how long it would be before *he* would see a bough of holly or Christmas snow.

He remembered how in England, the elm leaves would turn to red in October. In November, leaves fall. December freezes the lake. Catherine and Annie would visit the farm. Catherine would sit at the edge of the lake, watching Annie skating in figures of eight over the frosted surface: Annie in her green coat and red ear muffs. *You look like a Christmas tree with those baubles on your head.* In his mind's eye, Pilgrim sees Annie sliding down a snow-powder hill on a blue toboggan as time slides into New Year's Eve. Annie, Pilgrim and the Uncle sitting around the open fire, sipping hot milk and nutmeg, the sound of the long-case clock, its metronomes incrementing towards the midnight gong. Tick ... Tock ... Tick ... Tock.

§

The clock had shrunk. And yet, he felt he was looking at the face of a friend who he hadn't seen in years. The features had changed so much that his mind struggled to recognise the older different face. He was confused. The clock should have been bigger and shinier. He turned it over to check the inscription on the back. 'He who loses his life shall find it.' A line had been scratched right around the face of the clock where the hour hand must have been bent and rubbed against the surface as it turned and turned. So much time had gone by.

§

January, 1897

Nowhere in particular

My Dear Harvey,

A job was going over on the *SS Oronsay* for a deckhand on a passage back to England and I thought I'd try my luck at it, but the captain turned me down. He told me he couldn't see how a so-

called 'aristocrat' would stoop so low as to scrub the decks for a living. Perhaps the guvn'r saw me coming and found a way to keep me out of old England for another year or two. Perhaps it was the Democrat.

I saw Paterson yesterday. He was impressed with our little polo club and said he might send out a moke or two next season. I'd like to hang around and see how it goes, but I'll be gone by then. I was thinking of heading over West for a bit of gold but it can't be done, I'm afraid, not now. Paterson hit me for an unpaid loan and I overextended my welcome when I fell short a quid. My IOU was rejected quicker than the time Cronje ejected me from the saddle last summer.

I've decided to head bush for a spell. Wil's got a friend who owns a station over near Renmark, so while I'm there I'll look in on the relatives. Perhaps the Admiral's cousin will spot me for a quid, if not a job.

There's a notebook of rough drafts. If you could get them published, I'd be happy for you. Otherwise, do whatever you want with them. All the money's gone, so take it as payment for what I owe you.

I'll look in on you next time I'm back in Sydney. Good luck to you, young Harvey. Stay well clear of Chinkanjavjapmaloolie.

Fare-thee-well.

His Nibs.

PS: Keep the clock. I found it amongst your possessions. Always knew you'd taken it, but keep it. You've earned it for all I've put you through. Note the inscription on it.

As to Sydney, it still stank of horse shit. Pilgrim leaned on the cane—Henry Lawson's cane—his symbol of opulence. His fingers had become one with the smooth rosewood handle, and the silver tip that clicked on the street as he walked tapped out the rhythm of his steps. Tapping along the street. Tapping along, like a Sydney toff who thinks his horse's shit doesn't stink—no, not at all.

Pilgrim walked to the post office and went inside. He approached the postmaster and asked him to wrap up the notebook with the letter he'd written to Harvey, and put them in the top of Harvey's bag to be delivered to the hospital. When the postmaster asked him why he couldn't just take the things to the hospital himself, Pilgrim explained that he couldn't bear to see Harvey's dying, shrinking body ever again. He'd given up hope that he'd wake up.

'This way,' he said, 'it seems like he's alive and well and I can remember Harvey as a mate.' The postmaster nodded and then silently wrapped the book in brown paper as Pilgrim watched. He pushed the bag to the side and quietly took Pilgrim's money.

When Pilgrim turned to leave, the postmaster said, 'He was a good boy.'

'Oh. Here.' Pilgrim turned back, and handed the walking cane to the postmaster. 'Include this,' he said. 'It used to be Lawson's. Harvey might make a quid out of selling it.' He turned and left.

As Pilgrim walked out onto the street, he heard the sound of skipping and turned to face the sounds.

'Hey little girl,' he said.

She had stringy hair and a dank dress. She dropped a hoop and twirled around to look at him. Head full of lice. The dirty pink bow.

'I have something for you.' He delved into his pocket for a handful of change.

'Here. Go buy a toffee-apple.'

The puzzled girl tilted her head, and then turned. Ran away.

He saw, in her shape and movements, the workhouse children. He was not afraid. Their sharp little fists were far away now, their rat-like eyes blind to him, their

voices faded like the receding cries of seagulls on the shore as a ship sails out to sea. The little rag-tag girl skipped to the end of the path and then planted both feet, thump, onto the ground, jumped, and spun around. Her hands gripped her hips, her cheeks pouted, she poked out a tongue.

But she was tiny. Fragile. A child. Just a tiny, tiny child, and Sydney loomed around her: its streets reeking of mischief.

43

February 1897

Falling. To speak of this sensation as 'falling' is a misnomer. It is not possible to perpetually fall. Harvey's sleeping mind reasoned, I don't want to fall.

A woman's voice penetrated his dream. Her words were rhythmic. He strained to listen.

'I am reading to you from the *Sydney Morning Herald*.' Her voice was loud and deliberate. 'Today's date is the 5th of February, 1897.'

He dreamed of a giant hand reaching down from the sky and catching him. His reasoning mind told him that the hand had come between the falling subject and the ground. Split infinitive, it said. The woman's words continued to disrupt his thoughts.

'In the course of an interview yesterday, Sir James Silverwright, K.C.M.G. Commissioner for Public Works in the Cape Ministry, said that he refused to stand quiet while the Boers, under the guise of seeking redress for the Jameson raid, aimed at the creation of a republic from the Cape to Zambesi.'

His dream-self peered over the edge of the giant hand. Below him, a line of men dressed as guerrillas aimed rifles at another line of guerrillas. A bull appeared amongst the guerrillas and reared up like a horse. The face of the bull became Nicker's face looming toward him.

Harvey's comatose mind was confused. A guerrilla ran up behind the bull and took it by the tail. Mixed metaphor, said Harvey's reason. He stepped back from the edge of the hand.

Harvey's eyes opened. He saw the woman as a shade of blue, a ghostly figure, drifting in and drifting out.

There's something wrong here. His eyes closed again. The dream resumed. From his position on the big hand, Harvey watched men and bulls dancing around a doorknob with guns and bags of gold. Pilgrim appeared. He rattled the bars of a gaol cell. There's something not quite right, Harvey thought.

The hand tilted. He slid along the surface of the hand and started to fall.

‘Subject-verb disagreement!’ He yelled and woke up.

When he opened his eyes, Harvey thought he was dead, because he saw from behind the silhouette of a priest, facing the window. Sunlight highlighted the silhouette of the priest, so that he looked like an Angel. Harvey tried to speak. Instead of words, he heard himself moan. He rolled over and saw the nurse, sitting in a chair, her mouth gaping, the newspaper fallen into her lap. Harvey knew then, that he wasn’t dead. He was in a hospital, but he also knew that he was alive. In a wave of pins and needles across his face, the pain returned to his jaw. And he couldn’t feel his legs. Harvey’s mind struggled back from sleep.

He tried his voice again. ‘Where am I?’ It came out croaky, but heard the movement of the priest as he turned around.

‘I thought you were dead,’ the priest said. Suddenly he was by the bed, kneeling and holding Harvey’s hand. Tears spilled out of his eyes.

Harvey’s waking eyes saw a figure dressed in black cloth. ‘Fryingpan ...’

Part Four

War

44

Redgums stood like sentries. Shags draped themselves amongst their leaves like so many pairs of black long johns hung out to dry. Amongst the tall grass, further up the bank, a pair of willy-wagtails danced like quavers on a musical score, in and out, over, under, up and down.

The Murray with its placid width and its flat pink-brown surface supported a trail of paddle steamers whose long thin moans melted outward toward the setting sun.

‘Ah. The Murray.’

The paddle-boat panted. The steady throb echoed off the banks of the Murray River. The muddy water rippled around the boat, and a bleached egret perched like the statue of an Angel on a dead red rivergum that edged out of the water.

Pilgrim made notes for a poem, adding poetic licence, changing gumtrees into willows, and changing muddy waters into an opal sparkling river. A fairyland. Some form of heaven.

A priest sang in E minor with his arms outstretched; his head, sleeves and frock make the shape of an ankh. Standing on the bow of the *Mary Anne*, he sang the hymnal ‘Be not afraid.’

Others on board the boat join the singing. ‘Be not afraid’ they sing. The song slow-waltzes across the water, bending and twisting through the scrub and around the tree trunks, like a black snake.

You shall cross the barren desert,
but you shall not die of thirst.
You shall wander far in safety,
though you do not know the way.

Behind the paddle steamer a wake followed like an arrowhead. The engine cut out with a bang. The pulsing stopped. The paddle steamer moved along the water, past Paringa and slid, andante, into Renmark.

§

The West Australian, Monday, October 16, 1899.

The real grievance lies underneath all, the absolute need for the Transvaal to recognise the paramountcy of England in Southern Africa. This at least could not be left in doubt in the interests no less of South Africa than of England, of the future civilisation of the continent as fully as of the integrity and consolidation of the Empire. But if England is to become the dominant power of South Africa, without fear of challenge, it is above all things essential that her march forward should not only be irresistible and decisive, but rapid.

45

Harvey sat in his wheelchair at his desk in the office he shared with his boss at *The Richmond and Windsor Gazette*. Apart from the broadsheet that he was reading, a foot-high pile of manuscripts at his left hand that waited to be edited, and a handful of freshly sharpened pencils standing point up in a jam tin, his desk was clear. Harvey closed the newspaper and scowled at Frank. He was angry. He'd just finished reading the 'The Town Gossip' column in the early edition. The paper was still hot from the press and the smell of wet ink wafted up from the page as it settled on Harvey's desk. Apparently Pilgrim had skipped off to Africa without a word to him, but the gossip column knew all about it. And to add to Harvey's distress, they'd defamed his friend. Pilgrim was many things, but ... 'What's this?' Harvey said, tapping his pointer finger on the desk. 'A bad rider? And is it true? Has he gone?'

Frank looked up from his typewriter and peered at Harvey over the top of his glasses. His hand subconsciously touched his right ear, a habit developed from years of reaching for his pencil at the hint of a story. It was a habit that had created a patch of flattened hair on his already balding head, above his ear. He twitched his moustache and shook his head as if in disbelief.

Harvey was perplexed. 'It's been two years since I've heard from him, and you didn't think to mention that he's gone off to war?'

The 'truth' according to *The Richmond and Windsor Gazette* was that Corporal Pilgrim, of *The Bulletin*, was amongst the South Australian Mounted Rifles with the second contingent that had left from Adelaide on the 26th of January, and here was Harvey, reading about it one week later: in his own newspaper. He was seething.

Harvey scowled. 'Frank!' he said. His voice came out high, 'he was my friend. You could have told me!'

Frank gave Harvey a steady gaze. Harvey watched as Frank's line of sight moved over the wheels of the chair and up Harvey's crippled body to meet his eyes.

'He was my friend,' Harvey repeated, his voice getting louder. Frank didn't answer.

Harvey grabbed his wheels, backed out from his writing desk, spun around and sped out the front door of the *Richmond and Windsor* office, leaving Frank shouting at him from behind. 'No friend would leave you like that. I thought you'd be glad of it. That's he's gone to get his head shot off.'

Harvey wheeled himself along the bumpy footpath at the side of George Street as he headed toward the docks. He followed the sounds of fanfare where a troop ship was due to leave. If he couldn't say goodbye to Pilgrim, in person, he'd at least wave to the troops that left from New South Wales. He lost track of time as his anger propelled him, and his thoughts were on the Pilgrim he once knew. He had missed him. It was one thing to run off to South Australia, but it was quite another to go to war without a word.

As he pushed his way through the crowd that had gathered around Semicircular Quay, Harvey tried to picture Pilgrim dressed in uniform. It wouldn't look right. Harvey shook his head and focussed on a stranger in the New South Wales Contingent, who led the parade. He could not bring to his mind an image of Pilgrim riding tall in a saddle, dressed in that dun tunic. He could not see him taking orders or falling into line. Harvey blinked.

He saw Pilgrim only in the surrounds of the bush, only with dust at the heels of Cavalier. His image of Pilgrim refused to adjust as he watched the troops marching up the gangplank and arranging themselves along the deck of the ship. Pink streamers spiralled down from the deck, along the edges of the harbour, and curled up on the wavelets, leaking streaks of colour into the water.

Harvey watched as the ship started to move. From the edge of the dock, he saw the troops pressed against the railings, leaning over, waving their arms in the air to the strains of 'Rule Britannia' that the crowd sang in a roar. He moved his gaze along the line of men looking for a shape and size that reminded him of Pilgrim. He wasn't there. When Harvey closed his eyes and tried to recall Pilgrim's face, the grey, bright eyes, all he could see was his own reflection.

When Harvey was a boy, Pilgrim took him up to Nyngan. The Bogan River ran all year long, and so it became their favourite camping spot through the summer months. It was cooler there than on the Goobang Creek that dried up in summer. On the Bogan, they fished and swam away the heat of the day, dissolving their shearing aches and pains; it was there that Pilgrim had taught him how to swim. At the end of their first season of shearing, his bones and muscles hurt; Pilgrim had said the Bogan River would make it better, and he'd been right. It did.

It was one of those days when the sun seems to be either rising or setting all day long; the stillness, the bliss of a long, sleepy day that had ended with a belly full of pork and beer. He saw himself reflected in the still, brown water, amused by his own face, half white, half dirtied with mud. Except for his long johns, he was naked, his small shoulders hunched, his collarbone protruded. He was sat on a dead tree that had fallen at the edge of the river, dangling his bare legs into the water. The cool water caressed his blistered toes.

A white crane stood, silent, at the end of the grey branch. It arched its neck to look downward. It seemed to be sucked, head first, into its image.

The surface of the river was so still that it showed every detail of the far bank, and of the sky, and in that, Harvey saw that the water reflected blue with floating balls of white cloud. There were two boys: one on the log, the other upside down in the water. The inverted one waved at itself and then dove upward, headfirst into its own body.

§

Sunlight glinted off the spokes. The wheelchair smelled of leather. It teetered over the water. In it, Harvey sat straining to lean forward enough to see the ship disappearing out the mouth of the bay, when he heard a voice behind him. He wheeled around.

‘Fryingpan!

Fryingpan's black robes contrasted with his skin. When he saw him, looking more like a priest than a white man could, Harvey felt betrayed. Fryingpan stepped up to the wheelchair and peered over Harvey's head, across the bay where the afternoon sun glistened off the wavelets in silver worms.

'Pilgrim's gone to war,' Harvey said. He felt strain in his voice.

Fryingpan stepped back and looked down at him. His eyes were steady. 'That Pilgrim nearly got you killed,' he said. He grabbed his hips.

Harvey felt like yelling, but he took a deep breath and controlled his voice. 'Of all the people who ought to know how to forgive ...' There was no answer. Harvey knew that Fryingpan couldn't argue.

'Take me back to the office, Fry.' Fryingpan stepped around behind him, gripped the handles of the wheelchair and started to push. The wheels vibrated over the ground. Harvey felt every bump. Every bump made him madder.

While Harvey yelled insults, Fryingpan pushed him back along George Street to the *Windsor and Richmond* establishment. He bumped him up the steps and rolled him through the building to the door of Harvey's corner office. By the time they arrived, Fryingpan was mad, too. He aimed Harvey at the doorway and shoved the wheelchair forward.

One of the wheels caught the door. Harvey pelted forward and slid headfirst across the floor. The chair rolled forward. Harvey lay for a moment, feeling the cool floorboards under his hands. When he gained his composure, Harvey rolled over. He groaned, but it wasn't with pain.

Something inside of him had snapped. He was laughing: his belly heaved with laughter as he looked up at Fryingpan. Fryingpan's eyes were wide as he stared over his hands, which were clasped over his mouth; it only made him laugh louder.

'Pass ... that cane over,' Harvey said, running short of breath.

Fryingpan jumped into action, unhitched the cane from the hook by the door and held it out while Harvey used his arms to pull himself up onto the desk. He dragged his legs around it so that he was balanced, upright in front of his chair with his hands on the desk. He let go of the desk and snatched the cane with both hands,

still laughing, tears rolling down his cheeks, and then he slammed the end of the cane onto the floor to make a tripod with his feet and the cane that stood swaying in front of the priest.

‘I prayed for you,’ said Fryingpan.

At that, Harvey’s laugh came out so violently that he fell back into the chair. He rolled around to face his desk and selected a pencil from the pencil tin. Still laughing, he used it to wave at Fryingpan, but Fryingpan was already gone.

§

A witch. A frightful old woman was employed to sit in a cordoned off area of the bookshop at the front of the *Windsor* office, where the tables were draped in purple cloth, painted with gold stars. The sign read: ‘Spooks, séance and the mystic world.’ The woman glanced at Harvey, and for a moment, he saw in her scowl a vague resemblance to an expression he had seen on Pilgrim. The woman stepped forward, wrapping her shawl around her, like a bat folding its wings.

Harvey balanced on the walking cane, determined that he would never sit in the wheelchair again. ‘Tell me something, old woman,’ he said, ‘will I ever see my friend again?’

Her eyes rolled back in her head and she put on a show of shaking and raising her hands to the air. ‘He who loses his life, shall find it,’ she said.

The woman turned, and, with her robes drifting behind her, floated away.

§

April, 1900

South Africa

My Dear Harvey,

Hope you're well. A quick note before I leave Cape Town. I'm on active service here. It's too bad we never had the chance to say goodbye, but there wasn't time to write with all the training before I left from Adelaide. This is the first chance I've had since arriving to dash you a line.

There's whips of 'copy' here. You'd enjoy the challenge, but I haven't seen The Banjo or any of the Hawkesbury fellows. I might find them in the field. As to seeing you again, young Harvey, Lord knows when, but it will probably be when we meet in heaven. I'll have a hole in some part of me, although rumour is that the Boers are bad shots.

I might get back to old England in one piece yet! Remember me to *The Bulletin* and toss a bumper down your throat if you hear word of my demise.

Yours, Pilgrim.

46

The main hospital in Bloemfontein was a large wooden building that had once been a hotel on the main street. With just ninety beds, it overflowed into tents, and all of it was surrounded by a plantation of Australian gum trees. He asked around after Paterson, but The Banjo was on his way to Pietersburg. If he'd found Paterson, Pilgrim would have told him that the plantation was a small gesture to make the Australians feel at home.

When Pilgrim found himself staggering, emotionally drained, through the city of hospital tents, he tried to remember the details of a night in 1894 when he became homeless along with Martha and Mrs Nelly Gordon and the dog. He remembered how he had tried to sleep in the bricked-in oviduct that arched over the underground Tank Stream in Sydney, watching a leech playing inch-worm up his boot.

In March 1900, however, things were far worse for Pilgrim than they ever were in Sydney. In 1900, as he helped to carry wounded soldiers down to the New South Wales hospital in Bloemfontein, he remembered only that the stench of human excrement, at various times in his life, had stung in his nostrils. And he remembered, as he held his breath, some small incident at a workhouse of his childhood. What was it, now? A blocked trap? Sewerage bogging up and creeping like larva all over floorboards under the beds? But nothing; there would be nothing else during his past, present or future that quite equalled what he smelled at Bloemfontein.

The camp was a cesspit of enteric fever, dysentery and malaria. Every crack, every corner of the town, every street, every room of every building was permeated by a miasma of death. Men shivered in sweat-soaked beds; there was no distinction between the sweat and urine of officer, Briton, Canadian, New Zealander, Tommy Atkinsen or Boer on the soaking sheets.

At night the troopers all feared the thin tinny buzz of disease-carrying mosquitoes as much as the daytime clatter of the pom-pom gun. And while at night, insects hunted their skin, the Vickers-Maxim hunted the wounded in their nightmares. In their dreams, it sends a shell across the veldt into the hospital camp.

The injured with their feet blown off are the ones who know too well that the shell travels faster than the scream of its passing.

Each morning, the wheels of the ambulance cart creaked under the weight of twenty dead bodies, each body wrapped in a service blanket. Pilgrim, one morning in his daze, watched the bare foot of a dead man sticking out from under the covers—stark white against the greyness of the service blanket. The foot bobbed up and down, seemingly disembodied, and Pilgrim mused over how the foot had the appearance of a small phantom floating along behind the cart. The ambulance wheeled its way, slowly toward the corner of the gum-tree plantation.

§

Pilgrim leant forward. He was hot and hungry. The butt of his Lee-Metford dug into his inner thigh as he held it wedged against the saddle, and the weight of the bandolier full of bullets dragged on his chest. Two wallets, each stuffed a foot thick with clothing, hung on either side of the saddle. On one of the wallets he had strapped his spare boots, and on the other side he'd rolled his overcoat into a ball and tied it on with string. Behind his saddle, his backpack jostled around, loosely, and it was topped by two big picketing pegs with the sharpened ends facing the near side. By some miracle, he'd avoided tearing his breeches as he'd mounted.

He looked back from his position amongst the Mounted Rifles who lead the three hundred cavalry that crawled toward the Zand River raising billows of dust from the hooves of horses, oxen, mules and the wheels of ambulances and supply carts loaded with stores, tents and artillery as they oozed northward. In the breeze, the grass across the veldt swayed like an ocean; reefs of boulders protruded. He made a mental note of the positions of the rocky outcrops should the columns of men come under attack from Boers. When he was satisfied that he could find shelter, quickly, he turned and shaded his eyes to focus on the path ahead, across the drift to the steep banks of the Zand River. He didn't expect a fight that day. Nothing south of Kroonstad, he thought.

He nudged his knee into the mare's ribs, but his legs were restricted to shallow movements, not only by the position of the wallets, but because the cast iron stirrups were too small to house his boots. He'd lengthened the leather and had his feet pushed into the loops above the stirrup, but the stirrups dangled uselessly, aggravating an abscess on the horse's side. She jerked and moved, slowly, forward. Twenty-odd scouts milled, in a group, a hundred yards ahead of him.

Pilgrim heard the sound of galloping from behind as his captain yelled to him. 'Ahoy! Pilgrim! Would you like to head off with the scouts?' Pilgrim dug in with his knee. Would he? The horse jerked again and this time set off at a trot. He followed the dust of the twenty-four Mounted Rifles toward the Zand River.

Pilgrim coughed and spat to the side. His nostrils were full of dust. Underneath the thin, meaningless saddle, and through the two folded blankets it sat on, he felt bones protruding from the pony's back, but he urged her on, leaning forward in the saddle to speak low into her ear. She was starved. She had been reduced to a stick-like creature, which Pilgrim knew had no hope of surviving the war, but today, she was his strongest ally. She is not animal but machine, he told himself. A mode of transport.

The scouts waded, in pairs, through the foot-deep muddy water on the drift and up the far bank. He had paired up with a New South Wales trooper, who was not older than seventeen, and together, they followed the others. By the time they reached the crest of the bank, half of the scouts were a couple of hundred yards ahead, out in the clear of the river-reserve, but he and his partner held back at the top of the bank and gazed northward across the treeless plain. Something moved in the corner of his vision. He turned his head to the right, to see a swirl of dust and a sprinkling of small dots approaching from the east and heading toward the river. As they came closer he could make out the outline of familiar British uniforms. Pilgrim turned to the boy, who returned the confused glance. 'British? Were we expecting reinforcements?'

The crowd of advancing men seemed to expand in number as they neared. Pilgrim made a quick calculation in his head. 'Fifty? One hundred?'

‘P’hap’s it’s the New Zealand Contingent?’ the boy asked, but Pilgrim was not so sure. Something in the way the advancing men leaned in the saddle seemed wrong. They held their rifles at a strange angle. Some of them rode bareback. The horses were fat. By the time they had advanced to a distance of about half a mile at his right, Pilgrim could see the shapes of the men’s hats.

‘Tommies?’ the boy said. ‘British helmets?’

The scouts in the north had turned and were facing the advancing men. They had stopped moving forward and now they milled, shading their eyes with their hands, gazing eastward. Pilgrim looked from the group of scouts and then back to the approaching riders.

‘No! *Those* are Cape ponies.’

Pilgrim yanked on his reins. ‘Boers!’ he yelled.

The scouts turned, kicked their heels, and galloped toward Pilgrim. The Boers started to gallop from the east and then turned in toward the river half a mile at Pilgrim’s right. He yanked again on the reins. The mare reared beneath him and spun around. Pilgrim dug in his ankles, hard enough to break the horse’s ribs. She lurched into a gallop.

‘Retire!’ The British captain screamed as he overtook Pilgrim, and galloped back into the valley and through the drift, throwing showers of water into the air from the horse’s legs.

The boy had turned and was galloping at his left, as the first dum-dum zinged across the path in front of them. His young face was a mask of fear, sweat and mud. Pilgrim heard a pop near his left leg and looked down to see a hole had appeared in his wallet. Another shot sizzled above his head. He ducked, and as he pressed his cheek against the horse’s lathered neck, he swore.

Pilgrim heard a shout coming from the left and his eyes registered the slow slide of a body, falling from the saddle beside him. In that instant he forgot the scout’s name. ‘Harvey!’ he screamed. The boy fell under the horse, for a moment was tangled in the horse’s feet and then rolled across the ground. Pilgrim pulled up and in the one movement, twisted in his saddle and struggled with the backpack, the

pickets angled toward his face. 'Bastard!' he screamed. He slammed the pack to the side. One of the pickets speared into the ground.

Pilgrim went back, reached one arm downward, clamped the injured boy's hand and swung him up into the saddle behind him. The mare bowed beneath them. He screamed into her ear.

Another of the scouts edged close to shield the injured man from the shower of bullets; he stretched out an arm and, as they galloped forward, held him in place on the saddle behind Pilgrim. Another bullet warmed the back of Pilgrim's calf muscle and another ploughed into the wallet.

Finally they had almost reached the shelter of the British army, and the sound of the Mauser rifle-shot subsided behind them, but one last, rogue bullet at the end of its run smashed the mare's hind knee. She fell. As the horse telescoped beneath Pilgrim and veered to the side, it took out the trooper at the left, whose arm was still outstretched, holding the injured boy in the saddle. All three riders and two horses rolled to the ground.

The trooper scrambled over and lifted the broken head of his mate.

'They got him in the mouth!' he cried, 'In the MOUTH!'

Pilgrim snatched up a backpack and emptied it. Supplies spilled over the dirt; canned food, utensils, spare tunic. The trooper grabbed the backpack, rolled it in a ball and placed it under the injured boy's head and leaned over, embracing him and kissing his forehead. 'Get him back to Bloemfontein.'

Pilgrim could do nothing. He held up an injured can of meat, and looked through the hole at the boy who no longer had a face as he bled to death in his brother's arms.

§

Pilgrim was issued with another mount. She was so thin that she wouldn't make one meal for a vulture. A storm came and she didn't move her ears or drink from a bucket of fresh rain water. After the storm had passed, with fifty captured Boers, the army

picked up and continued to march, north-east to Kroonstad and then towards the Vaal River and on to Pietersburg. They marched all day through mud. The horses staggered like drunks. Pilgrim ran his hand along the mare's back and, for a moment, allowed himself to feel for the animal. It didn't notice his touch. He choked on a sob. Bone and skin.

They passed a dead Kaffir who lay bloated at the edge of the track and stepped around him. The mare hung her head low and didn't start at a fly that buzzed around her nose. Another day passed. The horse still refused to drink, and even if it had, Pilgrim knew that there was a chance her stomach might explode if she'd eaten just one bite of the poison tulip that grew on the veldt. In the end, he led her away from the main group of soldiers, and as gently as possible, he placed a bullet between her grateful eyes.

He returned to where the army had set up camp for the night and joined the line of men who shuffled like Mary Shelley's monsters toward the supply tent. He held out his blistered hands for two and a half oatmeal biscuits, one sixteenth of an ounce of tea, a quarter ounce of coffee and half a pound of horse meat.

The soles of his shoes were worn through and he felt every small hard stone that dug into his flesh through his socks. Pilgrim's pants were in tatters. Blood dried to dust on his hands: someone else's blood. That night, he fell, exhausted onto the hard bare ground, under a wagon, rolled up in his overcoat, with his head resting on his upturned saddle, and fell asleep.

§

The tiny hairs on the insides of his ears move with the sound of thunder: it's the pom-pom gun. Bullets strike rocks and sparks ignite patches of dry grass. Fire roars all around him. He feels it. Hot inside and out. Pilgrim tries to run. He dreams of running into a corner in a factory with the click of weaving looms snapping at his ears. The pom-pom guns. Lightning. Terror forces bile into his throat.

He woke up with cold vomit on his face.

§

July 1900, Pietersburg, Africa

When the troops gathered in Pietersburg, Pilgrim was surprised to see that the town was at peace. Bright green ornamental trees lined the roadside as though the town had never been touched by war. But Pilgrim felt an ache. He was suspicious of the scent of honey on the breeze and the old injury in his leg that throbbed whenever the weather turned humid reminded him of permanent scars. Fear and exhaustion had turned him cynical, but he felt an inkling at the back of his mind as the men gathered in a pretty market square where a fountain sparkled like diamonds. Civilians, Boers now deemed British subjects, wore red, white and blue, waved flags and handed around bottles of beer. The troops were celebrating, were preparing to go home to Australia, New Zealand, Canada.

Pilgrim felt a hand on his shoulder. It was an old mate.

‘We’ll be home in time for Christmas,’ he said. ‘I’m leaving for Cape Town tomorrow.’

‘Home?’ Pilgrim looked out across the crowd of Union Jacks around the Tommies and Australians and wondered whether his own colour was red or blue, or simply white. When Pilgrim turned to face his friend he saw, on the poet’s face, a set of new lines wrinkled around his eyes, and wondered also whether the colonial man had lost sight of his ‘vision splendid.’

‘The *Wilcannia* can go without me,’ Pilgrim said. ‘I won’t be missed in Australia.’

Part Five

Home

47

BACK IN ENGLAND

It was nothing like a dream. It was better. The dream had come true. The gate opened and Hunt's horse, Pear, stepped through. Pilgrim turned his head to the right and saw the greenest of fields. Perhaps it was like the field that his mother once looked across; a caterpillar of moss-rock walls creeping over hills of green grass that grew to a horse's knees. Home at last. Devon.

It was all too perfect. He searched for a hidden memory, an illusion perhaps, of his mother, crying at that very gate, and ... stars in the sky. A rainbow. A blue tit. He drifted. Stevenstone Hounds spoke from the edge of the forest.

All was well. Even winter was different in England. Ice and snow had its own breathtaking beauty that made him forget about the cold. Pear shied at a gate as a quail flopped out of the bushes and flurried around her feet. Pilgrim measured the gate against Pear's leg as Percy faded into view through the fog ahead of him. The Captain was his hunt-master, the best mate he had on Earth, and Pilgrim knew well that The Captain was watching him closely. Pilgrim meant to make a good impression. As he waited at the edge of the forest with icicles on the ends of his moustache, Pilgrim reminded himself that he must shave. The mare and the property and the running to the hounds were not the only things Percy had to offer. He had a sister, Kate.

A hound ran out in front of him and feathered around the covert. Pilgrim raised the call. 'Taa leo.'

The pack of hounds rallied in a circle surrounding a clump of undergrowth. They barked like maniacs. Hoof beats thundered through the pinewood forest as four scarlet-coated hunters emerged from amongst trees, frosted with ice from the early morning fog. Pilgrim moved to the right of the hunt-master and peered into the covert.

'Hold hard,' Percy yelled.

A pheasant flew from the bushes. Hunt-master called the hounds to heel. They grunted at the ground, searching for a new scent, their floppy jowls puffing out steam from the sides. Percy shouted to the field, the warning cry that meant the hounds had found a pheasant instead of a fox.

‘Ware. Riot.’

§

Back from the hunt, Percy offered him Cognac. The women were taking tea in the drawing room. Their voices carried in scattered whispers through the house. Percy’s sister caught Pilgrim peeking through the crack in the door, and in return she coyly moved her gaze over Pilgrim’s body. He had noticed, and so had Percy’s fiancée who blushed and looked out of the window toward the gazebo.

The air was fresh but not too cold to brave the garden and so Pilgrim, knowing that he would be in sight of the women, suggested that he and Percy move out onto the gazebo, out of earshot of the ladies so that they could reminisce about the war. As they cut across the lawn and up the steps of the gazebo, Pilgrim’s eyes adjusted to the vivid colours of freshly washed landscape; weeping willows, the bare branches of deciduous trees reaching upwards into a whitewashed sky. Under the shade of the gazebo, he tipped a puddle of water off a chair, wiped it dry with his handkerchief and sat at the table. The cold tingled on his skin and he felt the contrasting warmth of Percy’s Cognac slide into his belly. Percy spoke first.

‘I saw a Kaffir body in the Modder. He’d been shot in the back. They left him there to bloat.’

The effects of the Cognac filtered through Pilgrim’s veins. He felt his body softening as he glanced toward the house. Kate was standing at the window looking out. ‘That’s nothing, Perce.’

Kate waved. Pilgrim waved back and then turned back to Percy. ‘Did you ever see a Tommy with his face shot off? This one had his teeth showing through the wound. Funny thing is ... he could talk through the hole in his cheek. I wouldn’t have

dared to say it myself, but he looked up at me from his crib and he said, "*How's this for a gum boil?*"

Percy laughed, self-consciously.

'He died the next morning.'

Percy cleared his throat. 'I had to have my dear old nag put down. Should have left her home in England.'

Pilgrim nodded in sympathy. He missed Cavalier, but was thankful to the vet who'd talked him into leaving Cav in Australia. 'I lost three horses,' he said. 'Had to shoot two of them. The third, my best, got tulip on the veldt. I never saw an animal in so much pain. She died before I could cock the rifle.'

Percy took a sip of Cognac. He inhaled audibly through the nose and exhaled with a sigh into his brandy balloon. 'Damned Boer ponies are immune to poison.'

Pilgrim felt a soft sprinkle of moisture land on his cheek. It had blown in under the roof of the gazebo. Nothing in Australia had ever resembled such a soft touch of the elements.

'I have to tell you about the rain there, Percy.'

Percy looked up.

'In Australia. It hails so hard it'll leave dents in a tin roof, and I thought I'd never be able to describe that. But thinking on it, the sound is very close to the noise of a Vickers Maxim.'

'You going back?' Percy asked.

Back? Pilgrim's mind recalled a day he had spent on the Bogan River hunting a pig. He reminded himself of the feeling of exhilaration, of a rush of adrenalin as he had felt the blade of a knife entering the flesh, and he wondered if that sense of excitement could be stopped short of killing a human once the barriers had broken down.

'There are days,' he said, 'when you can be at peace. On a day like today, when everything seems perfect. But suddenly, something triggers ... a fear ... anger ... I can't describe it, Perce, but when it hits you ... all you want to do is kill something.'

Percy's face melted into a frown. 'I meant Australia. Are you going back to Australia?'

'Oh.'

Pilgrim didn't answer straight away. Instead, he held the thought. Percy had misunderstood and thought he had been talking about going back to the war. Until that moment, the thought had barely crossed his mind, but ...

'Perce! You're right. I'm going back! They're offering seven shillings a day to anyone who can ride and shoot. We can clean up the last of those bastards within a few months. Come with me! Let's clean them up for England.'

'I've had enough of that war.'

'Come on, my old hunt-master. Come on back to Africa with me.'

Pilgrim leaned over and pushed a friendly fist into Percy's shoulder. 'Do it for your sister and me. For all the guts and blood those Boers have spilled.'

Their eyes met—a bond of shared hatred.

§

Warm water splashed over Pilgrim's face. Soapy suds warmed his hands. Pilgrim stood over a porcelain washbasin as he washed for dinner. He straightened up and looked into the mirror. His face was clean. His own image stared back at him, expressionless and disembodied and he observed his own features as a stranger would. The handsome face that stared back, beginning to show signs of its thirty-seven years: a small crease by the eyes and laughter lines in front of the ears. The light brown hair shiny as a youth's except for ... one or two small grey hairs at the sides, and those, he thought, give the man in the mirror a dignified appearance rather than aged. But he was full of nerves.

He looked over at Percy who was cleaning his teeth at the other basin and noticed how white Percy's skin had become since it healed from African sunburn. He had grown a black moustache and a delicately trimmed beard complemented his fine features, and Pilgrim was proud of the man who he intended to call brother-in-law.

The hunt-master is every bit as handsome as Kate is beautiful, he thought. He towelled his face. Better without the moustache. He hung the towel on the hook and turned, thoughtfully, to Percy.

‘I want to know that you’ll come with me,’ he said.

Percy spat into the bowl and straightened up. He gazed into his mirror and pulled his lip up to examine his teeth. He turned side on to the mirror to examine his profile. ‘Back to Africa? What about the women?’ he said.

‘Let’s make it our personal mission to capture De Wet and De la Rey. Bring home a medal as a wedding gift.’

Percy’s face became serious. He placed his hands on Pilgrim’s shoulders and looked into his eyes. ‘I want to know that you’ll look after my sister,’ he said. ‘And only when you bring home a medal, will you have my blessing.’ He winked. ‘Anyhow. Good luck with the proposal tonight.’

Pilgrim felt his heart speed up. This is it, he thought. The big moment of my life. He turned back to the mirror. Perhaps he should have left the moustache on.

‘Pilgrim.’

‘Mmmm’

‘If she says yes, we’ll set the date together.’

§

After the evening meal, Percy gave Pilgrim a nod as he took his fiancée by the hand and left the drawing room to Pilgrim and Kate. They watched Percy leave, and then Kate looked toward Pilgrim, her face expectant. A warm fire that glowed in the fireplace behind her illuminated her skin, and Pilgrim felt such a deep love for her that he could barely speak. He remembered a poem he had written in Australia. Oh, that she could have been there then. He had dreamed of a love like Katy. The words of the poem seemed only to convey a fragment of what he felt.

‘Love me little, love me long ...’

Kate looked at him inquisitively. Deep dimples appeared on her cheeks as she tilted her head.

Pilgrim stepped across the room, knelt beside her and cradled Katy's elbow in his hand.

'Before I go back to the war ...'

Kate took in a sharp breath. He reached for her hand.

'I'd like to recite a poem that I wrote for you. Well, not for you, specifically, but ... the words ...'

'A poem. Is that it?' she said. He reached toward her face, lowered his hand and found the ribbon at the front of her dress. He curled it around his finger tip.

'Just for you, Kate.'

His lips ached to kiss her. She leaned toward him. He felt the softness of her hand on his cheek. Her green eyes gazed into his. His Kate held him then, wrapped her arms about his neck. Her breath caressed his ear. He responded; pressed his cheek against hers, losing all control slipped his arms around her and pulled her close.

He kissed her cheek. And then her chin. And spoke softly into her parted lips.

'Until I return. And I want you to know, Sweetheart, that I mean it to be more than just a little while ...'

48

Moving about inside her small cottage at Torquay, in Devonshire, Catherine is confused. This is not the workhouse. If it is, the workhouse has shrunk and she can't find the staircase leading up to the Master's parlour. Instead, she wanders along a short passageway, over polished boards, leading from the front door. Two doors open into the passageway, one to the left, one to the right and she peeks in, seeing a single bed in each room.

'The beds are made,' she mutters.

She backs out of the bedroom and continues toward the back of the house where she finds a small kitchen. Where is the cook?

She is sure the year is 1894, the telegraph wire she has been reading, only this morning, was sent from Sydney, dated August 15, 1894.

She folds the piece of paper and slips it into the pocket of her apron and then moves over to a small rectangular table in the centre of the kitchen. On it is a scrapbook beside a bowl containing a mixture of flour and water that has been mixed into glue. The book is open to the page that has been carefully labelled in blue ink, and underlined: *The North Devon Journal*. Her eyes skim over the words of the newspaper cutting: 'Boers dressed in khaki riding alongside the wagons frustrated all attempts of the officers to rally.' She reads the annotation written below, in her own writing: 'Page 3. Thursday, 13 March, 1902. ... is it possible?'

Catherine counts on her fingers, whispering the numbers through clenched teeth ... 1883—one, 1884—two, 1885—three ... 1902—nineteen years and ... April—one, May—two, June—three, July—four, August ... yes, nineteen years and eleven months since she has seen her boy.

As she eases into a chair in front of the book, Catherine slowly turns the pages to the section titled *The Aberdeen Daily Journal*. 26 March, 1902.

AUSTRALIAN VENGEANCE ON BOERS.

FOLLOWED BY EXECUTION AND IMPRISONMENT.

A SENSATIONAL STORY.

(EXPRESS TELEGRAM)

Melbourne, Tuesday, Major Linehan, who returned from Cape Town to-day, reported to General Hutton and Mr Barton that, while in command of 400 Bushmen last October in Komatipoori district, the Boers horribly mutilated a lieutenant. His brother Australian subalterns vowed vengeance, and court-martialled and shot at different times twelve Boers. The general commanding the district thereupon ordered an inquiry, the result of which was that Lieutenant Whiton, of Victoria, was executed, and Lieutenant Morant, of West Australia, was imprisoned for three months in the fortress at Cape Town.

The publication of this news has caused a great sensation.

Catherine slams the book shut and stands. 'He will come home, Annie,' she shouts. 'Soon.'

A mother knows these things. Annie comes to the kitchen door and stands there with her hand on the doorframe.

'Annie?' Catherine says, quietly this time, with a hint of caution in her voice. Her hands tremble as she takes out the telegraph wire to look at it again. As she unfolds the delicate piece of paper, it almost tears between her fingers. It is old, the folds in the paper, stiff, as though it has been pressed between the pages of a book for many years.

'Annie, what date is it today?' As she waits for Annie to respond, she glances at the telegraph wire again.

August 15, 1894

Mother.

Going bush. I may disappear for a while. Don't worry. Will write whenever possible. Love to Annie.

His Nibs.

Annie spins around and hisses. 'For heaven's sakes, Mother. Again?'

'The year?'

Annie ignores her. Catherine hears her footsteps moving angrily down the passage way. The front door opens and slams.

'Annie,' she says, softly, 'Shall I check the bedrooms?'

Part Six

Countdown

49

Pilgrim looked up to see twelve cold, grey steel, rifle barrels pointed toward him. Twelve little holes, as black as the dilated pupils of eyes whose gazes were fixed on his throat. He waited—in the shadow of a forty-foot mimosa that reminded him, oddly, of a wattle, if only it had yellow blooms instead of the pink fairies that dance amongst the mist-green leaves. He looked up at the branches of the mimosa and had a vision of the Murray River and the lemon-scented eucalypt, and the drooping river gum dangling leafy fingers into the mud, and he thought: *home?*

‘Make it quick,’ he said, and then realised that he had only moments to live.

§

Cold mercury shoots through Pilgrim’s veins. The boys are dead. Frank lays supine on the dirt, his hair matted with dried blood, a hole in his back. Clutched in his fist is a letter.

To my dearest Dora, and my baby girl.

Percy, Pilgrim’s hunt-master, is face up beside Frank, with his mangled hands resting on his chest. His face is a purple swollen plumb, empty eye sockets are smeared with black blood. Blowflies with closed wings walk over him. Pilgrim spins and vomits. Everything stinks. He craves the smell of city horseshit.

§

The glint of sun reflecting off metal stings in his eyes. Pilgrim peers along a valley on the Groot Letaba River. He has heard a familiar sound. He settles down behind a furry thicket of wild asparagus to hide, scratching his arms on the sharp thorns. A thicket of vegetation obscures a laager from view from all sides but the east. From his position downstream of the campers, Pilgrim shades his eyes from the brightness of the morning sunshine and squints. Three covered wagons are partially hidden in

amongst the dark-green shade of the sawing palm-like leaves of a kiepersol tree, behind which the Boers have set up camp under the bulging branches of a sycamore fig.

Something moves in the valley. Pilgrim hears the faint shuffle of feet and the clink of utensils. Wash-water is thrown out from behind one of the wagons and rattles over the shale on the riverbed. He takes note of the white flags hoisted on a corner of each of the wagons and motions to his troops. They creep forward and settle behind the outcrops. Beside him, he hears a hot whisper.

White flag, P.

Ignore it. It's a trick.

A Boer appears from behind the wagon with a Mauser rifle slung across his shoulder. That is Pilgrim's signal to open fire.

At the first shot, the Boer throws down his gun and flings his hands into the air.

Take no prisoners! Shoot.

There is the half-demon scream of a woman that pierces the eardrums, and she stumbles out from behind a wagon, tripping over her skirts.

Stop!

No. It's a trick.

They shoot and shoot and shoot. The woman falls, face first onto the earth, covering her head with her hands. A little girl dashes out from the wagon toward the woman. The woman flails her arms at the girl, screaming, but the girl stops. She looks upward toward the firing squad. Pilgrim holds the binoculars to his eyes.

Wait.

Through the binoculars, Pilgrim watches her eyes. They bulge, black and frightened.

Wait!

A hole opens in the girl's throat. For a moment, she stares, uncomprehending toward the shooters. And then her legs buckle. She falls. Her dress balloons

downward and then settles. A child. Just a child, and the war crashes around her like a drum-roll.

§

A small fire. A thin column of smoke. Three Boers squatting around a campfire, eating. A man, a grandfather and a boy. The boy's face appears at the front of his vision: the cluster of little pimples around the boy's lips; his nose, slightly bent; pupils that are pinpricks that rapidly dilate as Pilgrim raises his carbine to his chin; the boy's soft brown hair. And a Captain's uniform. A khaki British Captain's uniform. The hunt-master's stolen clothes. And a hat.

Turn around you little bastard. Kneel!

What are you doing here? Eating potatoes.

March. Please. Sir. This is not our war.

Turn around. Kneel.

The aroma of baked potatoes.

§

Yes. There he was. Staring into a row of barrels. The quartermaster blared. Pilgrim turned his head to see that Father Fryingpan stood twenty yards to his right with both of his hands clapped over his mouth, his eyes wide. When the countdown started, Fryingpan moved his hands and covered his ears. Pilgrim nodded and turned back toward the row of Highlanders and their rifles. He floated above his body, and away ...

'Twenty!'

His mother is peeling potatoes over a bowl at a big brown table in the workhouse kitchen. She is in her brown dress. From behind, he sees the white bow of her apron. On her right is a mountain of white potatoes and, on her left, a mountain of dirty,

brown ones. She dips a potato into the wash basin and adds it to the white-mountain. Her hand reaches for a brown potato.

Why won't you ever say my name, Mama?

She turns from the table, drifts toward him and leans down, her face a white, expressionless mask.

'Nineteen!'

From above, he sees the red roof of the hay barn. The girl is pink. She smells like roses. He touches her bare skin. Soft. Warm. Hay prickles his bare backside. Her fruity breath; her wet, parted lips.

And her father rages like a madman.

'Eighteen!'

Ah! How the roughness of the brickwork makes his fingertip tingle. And how the soft green moss, with its minute yellow flowers, springs back from his touch. The workhouse: the smell of damp earth, ice in the breeze, the weathervane on the roof that squeaks, faintly, the gargoyle that claws toward the wind throwing its shadow across the courtyard. Annie.

Annie lifts her skirt and wipes her nose. Pilgrim presses her damp fingers between his palms, lifts them to his face and blows warm air onto her hands.

She clamps him in her arms.

I'm frightened, Annie.

Annie squeezes.

I don't want to go... to Australia.

Annie squeezes tight.

'Seventeen!'

Daisy's voice comes on a willy-willy toward Fanning Downs Station. Inside the cottage, the heat tightens around him. Pilgrim opens the door of the Pivot oven door and brings out a tray of scones.

He turns. The table is strewn with letters. He sees their marriage certificate. Daisy rhythmically slaps the pile of papers. Her chair creaks. The table wobbles.

The scones scatter over the papers.

Daisy lifts her arm exposing a circle of dampness in the grey fabric of her dress. She points out through the window toward a mirage that wriggles across the paddock. Cattle float through the heatwave, their legs missing.

You're a thief.

'Sixteen!'

Gabriel has a long face and pointy ears. Horse face. He is holding Cavalier's mouth in his hands and is counting teeth.

Do you really want to take him?

Can't I?

Leave him home. Take the dog instead.

Pilgrim looks into Cavalier's big black eyes, presses his forehead against the horse's nose and then kisses him on the blaze. His lips tingle.

'Fifteen!'

Rows of cannons salute the sky. Pilgrim's position is sixth to the left in the second row from the front of the parade. Pilgrim leans forward on Abby and hugs her around her neck. *Hello Abby*, he whispers. Her ears are velvet.

He pats the lancer at his leg and runs his fingers along the handle grip, lifts the sword a few inches out of its leather pocket, feels its weight.

The chinstrap presses into his cheeks, starched tunic coat, white jodhpurs with a double stripe down the sides. Dust below his feet. The smell of healthy horses. Keswick Barracks, stables, mess halls and dormitories. Wall upon wall. Brick upon brick.

Abby nickers softly: nods her head.

'Fourteen!'

The *SS Surrey* floats out to sea. The sky is a turquoise marble. Adelaide shrinks away, Australia shrinks away, the coastline becomes the beach of a small island.

‘Thirteen!’

The bottom deck of The *SS Surrey* is an oven. Humidity presses his skin. Sickness is a stench of lather and horse-sweat. Abby’s rump is a red, bloodied carpet from tossing around in the ship. Pilgrim is working bare-backed, at the block and tackle. Abby struggles but slips in the dirty stall. The boat throws them left. Throws them right.

Abby. He holds her around the neck. *Get up!*

Her legs push outward at dangerous angles, and then buckle. She falls. Her head lolls to the side. Her eyes roll back.

‘Twelve!’

Abby’s shadow sinks into the ocean, mottled around the edges by dark green water.

‘Eleven!’

He is at the edge of a forest. The shadows are faint but long, and the light is as clean as a washed window. Snow dusts over the grass, and pine needles glisten with icy stalactites. A huge transparent moon.

I am sitting on Pear,
An Appaloosa mare.
She moves beneath me
like a rocking chair.

‘Ten! PRESENT!’

Silence. Blinding fear. Away. Away. Above his body and away.

‘Nine!’

He kneels before his Kate, and kisses her wedding finger. He opens the box and shows her the diamond solitaire engagement ring.

She blushes and nods, and then, with an excited hop, she cries, *Present!*

‘Eight!’

The shadow of a bird moves across the ground in front of him. His nostrils fill with dust.

‘Seven!’

Wong Pat standing at the door of The Hatters and Merchandise, waving. Waving. Waving goodbye.

‘Six!’

The white of Mary Robertson’s arm-bone with the flesh stripped away. The thin stream of pulsing blood, pulsing in time with the flick-flick-click of the weaving looms.

‘Five!’

They lie, the men who ...

‘Four!’

... tell us for reasons of their own ...

‘Three!’

The dead boy’s face. Fine fuzz on his upper lip. Wrong hat!

‘Two!’

Oh my Lord. I forgot to write to ...

One!

Daisy!

'FIRE!'

Lightning and Thunder.

50

Annie has been gone for hours, and the persistent knocking has persuaded Catherine to ease out of the chair and leave the warmth of the kitchen to answer the door. She walks, slowly, along the passageway, ignoring rat-a-tat-tat, resigned to the conclusion that it will not stop. She opens the front door a crack and peers through from inside.

A tall man dressed in black robes stands on the porch. He is holding a parcel, turning it over in his hands. Catherine waits a moment, regarding the man through the thin opening. He steps close to the door, bends down and looks at her through the crack.

‘Yes?’ Catherine says.

‘Ma-am? Are you Pilgrim’s mother?’ His voice resonates deeply. His accent is strange, unfamiliar.

‘And you are ...?’ she asks.

The big man adjusts his white clerical-collar with long fingers. She notices his fingernails. They are very clean, even for a priest. Behind him, in the distance over the damp fields, she sees the light splitting into a rainbow.

‘I’m from Australia. I was with Pilgrim in Pretoria. I have ... something ...’, the man says.

‘From my son?’

‘Yes.’

She opens the door, and as she steps back a ginger cat waves its tail and enters the house between her feet. ‘Psst. Oh! Now you’ve let the cat in.’

The priest shifts the parcel under his arm and holds out his right hand.

‘I was the one who sat with him during his last hours.’ He looks at her, inquisitively. ‘In Pretoria.’

She feels her heart move in her chest. Catherine steps back and swings the door wide.

‘Come in,’ she whispers.

She ushers him through, barely controlling the weakness in her legs; she steadies herself against the passageway wall as he steps through the door. She feels a

sensational swelling in her chest. Her head spins. To calm herself, she speaks suddenly.

‘Then it’s true? He’s in Africa. In prison?’

Catherine is overcome by nausea. She can’t bear to hear his answer, so she interrupts. ‘No. Do not say a word. Not one word, you understand?’

The Father nods. He brushes past her and she looks up at the proud angle of his chin. He takes three long steps along the hallway. She knows it is impossible, but the fragrance of a blooming frangipani follows him. She watches him from behind. His robes sweep the floor giving the illusion that he is floating.

‘Turn left into the kitchen,’ she says, aware that her voice is shaking. He disappears into the room. For a moment, Catherine stands back from the kitchen door, wishing for this moment to pass quickly, that she would not have to face this man. From deep within her, a throbbing begins. Her pulse measures minutes and seconds. The thuds of her heart slice away moments of her life, taking with them fragments of memory. She can hear the tick of time passing. She takes a long, deep breath. Steps into the kitchen. The kettle hisses gently on the hob. SssssSSSssss. ‘Tea?’

The padre shakes his head.

‘Sit. Please.’

He sits at the table and pushes the scrapbook aside with his forearm, places the brown-paper bundle on the table in front of him, and starts to untie the twine. He looks up. Catherine feels him looking through her, and in turn she stares back through his eyes.

‘So? You knew him? In Australia?’

He nods. ‘But I visited him in prison, before ...’

Inside those eyes, she believes, if she stares for long enough ... And there! She sees it. In the reflection of the Father’s eye, the image of her son passes back. The Padre does not avert his gaze.

The untied package reveals a tattered notebook and worn-down pencil. She holds them to her chest for a moment, and then gently places the book on the table to

turn the pages. Inside, she finds a photograph of a girl. She holds it up for the Father to see.

The priest gazes steadily into her eyes. 'That is Katy. His fiancée,' he says. 'From Devon.' He frowns when she stares back and shakes her head.

In a corner of her mind, she registers that the year is 1902, but Catherine drifts back to Plymouth and to the white fog that stole away her son. 'Seventeen. He was seventeen. How much further could the family have sent the boy, for the sin of touching a girl's knee?' She throws down the photograph.

'It was the Admiral's only act as a father: to send the boy as far away from England as possible. To Australia. Out of sight, out of mind. To live as a convict!'

Father reaches for her hand. Immediately, at his touch, she feels calm. The softness of his skin and his gentleness of his touch reassures her. She sighs.

'I suppose he had a good time, with his fiancée.' She gazes upward, to the corner of the ceiling. 'It's a strange word isn't it? Strange world.'

She returns her attention to the book that the priest has brought. 'These poems? Will he have them published?'

The priest bends his head. Tears squeeze out of the corners of his closed eyes. Catherine pushes the notebook toward him. 'Take them. Tell him he must have them published.' She is eager to read the letter: words for her, alone.

My dearest Ma, it says.

'Oh.' Only now she feels a lump in her throat.

These will be my final words to you.

You must forgive me ...

'No? My boy?'

For the Lord's sake Ma, do not cry over me.

'No.'

I am held captive by our own side, court-martialled and charged with murder.

'No.'

I killed some Boers. Apparently it's a crime.

'No!'

I am to be shot at dawn.

Catherine feels the sensation of falling. She is falling now, down into a desert where the wind sweeps the grass into waves like the ocean. She has become, as her son, fatherless and insane with grief. Above the desert, thunder roars, light flashes, and the sound that echoes is the great pom-pom gun. The priest stares downward into her eyes and places a round, silent object into her hands. The gold-plated clock has wound down. Like the scar across her heart, the hands make out a straight horizontal line. It is a quarter to three.

51

Harvey and his wife had decided, after the news of Pilgrim's death, to move to a small plot of land on the edge of heaven, but, curiously, it was upside down. Their modest little house, with a red tin roof and white picket fence, sat above the grand Hawkesbury River, overlooking the valley of rugged bush that was wild with life. It stood above the undulating countryside that rolled and pitched down toward the river. All of the bush was grey-green like a mist over a forest. Willy-wagtails and wrens flitted about, hopping onto the foal's back to steal hairs for their nests. There was yellow sunshine. And a child.

On this particular sunny day, the sky reflected in the river so that instead of peering upward, Harvey showed his own little Pilgrim they were able to look downward at white balls of cloud.

§

Harvey read the message that was handwritten inside the cover of the Bible that Fryingpan had brought back from Africa.

'I feel guilty Fry ... It's rather personal.'

Fryingpan pushed up his hat, rubbed his forehead and turned away to gaze downward into the river. 'There's nothing I can do, Arv ... I haven't been able to find Miss G. Raper Street's gone, the farriery, the whole lot, as though none of it ever existed.'

Harvey looked again at the words that Pilgrim had left on the page, and said, sadly, 'Whatever the case, Fry, this poem is dreadful.'

To dear Nelly Gordon. I leave you this Bible as a parting gift for all
you've done for me. I've included a final poem. From the ruins of
this life, great literature has emerged.

For years to come, Miss Nelly G,
You'll see I'm ne'er defeated

For rising from the cemetery
You'll finally be meeted,
The floating tress
Is nothing less
Than a loved one badly treated.

Pretorians who wander by
The graves of Carbineers
As they mourn the dead they'll wonder why
Their ears are filled with cheers.
My mates and I,
Salute the sky,
And rise up through the years.

From your fond acquaintance - Pilgrim.

'Doesn't scan,' Harvey said, lifting his face toward Fryingpan. 'You ever heard of a cemetreeeee?' Harvey felt a constriction in his chest. He remembered at time, in a little box at the end of a street when he'd first encountered Pilgrim's first drafts. If only he had *learned* something.

Fryingpan gave him a look of exasperation and turned away.

Harvey couldn't let it go. 'And what's this—"meted"?' he said. And he set to work immediately, with his neatly squared pencil, re-writing the poem into his tidy notebook, hoping to make it suitable for publication in *The Bulletin* or his own *Richmond and Windsor Gazette*.

As he worked, Harvey kept half an eye on his son, Pilgrim Jnr., who flitted about like a butterfly from rock to bush, to cat, to dog. Inquisitive little gentleman, he thought.

'Fryingpan!' said the little boy, as he ran toward the outstretched arms of the priest. 'There are snowflakes in the water. What makes it snow?'

‘Clouds,’ said Fryingpan, as he lifted the boy, and threw him up, and caught him, and threw him up again. And from where he sat, Harvey saw that the boy flew into the air, at the same time as his reflection dove deep into the earth.

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The Making of Breaker Morant: Mythology and the Australian National Identity

The making of The Breaker: Conflict and Identity

Warning: A certificate is not evidence of identity

The above warning is issued by the General Register Office of England on the 'Certified Copy of an Entry of Birth.' It reminds readers that a person can claim an alternative identity to his birthright: an identity which can be forged with external influence and through choice. The birth entry for Edwin Henry Murrant (Jnr.) states that he was born in the sub-district of Bridgwater in the County of Somerset, England, on the ninth of December 1864, but before Edwin Henry Murrant had died he had become a Lieutenant in the English Army (Murray, 1911), was fighting on behalf of Australians in the Anglo-Boer war and was known as an 'Australian' poet. He died by firing squad on the 27th of February 1902 in Pretoria, South Africa. The prison record (Denton, 1983, p. 120) shows his age as thirty-five, three years younger than the age he would have been if calculated from the date on his birth certificate. By the time he died he was considered to be Australian, and he was well known throughout Australia as Harry 'Breaker' Morant with the pseudonym, The Breaker.

Although he tried during his life and until his death to change his identity, Edwin Henry Murrant was unsuccessful in concealing his origins or his ideology. His change of name, his eccentric behaviours and the way in which he over-stated his connections with elite social classes in England indicated a person who was ashamed of his past. Edwin Murrant's parents and his ancestors were involved in the British workhouse system, and yet, when he arrived in Australia Murrant created a façade of a well-educated gentleman who was raised in Devon, England, and who was connected with the Admiralty of the British Navy. Instead of continuing the Murrant family line, he rejected his workhouse heritage, claiming a more auspicious history by insisting that his real father was a British Admiral by the name of George Digby Morant. Whilst 'Breaker' Morant yearned for a sense of belonging as an Australian bushman, and to specific social circles such as those associated with bush writer A B Paterson, his early poetry reflects a strong sense of belonging to his mother's Irish background and his behaviour during his early years in Australia reflects a young man who was accustomed to violence than his claims to the British aristocracy would imply.

Morant's conflict over his birthright is frequently discussed by his biographers and these discussions have also contributed to the way in which the character, 'Breaker' Morant, has been constructed. The discussions of the very ambivalence of 'Breaker' Morant's character and of the discrepancies between his fabrications and his history have become a major component of the identity that is recognised by Australians. Because of the discussions and stories that have evolved, Harry 'Breaker' Morant has become a legend within Australian national heritage and his story has become folklore. The identity that Australians know as either Harry 'Breaker' Morant or The Breaker is therefore a product of his controversial life story which became folklore, and of his own conscious decisions and efforts to change his identity.

Soon after he arrived in Australia, Murrant changed his name to Harry Harbord Morant and began to construct the foundations of his chosen identity. Official records show the transformation from Edwin Henry Murrant to Harry Harbord Morant is as follows:

Birth Certificate 1864 – Edwin Henry Murrant.

Census Records, 1871 – Edwin Henry Murrant – Bridgwater Union Workhouse – Scholar, age 6.

Census Records, 1881 – Edwin Henry Murrant – Silesia College – Tutor, age 17.

Shipping Records, 1883 – Ed Murrant, age 20.

Marriage Certificate, 1884 – Edwin Henry Murrant – gentleman, age 21

Court records – 1884 – Ed H Morant (and) – thief – age undefined.

Enlistment in 2nd contingent – 1899 - Lieut Harry Harbord Morant

Court martial transcripts – 1901 - Harry Harbord Morant – convicted murderer – age 35.

As the records reveal, shortly after arriving in Queensland, Edwin Henry Murrant became Ed H Morant. Some biographers argue that it was Daisy O'Dwyer, who later in life became the famous Aboriginal activist and writer, Daisy May Bates, who had demanded that he change his surname to Morant, since the name Morant connected him with a respected military family. Certainly, the marriage marks the beginning of Murrant's transformation into Harry Harbord

Morant, but his name did not change until after the marriage ended. Australians were sceptical and raised questions as to whether he was the same person as the Edwin Murrant who had married Daisy O'Dwyer. Shortly after 'Breaker' Morant's death, the discussion became public and was debated in national newspapers (Carnegie & Shields, pp. 6-13). Once the Australian public was satisfied that Edwin Henry Murrant and Harry Harbord Morant represented the same person, the surname Morant was adopted by his contemporaries and his biographers and the transformation began from the person born as Edwin Henry Murrant to the identity known as 'Breaker' Morant, or otherwise, The Breaker.

Whilst the surname Morant was accepted and used by Australians, the question of 'Breaker' Morant's parentage provided the foundations for what would later become Australian folklore. Early notes of mistrust are seen in the correspondence with one of Australia's most popular writers of the time. Andrew Barton wrote to his nephew, A B Paterson, in 1893. He uses the name, Morant, and relates the story that he has been told of Morant's lineage:

... His name is Morant. He says he is the son of an English Admiral and he has good manners and education. He can do anything better than most people ... anything except work. I don't know what is the matter with the chap. He seems to be brimming over with flashness ... (Ward, 1981, p. 7.)

In this letter, Paterson's uncle had already detected an anomaly in Morant's story and he seemed confused over the apparent 'flashness'. The 'brimming over' with excessiveness contradicts what might be expected from a self-assured and truly well-connected and educated character. Andrew Barton was not the only Australian to see the absurdity in Morant's claims. In their biography, *In search of Breaker Morant: Balladist and Bushveldt Carbineer*, Margaret Carnegie and Frank Shields juxtapose Morant's story with that of the very successful military man in Pretoria, Frederick Ramon De Bertodamo. They speculate that, unlike De Bertodamo who had 'no need to fabricate a glamorous background to impress the colonial backwoodsmen' (Carnegie & Shields, p. 24), Morant was suspiciously overt:

Exactly when Edwin Henry changed his Christian names to Harry Harbord is uncertain, nor is it known when he invented the tale that Admiral Sir George Digby Morant was his father, for he told them in Charters Towers [in Queensland] that he had been educated by an uncle. There is no doubt he had a chip on his shoulder which made him boastful ... (Carnegie & Shields, pp. 25 – 26.)

Carnegie and Shields attributed Morant's 'boastfulness' to a 'chip on his shoulder', since Morant's resentment did not seem to match the stories he told of his parentage. Other writers and biographers who had known Morant during his lifetime, however, had not been so astute as either Barton or Carnegie and Shields in their observations, and instead created conditions which sustained the folk stories about Morant.

One such writer is Major C S Jarvis, who had met Morant in Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War, just before Morant had joined the Bushveldt Carbineers. In his autobiography, *Half a life*, which was published in 1943, Jarvis included a chapter titled 'Morant of the Bushveldt Carbineers'. Jarvis is sympathetic, describing Morant as 'one of those extraordinarily attractive "ne'er-do-wells"' (Jarvis, p. 127.) and Morant's execution as 'the most ghastly tragedy of the war' (Jarvis, p. 126). Jarvis relates a rumour: 'I have an idea that in his youth he had been in the Navy and had been forced to resign from the Service over some escapade or other' (Jarvis, p. 127). It is this rumour that served as the direct catalyst to a public forum. In response to his chapter on Morant, Jarvis received several letters from Morant sympathizers (Cutlack, 1962, p. 93) and these letters have contributed to open discussions regarding Morant's legitimate ancestry.

One of the letters is quoted by a subsequent biographer to support claims that Morant was connected with the British Navy. Although F M Cutlack is clear in the introduction to his biography, *Breaker Morant*, that the story of 'The Breaker' is 'obviously lacking in certain details, tantalizingly so in some places' (Cutlack, p. ix), and he draws attention to the fact that the letter was written 'forty years after the events' (p. 93) by a woman who was ten years of age at the time of the events, he does not adequately question the authoritativeness nor the content of the letter. According to Cutlack, Jarvis received the letter from Major Bolton's daughter, who

claimed that her father had been the Provost Marshal at Bloemfontein in 1901. In the letter she states that her father had accompanied Morant on the train to Pretoria just before Morant and his companions were executed. The letter, however, is potentially unreliable and so too are any details as to Morant's connections with the Royal Navy:

He ... had been in the Navy, but had got into trouble over a card debt which had forced him to leave the service and embark on a roving life. (Cutlack, p. 94.)

The tone of the above sentence is conversational, and yet it combines three substantial life-altering events in one moment: the advent of joining the Navy, the dismissal over something as trivial as a card debt and the severe and sudden change in career. The premise of the letter is based in oral history that had been passed directly down from Morant himself, and as such, the story of his life is summarised in one short sentence, and yet Cutlack (p. 92) includes the letter as part of his narrative that constitutes his chapter on Morant's execution. Whilst certain facts are important to Cutlack, it is the tensions and conflict between truth and fiction that has created the beginnings of a folk-story. In Cutlack's re-telling of Morant's biography, it is the story that is privileged over fact. Apropos this kind of discussion which occurs frequently in Morant's biographies, it has become evident from a cultural point of view that the facts of his life have become less historically important than the story and the legend that have been generated.

It is now particularly well understood that, during his time in Australia, Morant was a fabricator:

Miss Hilda Truman of Adelaide has told me in letters and in conversation that Charles always considered Harry to be his relative; as did the Cutlack family of South Australia, a household where The Breaker was a frequent visitor, a friend of the father of the house, and known well enough for F M Cutlack to have detailed in his book *Breaker Morant* much of what the family knew of Harry's life, although it must be understood that those details were supplied by Harry and with no supporting proof (Denton, p. 70).

Whilst the media is currently focussed on the exact details and precise truth behind Morant's court-martial, which includes only the briefest period of Morant's life, and on obtaining a pardon for Morant (Unkles, 2012), it is now accepted by biographers that much of Morant's story is built upon folklore:

The story of Morant's life, exploits, trial and execution have been examined in several books and numerous press and internet articles, but as noted above, each account varies very considerably from the other in both the facts presented and their interpretation. There are facts intermingled with fiction. (Robl, 2012b)

Morant alone was the instigator of the half-truths that provided him with a persona by which he became so well known, and his claims to have been the son of the Admiral have neither been proved nor disproved. Over several decades of attempts to justify Morant's continued enactment of a certain identity, researchers have attempted to raise evidence that Morant was related to the Admiral and whether or not he, by any of the variations of his name, graduated from the Royal Naval College, but none has been successful (Carnegie & Shields, p. 137). My own searches have been similarly disappointing, and there is no physical evidence to support Morant's stories. Even if it was true and the Admiral was Morant's father, the Admiral denied paternity until after Morant's death (Bleszynski, p. 3). This conflict in itself, and the myth that it has generated, is sufficient to hold the interest of Australians seeking a story about an Australian national figure. It is the story that endures despite efforts to dispel the myth and elucidate the truth. What seems to be missing, however, is an analysis of why the story, in its original context, was so important to Morant.

The issue to Morant, it seems, was the way in which he was perceived, since it was important to him that he was able to associate with the cultural and social elites in Australia, especially with the poets associated with the most popular Australian bush journal of the time, *The Bulletin*, a journal which embodied what it meant to be Australian. Morant was attracted to bush balladeer and writer, A B Paterson. In letters collected by various biographers of the writer,

Paterson, and Morant, The Breaker often harks back to the upper classes of Devon. In December 1895 Morant wrote to Paterson:

Had an English letter the other day from an old schoolfellow who is at present yachting in the Hebrides to put in time ere stag-hunting commences in Devon. Stag-hunting starts this week there. (Cutlack, p. 32.)

In the above letter Morant alerts Paterson to his high-society connections through the mention of his schoolfellow. Given that Edwin Henry Murrant lied about his age in order to be married to Daisy O'Dwyer¹ and went through various name changes between Edwin Henry Murrant to Harry Harbord Morant, it is understandable that Morant's supposed connections with a mate who is 'yachting in the Hebrides' might be seen as a fabrication. It is clear, however, that Morant had hoped that Paterson would believe his story and indicated that he may at any time return to the open arms of his wealthy family, alerting Paterson to the biblical parable of the 'prodigal son'. A hint of frustration can be detected in this letter to Paterson:

In the course of a month or six weeks I intend departing from these regions to try Coolgardie. If I don't find it prosperous over there, next Christmas will find one prodigal turning up in England with a request for prime veal ... (Cutlack, p. 29.)

Morant's real father, according to his birth records, was deceased. The important issue, it seems, for Morant was that he was able to downplay the workhouse to project an image of prosperity, particularly to Paterson.

Morant's family did indeed have connections in Devon, but they were exaggerated as his letters to Paterson suggested. Morant was born in 1864 and left England in April 1883 when he was eighteen years of age. Whilst Carnegie and Shields claim that Morant's mother, Catherine Murrant, 'vanished from the face of the globe' after 1866 (p. 10), Catherine Murrant did, in fact,

¹ Morant's age is stated as twenty-one on his marriage certificate to Daisy O'Dwyer in Carnegie & Shields, 1979, p. 8.

live at the workhouse until 1891 when she returned to live in Devon. In the 1891 England Census she was living there with her daughter, Annie K Murrant. They lived at Torquay in the District of Newton Abbot in the County of Devonshire where she is listed as ‘... (late)² Matron County Asylum’³. Catherine died at Devon in 1899 at the age of 66^{4,5} and her daughter, Annie Kate Murrant, continued to live in Exeter, Devon, until her death in 1945 at the age of 83⁶. These events occurred long after Edwin had left for Australia. He had lived at the workhouse until the age of eight and after that had visited his mother during school holidays from the Masonic Lodge. Morant spent his last two years in England at Silesia College from 1881 to 1883. In comparison, Morant lived in Australia for seventeen years, from 1883 to 1900; he had not spent a great proportion of his life in Devon. The boastfulness in his letters to Paterson may have been due to a ‘chip on his shoulder’, as Carnegie & Shields (p. 25) have speculated, but I suggest that the reason he was so boastful was that Morant was ashamed of his workhouse history and concentrated on presenting a positive image to Paterson.

Morant may have seen his workhouse roots as a threat to the connection with elite social circles in Australia. Charles Dickens’ 1837 stark representations of the forerunner of the union workhouse, (the poorhouse in *Oliver Twist*), meant that union workhouses became infamous as places of disease, prostitution and abandon. The original workhouse buildings were modeled on prisons and to be ‘sent to the workhouse’ has passed into [British] national memory as a serious threat (Smith, 2001, p. 22). To earn their keep, early ‘inmates’ were expected to work at penal-like, seemingly useless tasks such as ‘stone breaking’ or ‘oakum picking’ (Crowther, 1981, p. 198). As such, workhouses were a ‘passive emblem of misery of the nineteenth century’ (p. 2). Workhouse children, in particular, were regarded with apparent fear as being the carriers of disease (p. 203); the children’s dormitories were often over-crowded, inadequately heated, and rife with highly contagious infections such as measles and scabies (Negrine, 2010, p. 36). Tramps and vagrants listed in the records, with their handicaps, such as ‘lunatic’ and ‘imbecile’

² The word in the column appears to be ‘late’.

³ 1891 England Census record for Catherine Murrant.

⁴ England & Wales Death Index: 1837–1915 record for Catherine Murrant.

⁵ It was once believed that Morant’s mother was living either at Bridgwater or Fordingbridge in 1902 at the time of Morant’s execution, but at the time she couldn’t be found (Carnegie & Shields, p. 43).

⁶ England & Wales, Death Index: 1916–2005 record for Annie K Murrant.

noted beside their names⁷, filled the Bridgwater Union Workhouse, where Edwin Henry Murrant⁸, at the age of six, was listed alongside his housemates and peers of the day, as ‘scholar’. Whilst reforms to the Poor Law, particularly after 1871, meant that the workhouse institution was compared to ‘the charitable home, and the hospital’ (Crowther, p. 4), the stigma associated to workhouse life remains to the present day. As Matron of the workhouse, Morant’s mother would have been a source of shame, since, as Russel Ward points out, ‘if any class was more generally despised than the paupers, it was those who guarded them’ (p. 4). The stigma would not have been lost on Australians in particular, whose ancestors as British colonials were still strongly linked with Britain, particularly in the era predating Federation.

An association with the workhouse system would have been difficult for Morant to have explained to Paterson, particularly since it contradicted Morant’s image of himself as a well-connected gentleman and it undermined his education, which was superior to workhouse standards.

Morant was exceptionally boastful, and this caused his contemporaries to have been, justifiably, as sceptical of Morant’s education as they were of his connections with British Admiralty, but at least some parts of his educational standard can now be verified. At one time, Morant claimed that he had been raised by an uncle (Bleszynski, p. 12). Bleszynski believes that this uncle was a George Whyte-Melville and quotes a letter from one of Morant’s ‘old Hawkesbury mates’. Like most of the biographical accounts of Morant’s history, this story is a re-told version of an original tale handed down from Morant himself. It is a very entertaining story of how Morant learned to ride on the ‘knee of the Devonshire sport and author, G J Whyte-Melville’ who ‘... jolted the hard faced youngster up and down ... and rode a great burst over imaginary fences, with a “Tally-Ho!”’ (p. 13). Of course, since Morant was known to be at the very least a ‘fabricator’, the anecdote cannot be taken seriously, but recent research by Ted Robl has uncovered some evidence to support Morant’s claims of a more sophisticated education. Morant’s deceased father had been a Mason and member of Lodge Number 494, (Robl, 2012a, p. 31) which meant that Edwin Henry Murrant Jnr. was eligible to attend the Royal Masonic Institute for Boys. Ted Robl’s research led him to ‘a couple of newspaper references’ (Robl,

⁷ 1871 England Census record for Edwin Stenery Marant.

⁸ The transcript from the original, handwritten record has been incorrectly transcribed showing ‘Edwin Stenery Marant’, Matron’s son, age 6, scholar. His mother is listed as ‘Catherine Murant’ (having lost an ‘r’ from Murrant).

2012a, p. 26) which indicate that, at the age of eight, Edwin Henry Murrant⁹ won a scholarship worth three hundred and eighteen pounds five shillings and sixpence to attend the Royal Masonic Institute For Boys (Robl, 2012a, p. 26).

Morant stayed at the Royal Masonic Institute for Boys until December 1880, visiting his mother during school holidays but these visits were surrounded by controversy and the pressures associated with poverty. When, in 1880, the workhouse guardians were dissatisfied with the arrangement (Robl, 2012, p. 27) Edwin and his sister were asked to leave and could no longer spend holidays at the workhouse. In 1881, when Edwin Henry was about the age of sixteen, he moved to Silesia College¹⁰, where he worked as a scholar and a tutor for approximately two years. Since this can now be verified, at least some of Morant's fabrications might be taken seriously, but the extent to which he exaggerated his social connections in England in order to enhance his connections with Paterson is unknown. But there is no doubt that Morant understood elite equestrian sports and this served him well in respect of his socialization in Australia.

It was at Silesia College that Morant learned to play polo, made friends with well-connected 'schoolfellows' and became a skilled horseman. It was this knowledge of the game of polo and its social connotations that enabled Morant to communicate on a social level with A B Paterson, as this 1895 letter to Paterson attests:

Filled up some leisure by breaking in a four-year-old colt by the Levite (a Yattenden horse) out of an old mare by The Drummer. The colt was a man-eater when I first tackled him, but has turned out a beautiful horse to ride, and I may get a race out of him ... (Cutlack, p. 31.)

For The Breaker, horsemanship played an important role in his life in Australia. Much of this skill had been developed during his first years in Australia; as Edwin Henry, he performed on horses in circuses (Carnegie & Shields, p. 6) and it was said that he was an accomplished horse tamer. Numerous anecdotes pepper his biographies, some of them in his own words. At

⁹ His name in the Enrolment Register has been incorrectly entered – as Thomas Henry Murrant (Robl, 2012, p. 31)

¹⁰ 1881 England Census record for Edwin H. Murrant. Here he was as tutor.

this time, Morant earned his pseudonym 'The Breaker' and this had contributed to his popularity with horse-loving Australian men.

Horses, it seems, were a part of Morant's performance as The Breaker and therefore as an Australian. Through stories variously told, re-told and exaggerated, Morant also became a substantial figure in Australian horse culture. Onlookers remembered his antics many years after his death, and he contributed to 'The Breaker' legend:

The Breaker backed himself to jump the creamy over the fence barebacked—the stakes, drinks all round. The fence was a solid four-railed, about 4 feet 8 inches high; on the landing side there was the footpath, about 6 feet wide, and the gutter. I held up the clothes line in the hotel yard so that Morant would not get pulled off. He not only jumped the horse out of the yard but turned him round and jumped back again; the horse did not touch the fence on either occasion. It was a wonderful performance ... (Cutlack, p. 33.)

On another occasion, legend has it that his drinking led The Breaker to wager his horse, Cavalier, to jump a seven foot high picket fence, at which the poor animal baulked but 'scrambled over' (p. 32). As with many of the stories told about the legendary antics of certain well-known Australians, this story has many variations: in some versions Morant was blindfolded (Carnegie & Shields, p. 20), in others, he jumped the horse by candlelight or by the light of matches placed on the fence posts. It cannot be argued, however, that Morant did not possess a genuine love of horses. He wrote lovingly of his favourite horses, Cavalier and Harlequin:

I am wond'ring to-day if the brown horse yet live,
For the fellow who broke him, I trow,
A long lease of soul-ease would willingly give
To be riding brown Harlequin now! (Robl, p. 72.)

In 1896, The Breaker had Cavalier immortalised in a portrait painted by the outback painter Frank Prout Mahony (Denton, p. 73). Just before departing from South Australia for the South African war, The Breaker wrote an 'envoi' on the back of a caricature sketch of himself pictured with riding whip and breeches, drawn by a Fred Leist. The poem was not written in honour of a lady or a mate, but to Cavalier:

When the last rousing gallop is ended,
And the last post-and-rail has been jumped,
And a cracked neck that cannot be mended
Shall have under the yew-tree been 'dumped',
Just you leave him alone – in God's acre –
And drink, in wine, whisky or beer:
May the saints up above send 'The Breaker'
A horse like good old Cavalier. (McNicoll, 1980, p. 57.)

It is clear from the words of the above poem that Morant loved his horse, but that he also came to be remembered as The Breaker, which incorrectly created his reputation as a famous horse breaker. Good pseudonyms were important to *Bulletin* writers. The pseudonym afforded the writer an established image that gave him credentials at *The Bulletin*, but did not necessarily reflect his true identity. The first reference to Morant as a horse breaker occurs in 1887 when he was admitted to hospital in Muttaborra. On his admission form, he is recorded as 'horse breaker' because he was working at the time on Maneroo Station as a horse breaker (Robl, p. 63). It was shortly after this, in 1889, that Morant's first poems appeared in *The Bulletin* with the pen-name 'The Breaker'. Like many poets of the day Morant's pseudonym then became synonymous with his public image, but did not necessarily reflect his lifetime career; it simply reflected his current occupation. Pseudonyms often alluded to an identity that was separate from the writer. It was the pseudonym, not necessarily the writer, that came to be recognised by the Australian readership as having a specific knowledge about the Australian bush. This was important to *The Bulletin* since it was recognised as the 'Bushman's bible' and its writers needed to be, or at least give the illusion of being, authorities on bush lore. With the exception of a few writers, such as Henry

Lawson and ‘Banjo’ Paterson, the writers were not usually identified publicly, but even in these cases, it was the brand, ‘HL’, ‘Lawson’, or ‘The Banjo’ that was considered the expert on the Australian bush. For example, A B Paterson was a city dweller, and yet ‘The Banjo’ was the authority, albeit romanticised, on the Australian outback. Richard Fotheringham discussed this phenomenon in his essay ‘Arthur Hoey Davis and Several “Steele Rudds”: imagining the Pseudonymous Author’. According to Fotheringham, *The Bulletin* writer ‘had to be able to demonstrate their bush credentials, and to claim the verisimilitude of the representation of that experience as their greatest achievement.’ (p. 300). In the case of Arthur Hoey Davis, his pseudonym, ‘Steele Rudd’ became the social construct (p. 299). When it came to Harry Morant, the bush credentials to which he was able to claim verisimilitude of experience came to be recognised as the breaking of horses, thus, the pseudonym ‘The Breaker’.

Horse breaking, however, was not Morant’s best achievement. If a less romanticised version of The Breaker were to be portrayed, we might get a more balanced image that includes elements of a person who might be considered to be an arrogant exhibitionist. Morant was more frequently in the news for his accidents involving horses than for his successful antics, and when he had enlisted in South Australia for the Anglo-Boer war, the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* joked that ‘if Morant had gone for the NSW contingent he would probably have been “spun for bad riding”’ (*Windsor and Richmond Gazette*, Saturday 3rd March, 1900, p. 3). In fact, the stories of his legendary horsemanship have been overstated as this gossip segment suggests.

The “Breaker’s” Accident

As announced last week, Mr Harry Morant (“The Breaker”) met with an accident, through a fall from a horse, and suffered the dislocation of his right shoulder. This is not the first occasion on which Mr Morant has met with a similar mishap, for that unlucky shoulder of his has been broken or dislocated twice before; whilst the escapes he has had from total annihilation in consequence of the frequent falls from his horse have been legion. The only wonder is that he lives to tell the tales ... (*Windsor and Richmond Gazette*, Saturday 12th March, 1898, p. 9)

Whilst Morant become a part of Australian folklore through his love and ‘abilities’ with horses and the anecdotes told about him, there was a less romantic aspect to Morant’s character. Although he may not have been a pauper or a true inmate of the workhouse, he became a product of the social order of the workhouse system by which he was surrounded as a child. His early apprenticeship with horses and as a witness to violence, poverty and hardship in the workhouse enabled him to survive and work in the Australian bush and set him up as a candidate for Australian nationalism, but he had brought with him an interesting mix of values. These values necessitated Morant’s integration into Australian life, and contributed to the way in which he became significantly remembered.

Despite his wishes to manipulate the way in which people perceived him, it was Morant’s background that had prepared him for life in Australia. Whilst he had been relentless in downplaying his workhouse connections, and socialised with the likes of Paterson, the ideology that followed Morant to Australia enabled him to also connect with the working classes. Frank Renar, who is the author of one of Morant’s earliest biographies, *Bushman and buccaneer: Harry Morant — his ’ventures and verses* (1902), wrote the following about Morant:

Much that helped to make the man an outlaw in Devon helped to make him a hero in the Australian back country, where hard-drinking is no sin, roving recklessness a virtue held in great esteem, and the love of the horse of as good merit as the love of the Lord (Renar, 1902, p. 6).

Morant had certainly tried, by changing his name, by overstating his educational and social ranks, and by fabricating the story of his parentage, to be divorced from his workhouse parents, but Renar had seen through his façade. In his early days in the ‘outback’ his rough ideology seems to have made an impression on Renar, but Morant’s earliest poems that were published in Australia also expose something of the past he tried to conceal. Edwin Morant’s mother, Catherine, was the daughter of an Irish farmer¹¹ and it is evident that Morant had a particular

¹¹ As noted in 1881 England Census for Catherin Newvrant (see footnote 6): Residents of Bridgwater Union Workhouse and in the 1891 England Census: Civil parish of Tormoham. Her father is noted as ‘farmer’ on the marriage certificate of Edwin Murrant and Catherine Riely (Carnegie & Shields, p. 7).

affinity with Irish immigrants. On arriving in Australia, Murrant immediately married an Irish woman, Daisy O'Dwyer, and for many years after leaving her, he went droving with his Irish friends, who, through Morant's poetry, we know as Paddy Magee, Brumby Bill and Brigalow Mick. Several of his early poems included endearing references to these Irish friends. Examples include titles such as 'Paddy Magee', 'Slewed', 'Requiescat', 'To an old mate' and 'Untitled' with the first line: 'Oh, Paddy, dear! And did you hear the news that's going round' (Robl, 2012a, p. 275). He wrote extensively 'To an old mate', Paddy Magee, (Robl, p. 19), and also to Michael O'Dowd in 'Brigalow Mick' (p. 20.), and to 'Jock M'Phee' in 'The Reprobate's reply' (p. 27). To this end, Morant remained faithful to his mother's Irish background and it followed him to his death. In one of Morant's final letters, exchanged between prisoners in Pietersburg gaol cells, Morant takes on an air of dark humour but concludes with a prayer to Ireland:

Dartmoor!

Dear Hannam,- Send you herewith some books-though they're mostly
'Tripe!' I'm getting fat-showing '*emponbong*' [sic] owing to confinement!
Hell! No more hunting! No more partridges! No trimset petticoat! All on
account of the unity of the Empire!! Should the Lord allow that I ever see
Ushant Light 4 points on the starboard bow, once more, and steam safe into
Southampton waters or Plymouth Sound, the only Empire I'll acknowledge
is where-

At 7.45 they open the doors

And the Promenade's flooded with London's-----s

God Save Oireland!- Thine TONY

Lieut Hannam, per favor Gar.-Adjt.

(Renar, p. 30.)

In light of the satirical nature of the letter, 'God save Oireland' may also be seen as a joke. Ireland was not his birthplace, and yet, the poetry written during his first years in Australia betrays an empathy with the Irish, and it is significant that in his final hours of life his words should so prominently point to his acknowledgement of an Irish ancestry.

And yet, whilst Morant's early Australian experiences and his early poetry allude to his Irish ancestry, his works never reflect or acknowledge the workhouse. His resentment of the workhouse, however, seems to be evident in his behaviour and his lifestyle. As discussed, the stigma associated with workhouse children meant that they were feared as carriers of disease (Crowther, 1981, p. 203), and it is likely that Morant subconsciously and violently resented this stigma. Morant is said to have disliked children to the extent that both white and black children were afraid of him (Ward, 1981). He was frequently involved in fights and was 'devoid of fear whether it be horses or men' (Carnegie & Shields, p. 16). He was violent (Ward, p. 7) and exceptionally racist (Carnegie & Shields, p. 22). It was after Morant's execution in 1902 for war crimes committed during the Anglo-Boer war that Trooper Victor Marra Newland, who had been present at the shooting, recalled:

Poor beggar, how well I remember him: outcast, boon comrade, drunken beast, and brave man. It seems but yesterday we trekked, starved, stole and fought together —what a mate in those long hours of night watch or day march — what tales he could tell, what merry rhymes recite.

And there were days before, too, down in great sunny Australia: days of racing, of begging and starving, days of wine and women, rags, drunkenness and disgrace — Poor old Breaker! (Carnegie & Shields, p. 2)

The Trooper's portrait of a Morant in later life reflects an alternate ideology for Morant that may have developed from a childhood of shame and abandoned inhibition. His dislike for children perhaps reflects the fear and stigma associated with diseased children in British workhouses and his violence, a symptom of repressed anger and fear of being stigmatised. In the depiction above, Morant was clearly not the product of British Admiralty, the pride of Silesia College, the protégé of G J Whyte-Melville, or the friend of the 'schoolfellow who is at present

yachting in the Hebrides' (Cutlack, p. 32). Whilst he did not speak of his experiences in the workhouse, it is apparent that he was as comfortable in the rough outback as he was in the hunt and polo clubs with Paterson and his colleagues at *The Bulletin*. Morant had made use of all aspects of his family history; his workhouse childhood, his Irish ancestry and his expensive education in order to adapt to the lifestyle and adopt the values of his new home in Australia.

The childhood of a man can provide some insight into the identity and character that emerges, but in the case of Morant, his childhood was complex and involved an alternating lifestyle between the gentry and the poor, between workhouse and auspicious college, between Devon and Ireland. This has all contributed to the making of The Breaker, whose alternating values and ambivalence has created the myth. As to his heritage, perhaps the last word belongs to The Breaker:

Let's toss a bumper down our throat,
Before we pass to Heaven,
And toast: "The trim-set petticoat
We leave behind in Devon."
(McNicoll, p. 62)

The final indisputable truth about the early life of Edwin Henry Murrant aka Harry Harbord Morant—The Breaker—may never be known. As Nick Bleszynski writes: 'Most people have to wait for their legend to be created by the hand of others but "The Breaker" simply wrote his own' (Robl, p. 6). After one hundred and ten years of searching original handwritten documents and interpreting misspelled transcripts, or of trawling the internet for Government records, the only way Australia really knows the man who was shot at dawn on the 27th of February 1902—convicted of murder—is through identification with him as he presented himself. We know that he was a poet, a story teller, an Australian national character, a caricature and an anti-hero of the Anglo-Boer War whose most enduring aspect is his pseudonym: The Breaker. It is ultimately the name that he invented for himself. His final death poem says it all:

'The Last Rhyme and Testament of Tony Lumpkin—The Breaker' (McNicoll, p. 62)

The Making of The Breaker: A B Paterson and Will Ogilvie

Because of his connections with *The Bulletin* and writers such as A B Paterson and Will Ogilvie, Morant became a popular character that represented an emerging version of a national identity. Russell Ward (1981) describes a pre-war Morant as a 'despicable character who also possessed some admirable qualities' (Ward, p. 7). Morant had been a terrible racist (Ward, 1981), and it was rumoured that he may have been responsible for 'four shocking murders in South Queensland in December 1898' (Merredith, p. 62) when he disappeared for three months. He was a wild personality and could be, at times, anti-social, but the effervescent nature of his character earned him the friendship of both Paterson and Ogilvie. His connections with these reputable *Bulletin* writers, along with the publication of a small number of his poems, earned Morant his popularity with *The Bulletin's* readership of the 1890s. Additionally, both Paterson and Ogilvie wrote and published poems in which Morant can be identified as the romanticised hero. As a result, The Breaker became well known during the seventeen years that he lived in Australia, from the time he arrived in 1883 until he departed in 1899 as a lieutenant with the Second South Australian Contingent that served in the Anglo-Boer War. In 1902, after a short court-martial for war crimes, Morant was executed by the British Army, and due to the controversy aroused by his death, Morant's fame increased in Australia. After Morant's death, Paterson and Ogilvie both initiated public discussions about Morant: discussions which polarised the legacy of the already infamous Australian bushman and a fellow poet who had been a 'brave' soldier with which Australian men have since identified.

In the decade before Australia became a federated nation, *The Bulletin* played a significant role in defining a national identity for Australian men. The editors of *The Bulletin* claimed that the journal was one of Australia's most popular and most widely circulated bush publications of the time (*The Bulletin*, 1890). Being that it thrived in the 1890s, at a time when a distinctive Australian national identity was evolving, and that it published 'the first genuinely Australian, as opposed to colonial literature' (Webby, p. 308), *The Bulletin* implied everything that it meant to be Australian. Through it, 'an impassioned aspiration in the Australian ego was fulfilled for *The Bulletin* was not only the National Australian Journal, it was Australia in concrete form' (Lindsay, 1973, p. 5). Indeed, writers for *The Bulletin* described Australia as

Australians saw it, in real terms, and rejected 'the old values of the British cultural establishment' (White, 1981, p. 92). This meant that anyone heavily associated with *The Bulletin* or its writers had the potential to influence the vision of what Australian's perceived as a national type. To this end, it can be argued that Morant also played a particular role, through his influence on *Bulletin* writers, and on the way in which the literary version of an Australian national identity evolved.

Morant's personal attributes, his personality, and the character are very similar to what Graeme Turner has since described as the literary version of the Australian male. These identities were seen as 'single-dimensional but "colourful" characters that were metonyms for a particular aspect of Australian life' (1993, p. 90). According to the historian, Russel Ward, the characteristics of the Australian bush legend are derived from the attributes of the outback employee (Ward, 1958, pp. 1-2). Four basic criteria could be applied to Australian men in order to determine their patriotism: 'Was he rich or poor, cultivated or ignorant, Australian or British by birth and was he a bushman or a city-dweller?' (Ward, 1981, p. 3). According to Richard White, the 'Australian type' accepted at the turn of the nineteenth century possessed the characteristics of 'independence, manliness, a fondness for sport, egalitarianism, a dislike of mental effort, self-confidence, a certain disrespect for authority' (White, 1981, p. 77). Morant was an outback employee who also encompassed all of the above characteristics. He claimed to have been born into wealth and yet in Australia he was poor, he was well educated and yet he worked as a labourer, he was British by birth and yet he had been expelled from his homeland, his values alternated between the values of the city and the values of the bush, and in the end, he rejected authority. Morant's connection with Australian nationalism, therefore, was more complicated than what a simple application of the attributes of Australian males could determine. Accordingly, Russel Ward argues that: 'if we apply the above criteria mechanically to "Harry Morant", we must conclude that he was neither fish nor fowl' (Ward, 1981, p. 3). Morant, however, encompassed what Russel Ward had, in an earlier discussion, described as the Australian bush legend that possessed an almost impossible mix of alternating values. According to Ward, the bush legend can be laid-back and yet capable of hard work when necessary. He drinks heavily and gambles *occasionally*, swears and jokes consistently, is a 'knocker' of the 'well-to-do' and yet holds in high esteem the sporting hero. He is sceptical of religion, education and culture and yet will stand by a mate at all cost, even if he believes he is wrong (Ward, 1958,

p. 2). This male has become, as discussed by Graeme Turner, the legend that provides the paradigms and creates the myths that are the essence of the Australian nationalist (1986, p. 107). Morant could not be so simply categorised since the impossible mix of his alternating values posits him in both camps: not, as Russel Ward argues, as ‘fish nor fowl’ but fish *and* fowl. As a character who continuously moved between the boundaries of all categories of Australian nationalism, he could be identified amongst them all. Morant was both an Australian bushman and a city dweller, and to this end, he attracted the attention of one of Australia’s most popular *Bulletin* writers of the time, A B Paterson.

Morant reminded Paterson of the character he had created in his verse and inspired him toward further research on the Australian bushman. Paterson and Morant met in 1893, shortly after Paterson received a letter from his uncle introducing Morant. The letter described Morant as a man who could ‘break in horses, trap dingoes, yard scrub cattle, dance, run, fight, drink and borrow money, anything except work’ (Carnegie & Shields, p. 17). This intriguing description is similar to the values that Turner (1993) attributed, retrospectively, to the typical Australian bushman. When, in 1893, Paterson had engaged with Morant in a long conversation ‘chatting about the bush’ (Paterson, 1939, p. 21), it had brought to Paterson’s mind a kaleidoscope of images:

This set things going, so to speak, and the talk drifted from stag-hunting on Exmoor to galloping up alongside wild cattle and ripping them with a knife, in the scrubs at the back of Dubbo, which, in those days, was quite far-out country. We had a hunt club in Sydney in those days, and he said that he must get a horse and come out with us. He talked like a man without a care in the world. I found myself comparing him with the picturesque heroes of the past who fought for their own hand ... (Paterson, 1939, p. 21.)

After Morant’s death Paterson travelled to North Queensland, collecting anecdotes and ‘going over the tracks Morant had trodden’ (Roderick, p. 85) and penned the poem ‘Jim Carew’, which according to Roderick, ‘fitted Morant as Paterson at that time saw him’ (p. 86). The ways in which Jim Carew fits Turner’s and Ward’s descriptions of the Australian bush legend is self-

explanatory. The poem portrays an image of an adopted Australian who is easy-going and yet 'always ready and always fit' (Roble, p. 193), whose 'Drink is his master [which] drags him down', who is a fighter, a gambler, a womaniser and yet he works with the stockmen, 'toils with them, side by side' and he stands by his mates (p. 193). Having been immortalised this way in the poetry of one of the country's most loved poets, Morant became, albeit ostensibly, a romanticised version of the Australian national icon.

Morant was a narcissist and in recognising himself in Paterson's poetry, aligned himself with one of Paterson's most famous creations. Paterson was known for taking inspiration for his characters from the people he had encountered during his lifetime. He was encouraged by Rudyard Kipling after the release of *The Man from Snowy River and Other Verses*, which was published in 1895, to 'write more and more about the man who is born and bred on the land' (King, p. xii). According to some analysts, Clancy of the Overflow was drawn from a client of Paterson's law firm from whom he derived the words, 'Clancy's gone to Queensland drovin' and we don't know where he are' (King, 1995, p. xxxix). Clancy had been first imagined around 1889 (Semmler, p. 17). He appears later in April 1890 in *The Bulletin*, alongside 'The Man from Snowy River', who Paterson had, (quoted from the December 1938 *Sydney Mail*), created as a 'man who could ride better than anyone else' (King, p. xxx):

He sent the flint stones flying, but the pony kept his feet,
He cleared the fallen timber in his stride,
And the man from Snowy River never shifted in his seat -
It was grand to see that mountain horseman ride.
Through the stringybarks and saplings, on the rough and broken ground,
Down the hillside at a racing pace he went;
And he never drew the bridle till he landed safe and sound,
At the bottom of that terrible descent. (King, p. 3)

That Paterson drew his characters from real life is a fact with which Morant appears to have been acquainted, and since the book was published after Morant and Paterson became friends, it is apparent that Morant saw a direct reference to himself in the character. Nick

Bleszynski quotes a letter that Morant wrote to Paterson in 1895 in which Morant mentions ‘The Man from Snowy River’. In the letter Morant draws Paterson’s attention to his own, first-hand experience at wild mountain riding. He was acquainted with Paterson’s *The Man from Snowy River and other verses*, which had just been published when he wrote from Bundaleer in December 1895:

Apropos of “The Man from Snowy River,” there is a small, sultry border township, _____ to wit, where, just a year ago, a horse owned by an alleged steward ran a bad second to a shearer’s moke, and was declared the winner by the biased judge.

I have done a bit of brumby running in mountain country, although most of my cleanskin experience has been in mulgoa or brigalow, and I have noticed that a good man on a plucky horse can always beat brumbies when going down a declivity. A horse with a rider on his back goes with confidence, whilst brumbies are never all out then. When going uphill the naked horse gets away. Weight tells then, I suppose, though of course there is the chance of a smash going down. (Bleszynski, p. 70).

In this letter, Morant appears to identify directly with ‘The Man from Snowy River’ even though the poem was written in 1890, three years before the two men had met. Similarly, it is implied by some biographers that Morant became the direct inspiration for other works by Paterson.

Because of Morant’s and Paterson’s mutual interest in the game of polo, the inspiration for Paterson’s character in another of his poems has been mistakenly attributed to Morant. With his friend, Will Ogilvie, Morant would often play ‘polo in the main street of Forbes’ (Merredith, p. 42). It was shortly after Morant had met Will Ogilvie in 1896, and a fellow poet, Gordon Tidy, that the group organised a working bee to convert a large natural clearing near Nelungaloo Station between Parkes and Bogan Gate and formed the Bogan Gate Polo club. The club organised a satire of a ‘grand international match’ (p. 45). The two teams were ‘The Australians’ and ‘The Great Britain Team’. Captain Harry Morant represented England on The Great Britain Team (Merredith, p. 45). John Merredith (Merredith, p. 48) and Nick Bleszynski (p. 69) make

convincing arguments that Paterson's poem, 'The Geebung Polo Club' is based on Morant's Bogan Gate Club, although both Clement Semmler, (1966, p. 69) and Jonathan King (1995, p. xlii) point out that Paterson's poem was a 'make-believe city versus country polo game' (King, 1995, p. xlii) which was based on an actual game that was played against a Cooma team. It is Bleszynski and Merredith's assumptions that the poem was written about Morant that has added to the material which includes polo in the repertoire of myths that iconize Morant. The poem itself substantiates a polo hero, but Merredith's analysis of Paterson's poem specifies Morant as that hero, extending Morant's legacy to include the polo field. The poem does not name Morant as its hero:

For they waddied one another till the plain was strewn with dead,
While the score was kept so even that they neither got ahead.
And the cuff and Collar Captain, when he tumbled off to die
Was the last surviving player – so the game was called a tie.

Then the Captain of the Geebungs raised him slowly from the ground,
Though his wounds were mostly mortal, yet he fiercely gazed around;
There was no one to oppose him – and the rest were in a trance,
so he scrambled on his pony for his last expiring chance,
For he meant to make an effort to get victory to his side;
So he struck at goal – and missed it – then he tumbled off and died.
(The Banjo) (Merredith, p. 49)

Nevertheless, Morant's expertise at polo and Paterson's words in the 1896 poem eerily prefigure the Anglo-Boer War and Morant's part in it. Paterson espoused polo as valuable military training (King, p. xliii) and so too did Morant. During the Boer war, Morant trained polo ponies and organised polo games for his men during his time on the veldt. Later, in 1900, whilst Morant was fighting in Southern Africa, Paterson was a war correspondent situated at Bloemfontein. The Boer war was erroneously declared over, in July 1900, by Lord Roberts. Paterson returned home to Australia, and Morant returned 'home' to England. The Boers

continued to fight on, using guerrilla tactics. This led directly to Morant's return to the veldt in April 1901 when he joined the Bushveldt Carbineers, and, like the slapstick caricature in the poem, appears to have 'scrambled on his pony' to fight the war in its dying stages. The character in the poem, the captain of the Geebung Polo Club meets his final demise when he 'tumbles off the pony' whilst representing his team in the polo game, and similarly, Morant meets his death whilst defending his team, The Empire, in Southern Africa. Paterson's words in the poem used to describe the opposition in a 'trance' echo words that he would later use to reminisce about Morant's actions in the war: 'Somehow I seemed to see the whole thing the little group of anxious-faced men, the half-comprehending Dutchman standing by' (Paterson, 1939, p. 2). Paterson's writings had provided images, to Australian readers, of a romanticized Australian national character, and through a symbiotic relationship between fact and fiction had contributed to and assimilated Morant with this legend.

Another contributing factor to Morant's current notoriety is the way in which Paterson, himself, had identified with Morant's personality. In the 1993 biography, *A B Paterson: Poet by Accident*, Colin Roderick claims that Morant had won Paterson's friendship through his passion for horses (Roderick, p. 82). Their common interest in horses, however, was not the sole attraction between the two men. Colin Roderick noted that Morant and Paterson both possessed a 'reckless streak' (p. 85), and Clement Semmler, another of Paterson's biographers, also saw similarities in their personalities. According to Semmler, Morant was 'in some ways, the *alter ego* of the temperamentally more mature Paterson' (Semmler, p. 124). There was a bond between them, but Roderick, in particular, is careful to point out that the defining difference between the two men was that, unlike Morant, Paterson was able to keep a 'tight rein' on his wild side (p. 85); yet, Paterson overlooked the antisocial aspects of Morant's personality, and during the years before the Anglo-Boer war, engaged with him in an ongoing correspondence. Paterson's personal connection with Morant continued long after Morant's execution for murder.

Paterson was a lawyer, and despite Morant having been sentenced to death for the crime of murder, he continued to empathise with Morant. Following Morant's death, Paterson wrote several endearing accounts of his first meeting with Morant. The first of Paterson's memoirs appeared, shortly after Morant's death, in *The Bulletin* of 10 May, 1902 (Roderick, p. 159), in which Paterson recalls a meeting with The Breaker at a hunt club. Although Paterson appears to

have been conflicted over his feelings for Morant, finding it ‘very difficult to think of him as a murderer’ (p. 159), his language is anecdotal when he tells of a Morant who rode so well that he ‘delighted’ the stable keeper at the club (Roderick, 1993, p. 158). In Paterson’s second recollection, published in 1939 in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, he remembers Morant ‘as a daring rider’ whose ‘relationship to an Admiral made him a social lion’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 2). Paterson wrote that he had so enjoyed his first encounter with Morant that ‘time passed on golden wings’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 2). The second article was written thirty-seven years after Morant’s conviction and execution for murder, and even though Colin Roderick argues that Paterson’s recollections of Morant were faulty due to Paterson’s typhoid-ridden, ‘inactive mind’ in his old age (Roderick, 1993, p. 50), it appears that Paterson’s fondness for Morant had survived the decades of controversy.

At this time, other Australian men had also identified with Morant, and they became defensive, even at the hint of a frank and honest analysis by Paterson, one of Morant’s most consistent defendants. Despite his war crimes, Morant had gained such popularity in Australia, through *The Bulletin*, that he had become almost celestial to a certain element of Australian men. Paterson had again raised the debate over Morant’s execution when he published a reconstruction of conversations that had taken place between him and Morant’s defence lawyer, J F Thomas (Roderick, p. 160). For the most part, Paterson’s language is straight reporting, with large sections of text enclosed in quote marks to indicate the exact words spoken by Thomas. But at one point he lapses into reverie:

Somehow, I seemed to see the whole thing—the little group of anxious-faced men, the half-comprehending Dutchmen standing by, and Morant, drunk with his one day of power. For years he had shifted and battled and contrived; had been always the under-dog; and now he was up in the stirrups. It went to his head like wine (Roderick, p. 160).

In light of the relationship between Morant and Paterson, this would seem to be Paterson’s way of excusing Morant, and perhaps an attempt to justify his friendship with him. Paterson had been a lawyer, was a respected member of the community and a war correspondent

who had witnessed, first hand, the violence of war. His intentions were clearly empathetic to both sides and are an unveiled attempt at diplomacy. Here, he is seen to be struggling with his allegiances, which alternated between Morant (who represented a part of his own identity) and justice, but his language, however, was interpreted by Morant supporters and by the *Sydney Morning Herald* as an unjust 'condemnation' of Morant (p. 160). Having identified with Morant as a representative of the Australian male population, the Australian public were overly sympathetic to him, and this small moment of empathy for the other side was attacked at Paterson's expense. They had guarded Morant's reputation as though they had also identified with him personally.

Paterson was not the only national Australian poet who, by association, provided substance to Morant's notoriety. Will Ogilvie also wrote about the Bogan Gate polo game, 'For the Honour of Old England And The Glory of the Game' but his version was epic and glorifies Morant. The poem, which was published on the front page of the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* (Merredith, 1996, p. 45), describes a game that ends in a victory for the Great Britain team, privileging the heroic polo captain, who this time really was Morant.

Will Ogilvie and Morant met in 1896 and both men fit the accepted description (Ward, 1958; Turner 1993) of the Australian legendary bushman. Both were poets. In addition to 'For the Honour of Old England And The Glory of the Game' Ogilvie wrote 'at least half a dozen poems addressed to [Morant]' (Merredith, 1996, p. 52). John Merredith suggests that two poems and a short story, titled 'Only for the Brave' were disguised portraits of Morant (p. 15). One of Ogilvie's poems 'When the Breaker is booked for the South' was rejected by *The Bulletin* because it was considered libellous (p. 52), but in light of Ogilvie's relationship with Morant the poem can be interpreted as a celebration of Morant's contriteness:

He will leave when his ticket is tendered
A bundle of debts, I'm afraid –
Accounts that were many times rendered
And bills that will never be paid;
Whilst the tailor and riding-boot maker
Will stand with their thumbs in the mouth

With a three-cornered curse at The Breaker
When The Breaker is booked for the South.

...

There are comrades who'll miss him at polo
And look for his hard phiz in vain,
And it's twenty to one that they'll follow,
and "shout" for "The Breaker" again:
Whilst a rest shall come after the riot,
And drinking shall lapse into drouth,
For the town will go back to its quiet –
When "The Breaker" has booked for the South.
(Robl, p. 205).

In 1897, Ogilvie gave a photograph of himself to Morant, indicating a gesture of exceptional friendship. The poem, written on the back of the photograph, runs along the lines of mutual acceptance and friendship and ends with the stanza:

By the same firm belief that the world's ways are pleasant
The same disregard of the money we spend
This photograph now in place of a present
I hope you'll accept the face of a friend. (Robl, p. 207)

Like Roderick and his analysis of the Paterson/Morant relationship, Merredith is unconvinced of the alliance between Ogilvie and Morant, but the Morant legend is privileged with the support of his contemporary allies. According to Merredith, Ogilvie's relationship with the 'incurable Harry Morant' (p. 15) is explained by his 'understanding and acceptance of human weakness in others' (p. 15) and his ability to overlook the 'darker aspects' (p. 52) of Morant's character. Merredith relates that soon after receiving the photograph and the poem above, Morant passed it on to Henry Lawson, supposing that Morant 'apparently did not appreciate the friendly gesture'

(p. 56). Merredith's analysis of Ogilvie's poem 'Breaker Morant' relates an anecdote in which Morant won a bet over Ogilvie and Ogilvie willingly 'paid over his quid with a laugh' (p. 56), but Merredith is cynical: 'One can imagine, had the situation been reversed, Morant saying laughingly, "Well, that's a quid I owe you, mate!"' (p. 56). Once again, though, Morant's shortcomings had been overlooked by his contemporaries, who at the time were prepared to support Morant over the analysis of the more popular writer.

Similar to the way in which readers of the *Sydney Morning Herald* defended Morant over Paterson's recollections, Morant's memory was also guarded against Ogilvie's recollections. Morant's defence lawyer at the court-martial in Pietersburg, J F Thomas, after the trial continued to defend Morant, this time from Ogilvie's representations of him. In a letter addressed to A G Stephens, the editor of *The Bulletin*, in 1921, Thomas asks 'Why did Ogilvie say Morant was laid "in a coward's grave?"' (Letter, Mitchell Library, p. 3), missing the point that the poem was a condemnation of the way in which Morant was quietly buried in a shared grave before Australians received news of his execution. Ogilvie, however, may have seen something in Morant, or known something that only Morant's closest friends could have known. A poem by R Allen, 'Untitled', published after Morant's death, is testament to some form of 'hidden misery':

Good-bye, "Breaker" my heart is sad
Weary the days to me:
Down South Creek where the willows wave,
Yet once again I see
Your big heart, with a bare wound showing-
Mate o'mine! by the cool creek flowing,
None but I got a chance of knowing
Your hidden misery
(Robl, p. 206)

Regardless of whether or not Ogilvie, like Paterson, overlooked the 'shortcomings of his mate' Ogilvie continued to write for and about Morant long after his death. Both Will Ogilvie, and their mutual friend, Gordon Tidy, commemorated Morant in poetry (p. 74). Of particular

interest is the poem 'To the memory of one dead', which was the one commented on by J F Thomas, who had perhaps misinterpreted Ogilvie's intent. There is nothing detrimental to Morant's memory in Ogilvie's lines except the poetic licence taken in respect to Morant's burial site which was not, according to J F Thomas, 'on the grey Karroo' [sic], but in Pretoria Cemetery' (Mitchell Library, p. 3). More telling is the way in which the poem is introduced: 'This is the real epitaph of poor old Breaker Morant; and the sort he would have liked us to write above his grave – W H Ogilvie' (Merredith, p. 74). Like Paterson, Ogilvie had been criticised by fellow Australians for not defending Morant enough. Morant, therefore, who J F Thomas defended, had been the friend of at least two powerful figures representative of Australian national literature, Paterson and Ogilvie. Morant was a 'tolerable balladist and musician, a first class bushman and one of the greatest horsemen who ever lived' (Ward, 1981, p. 7). For this, Ward argues, he won the respect, 'even the love' of 'decent people like "Banjo Paterson", Will Ogilvie and J F Archibald, editor of *The Bulletin*' (Ward, p. 7). Through his associations with *Bulletin* writers Morant became famous and because of this, The Breaker, Morant's pseudonym, was recognised widely and eventually came to represent a stereotype of a national Australian identity.

The Making of The Breaker: Mythmaking and The Anglo-Boer War

By the time he had reached South Africa to serve in the Anglo-Boer War, Morant was a legendary Australian figure. The focus 'on the Morant affair, generated a further national myth, that of the sacrifice of Australian soldiers as scapegoats' (Walker, 1985, p. 2). Morant's pseudonym, The Breaker, had gained renown, and his story was well known throughout Australia, but it was the media with their eulogies and reflections pertaining to Morant and the war that further mythologised Morant's story in particular. During the second phase of the Boer War, Morant had killed a twelve-year old child who was with a party of Boers who had surrendered and were unarmed (Wilcox, 2010a, p. 34) and as a member of the Bushveldt Carbineers, Morant had 'ordered, and in some cases personally carried out, the murder of Boer prisoners including some women and children' (Ward, 1981, p. 10). But Morant was excused for his violence when the media invented an image of him as a man who 'went quietly berserk' during the war, after his friend, Captain Percy Hunt, was killed and apparently mutilated (Denton, 1987, p. 158). According to legend, Morant had 'become unhinged with grief' (Witton, p. 68). For this, Australians once again overlooked his antisocial behaviours, and, in relation to the stories surrounding Morant during his service in the Anglo-Boer War, have downplayed the facts relating to his crimes. Instead, Morant has become the subject of Australian media sensation, a mythological figure, a martyr and a fictional character.

The story of Morant's paternity was already an established myth within Australia, but during the Anglo-Boer War, due to Morant's antics, further anecdotes were created which sustained and expanded on the story. In November, 1900, during a recess from the Anglo-Boer War, The Breaker incurred a debt of £16.13.0 at The Mount Nelson Hotel and left the debt to his 'father'. When the hotel contacted the Admiral requesting payment (Carnegie & Shields, p. 41), the Admiral vehemently denied his paternity. After Morant's death, further denials by the Admiral appeared in newspapers all around the world, and this became a topic of debate.

The Son of an Admiral

"Morant was the son of Vice-Admiral Morant, a friend of the King." Every Admiral is a friend of the King's and every Morant a son of this particular

Admiral. The quoted line has appeared in a hundred papers, and yet we have a statement by an officer high in the naval service that Admiral Morant has only one son, and this son is quite another person altogether. There is nothing in favour of the executed Australian officer in being the son either of an admiral or a costermonger. All the same it is interesting to review the immense importance which is attached to making him out to the former, chiefly, presumably, with the idea of adding to the sensation. (*Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, Tuesday 8 April, 1902, p. 4)

The writer of the above article is alert to the way in which the story had escalated and draws attention to the ludicrousness of the situation. As noted, the newspapers had emphasised the need for story and ‘sensation’ rather than to report facts, ‘the quoted line’ having appeared in newspapers all around the world. Morant’s original assertions and the story that this generated had become a self-sustaining story with the beginnings of mythmaking.

Morant had understood the power of myth and in relation to his parentage made use of traditional fables and stories to support his outrageous claims that the Admiral was his father. On at least two occasions, Morant had attached himself to traditional folk-tales. He had, before the war, likened himself to ‘the prodigal son’ in a letter to A B Paterson (Cutlack, p. 32) which was written in 1895, and while he was in prison, awaiting sentence, Morant drew comparisons between his own situation and another fable. On this occasion, Morant wrote to Major Lenehan: ‘The Governor (my dad) got a K.C.B. the other day in ‘birthday honours’ (Cutlack, p. 75). He signed the letter with a reference to a fictional character by the name of Tony Lumpkin. According to F M Cutlack:

Tony Lumpkin was the character made famous by Goldsmith in *She Stoops to Conquer*, the young squire who played practical jokes and was the hero of frequenters of the local inn, whose mother doted on him but who could not get on with his stepfather. (Cutlack, p. 75).

In his last letter to Major Lenehan, Morant made an unveiled point that his story was worthy of media attention: 'Hope we go home together; if not, write to My Guvnor, Girl, and 'Bulletin', again signing off as 'Tony Lumpkin' (Cutlack, 1962, p. 96). His use of 'Guvnor' is a reference to the unwilling father whom Morant had discussed with A B Paterson in his much earlier correspondence when referring to himself as the prodigal son. Having identified with these fictional characters, Morant drew parallels between these fables and his own life and the potential, whether intentional or not, was that Morant, Tony Lumpkin and the 'prodigal son' would be amalgamated by the press who would also notice the similarities in all three stories. Therefore, his dislocation from his real father, along with the tensions created by the Admiral's denials and the engagement of the media with the emphasis on sensation, entwined with Morant's own fantasies of his likeness to legendary characters, made his story seem all the more romantic. Such was the sensation created in the media, that Morant was almost canonized by his contemporaries at *The Bulletin*.

Two months after his execution, *The Bulletin*, despite its anti-war stance, published an article titled 'Beautification of The Breaker – with some Literary Remains' that criticised the British Government over the treatment of Morant (Semmler, p. 121). An Australian 'mate' was dead and it was not, according to George Witton¹², because he was a murderer, but because Morant, along with the two men who were court-martialled with him, had served the purposes of the Empire and their execution helped to end a bloody war. This can be attributed, in part, to the way in which J F Archibald, editor and representative of *The Bulletin*, contributed to the Morant legend. Despite his anti-war stance, he defended Morant. Archibald was a powerful social figure who asserted a force and was considered 'an omnipotent maker or breaker of reputations' (Lindsay, p. 12), although, as strong as he might have been, Norman Lindsay argues that Archibald's position on the Boer War nearly ruined *The Bulletin* (p. 17). It was the debate that followed, and the conflict that it aroused between Australian nationals and Imperialists that ensured that the name Morant would be remembered. Some Australians who wrote for journals other than *The Bulletin* expressed the opinion that they were not surprised that Morant had been executed. One writer who had witnessed Morant's funeral reported that he 'couldn't help

¹² The book was published in 1903, long before the publication of Witton's 1929 letter that reveals that Witton knew all along that Morant and Handcock were guilty of murdering Hesse, a missionary who was once believed to have been German.

thinking there were many nations who would not have carried an affair like that straight through to the end ... but England carried it through and I must say I am glad of it ... that the Commonwealth means to show justice to all' (*Bathurst Free Press*, 1902, p. 3). Despite sentiments such those expressed in the *Bathurst Free Press*, the sympathies of *The Bulletin* were weighted toward Morant and this is what influenced the nation. *The Bulletin* reflected an overarching empathy for the 'underdog', especially for Morant, since he had been pitted against the machinations of war and the power which enabled the British Government to carry out the death sentence. It was in *The Bulletin* that Paterson found the space to justify Morant's crimes by the virtue of his having risen from the struggles of life:

For years he had shifted and battled and contrived: had been always the under-dog; and how he was up in the stirrups. It went to his head like wine. (Roderick, 1993, p. 158)

Alcohol had been a problem to writers such as Henry Lawson, and despite *The Bulletin's* best efforts to limit Lawson's drinking, it had proved to be a force that had no cure and could not be reined in. When Paterson suggested that the power of the stirrups went to Morant's head 'like wine' he indicated that Morant was perhaps at the mercy of external uncontrollable forces, such as those that controlled and ruined the lives of certain other *Bulletin* writers. For this, he has excused Morant's behaviour and simultaneously aligned him with other notable bohemians. Whilst *The Bulletin's* editor, Archibald, may not personally have regarded Morant as a benign character, and through *The Bulletin* acknowledged that he was, in fact, guilty of war crimes and 'got what he merited' (Roderick, 1993, p. 158), *The Bulletin* continued to elevate The Breaker 'as a horseman and versifier' (Lord, 1992, p. 1). Morant was eulogised as follows:

But a few months ago it seems since Morant was in Sydney – his hard, tanned, determined, jovial, scamp's phiz aglow with high spirits; his strong capable hands eager for a friendly grasp; and his husky, cheery voice tuned to the irresistible invitation. Only a little more battered, a little more worn with ten years of roving and rioting; with only a very little shiftiness in frank [sic] eyes to

mark desperate straits navigated by this accomplished good-for-naught – the sorrow of his family, the solace of his friends. (Cutlack, p. 30)

For several years after his death *The Bulletin* ensured the continuation of the legend of Morant, adopting him as a *Bulletin* man and an Australian literary figure. When A G Stephens was literary editor of *The Bulletin* from 1894, he maintained a notebook dedicated to Morant and his works (Mitchell Library Research). This notebook, with the name ‘Morant’ handwritten across the front cover, contains copies of the poems submitted by Morant throughout his years spent in Australia, some of them in their original handwritten form. It also contains a collection of newspaper cuttings relating to Morant and his life and pertinent letters about and by Morant, all glued into the pages, meticulously recorded and dated. One such document is a transcript of a letter, dated 22nd June 1921, from J F Thomas, who had been Morant’s lawyer during the court-martial in South Africa. J F Thomas relates the words of a letter he received from the Mitchell Library:

The particulars of Harry Morant I think are too valuable to file away with the many letters that are received at this Library and are very rarely consulted again after being acted upon. Therefore I have decided to file the letter with our special loose manuscripts and to index it in such a way that it will be available to any student seeking information about Morant. (Letter from Thomas to Stephens, p. 1)

The above illustrates the importance placed on Morant by the Mitchell Library as both a military and Australian historical figure, but because of its inclusion in A G Stephens’ notebook it also indicates a perceived importance of Morant to important Australian literary critics. Morant, thus, as a military figure, is commonly linked to Morant the horseman and subsequently to his status as the poet, The Breaker.

Had he not had connections with prominent *Bulletin* writers, Morant may not have been so well remembered and this is evident by the significant lack of information or accolade for Lieutenant Peter Handcock who was executed alongside Morant. Neither Handcock nor George

Witton are mentioned at all in J F Thomas' letter, despite defending all three accused Australians, and yet, at the bottom of the letter Thomas made notes that would excite the literary imagination. Morant is put forward as a worthy literary character:

The story of Morant, and the Bushveldt Carbineers, is a romance and a tragedy (no Ned Kelly type). I picture the different scenes in which he figured (with his brother officers, bush mates, and others) (Thomas letter, p. 3)

Thomas goes on, then, to list eight scenes as he visualises the outline of a dramatic novel or play but concludes:

What opportunities for a dramatic writer! Dialogues and soliloques [sic] on Peace and War – Australia and the Empire. I see it all but cannot write it. (Thomas letter, p. 4).

Although Morant is not remembered by all Australians, J F Thomas was not mistaken when he saw the potential for the creation of a folk-hero or a national legend, but he would not have noticed Morant had he not been a contributor, or a sensation in terms of newspaper worthiness. Since this 1921 letter, The Breaker and his place as an Australian soldier against the Empire have been written into history.

The Making of The Breaker: Poetry of a Nation

Since 1980 Morant's poetry has been re-examined and canonised by various writers, such as biographers Ted Robl, Graham Jenkin and Susanna De Vries and by the artist Pro Hart. Ted Robl (1984) published a volume of Morant's collected verse including some of his prose, and many works by other writers, in his self-published anthology, *Breaker Morant: A backblock bard*. In 1980, after the film *Breaker Morant* was produced by Bruce Beresford, Graham Jenkin saw enough merit in Morant's work to publish *Songs of The Breaker*, which consists of a collection of Morant's poetry complete with the musical scores set to the poems. Pro Hart responded in art to a collection of Morant's poetry and this was compiled and published in a book in 1981. In her introduction to the collection, *Pro Hart's Breaker Morant* (1981), Dawn Ross claims that Morant's 'uncomplicated verse became a favourite with readers at a time when a characteristically Australian verse-style was beginning to emerge' (flyleaf). Dawn Ross borrows directly from Kenneth Ross' fictionalisation of Morant's last moments in the Boer War. According to Dawn Ross, Morant, who 'carried poetry in his saddlebags, broke in horses, and died in front of a firing squad with the words "Shoot straight, you bastards", deserves a second look' (Dawn Ross, p. 8.) She concedes though, that 'His work should be regarded as verse rather than as poetry, and it suffers at times from the impetuosity of his nature' (p. 7). Morant's poetry, however, was unpolished (Renar, p. 48); he rarely bothered to revise the first drafts of his poems (Cutlack, p. 30). Even though his early biographers such as F M Cutlack and Frank Renar saw poetry as Morant's hobby rather than his passion, later biographers use poetry to define him. In Susanna De Vries' *Desert Queen*, Morant is said to have charmed Daisy May O'Dwyer through his ability to 'quote reams of poetry' (p. 71). According to De Vries, he enjoyed writing romantic little verses, and was well read and witty' (p. 71). Author Hedley A Chilvers portrays Morant as 'the very soul of versatility' who could reel off 'verse after verse' (p. 161). John Merredith notes that the poet Will Ogilvie was one of Australia's leading bush balladists (Introduction), and yet Merredith privileges Morant over Ogilvie by referencing Morant in the title: *Breaker's mate*. All of these publications, with perhaps the exception of *Breaker's mate*, which is a biography about Will Ogilvie, owe at least part of their success not to Morant's poetry, but to the fact that Morant's execution during the Anglo-Boer War was dramatised in Australian film.

In order to achieve a contrast between the brutality of the war and to emphasise the stoic ugliness of the British military from an anti-British standpoint, Morant was portrayed sympathetically, from a humanist point of view. This was done through the use of one of his most recognisable poems. Although Morant was not a particularly talented poet, film producer Beresford took advantage of the sentimental aesthetics of one of Morant's 'heartbreaking' poems. 'At Last' had been published posthumously on April 5th, 1902 in *The Bulletin*:

At Last

...

When other faces turn away,
And lighter loves have passed;
When life is weary, cold, and gray –
I may come back – at last!
When cares, remorse, regrets are rife –
Too late to live anew –
In the sad twilight of my life
I will come back to you!

The poem is portrayed in the most poignant and heart-wrenching scene in the 1980 film *Breaker Morant*, which was produced by Bruce Beresford. The image alternates between the fiancé and Edward Woodward, as The Breaker, who sings enigmatically to an audience stunned to silence by his words and emotive delivery of the poem. Following a memorable performance by Edward Woodward, Morant's poetry gained considerable positive critique.

Morant at his worst was a Kelly-like infamous villain and at his best a victim of the Empire, and because of this, Australian writers and researchers began to show increased interest in The Breaker as a poet:

But despite the brutal nature of some of their crimes, these so-called 'barbarians of the bush' enjoyed great public sympathy and there were vacancies for a new

generation of Australian heroes in the anti-authoritarian mould. They would be created by the so-called 'bush poets' who articulated the first distinctively Australian literary voice. The best known were the 'Holy Trinity' of Banjo Paterson, Henry Lawson and Will Ogilvie and, to a lesser extent, The Breaker, who wrote and inspired many a legendary verse. (Bleszynski, p. 41)

Despite Morant's connections with Paterson and *The Bulletin*, Bleszynski is overly ambitious in respect to retrospectively categorising Morant's writings with the likes of Paterson, Lawson and Ogilvie. Morant was not an elite poet. Morant, though, is sometimes referred to as 'an established poet in his own time' (Ross, 1979, p. 8), and George Witton who met Morant for the first time in South Africa (Witton, p. 52, p. 62), remembered Morant as a 'popular writer of verses' (Witton, 1982, p. 45). One of Morant's most ardent admirers was F M Cutlack, who was a boy of twelve when he met Morant at Paringa Station in 1899 just before Morant departed for the Boer War. Sixty years later, in 1962, he wrote fondly of his time droving cattle with Morant as being 'unforgettably wonderful days' (Cutlack, ix). Cutlack worshipped Morant. In this romanticised account of Morant's life, which Craig Wilcox refers to as 'much a cartoon version of reality as the *Bulletin* had once presented' (Wilcox, 2002, p. 363), Cutlack remembered Morant as having belonged to the 'fraternity of contemporary bush balladists' which consisted of Ogilvie, ('Banjo') Paterson and Henry Lawson (Cutlack, p. 29). Whilst Morant fraternised with Ogilvie and Paterson, he did not belong to the elite group of men who could be considered national poets.

Although a recent biographer, Ted Robl (2012), has collected approximately two hundred of Morant's poems from various national and local newspapers, Morant's body of work is relatively minimal in comparison to the national poets and *Bulletin* writers. Morant's first published poem had been accepted by *The Bulletin* on 5 September 1891 by J F Archibald and *The Bulletin* subsequently published approximately sixty of Morant's poems, several each year, until August 1899. His poem 'When Stock Go By' was published posthumously in December 1903 (McNicoll, 1980). Morant's collection consists of barely enough poems to fill the small

book *The Poetry of 'Breaker' Morant: From the Bulletin 1891–1903*¹³, published by Golden Press in 1980. In the first biography written shortly after Morant's execution, *Bushman and Buccaneer, Harry Morant: His 'ventures and verses*, Frank Renar (1902) discusses Morant's antics in Australia but focuses mainly on Morant as a soldier. Renar includes only a handful of Morant's works at the back of the book, and despite the subtitle of the book, Renar plays down Morant's role as a versifier but discusses the rough quality of Morant's work:

Harry Morant ("The Breaker"), in common with most men, had flashes of poetic thought; but he was, in no true sense of the word, a 'poet,' nor are any of his writings 'poetry'. He had a gift of breezy, graceful expression, a happy ear for rhyming music, and a varied fund of experience to draw upon. So his verses are always readable: they never reach to the depths of absolute doggerel: they sometimes come close to being poetry. (Renar, p. 48)

Frank Renar believed that Morant's poetry rarely needed editing or revising (p. 48), but that if Morant had been inclined to make an effort to polish his poems they 'would probably have been much better' (Renar, p. 48). The collection of Morant's poems, which had been printed in *The Bulletin* during his living years, was not published until 1980, to coincide with the film about his execution. It was not a body of work that could be remembered on its own merits and it is well understood that his poetry would not have earned a second look had he not been shot.

¹³ Inclusive of poems published in *The Bulletin* after Morant's death in 1902.

The Making of The Breaker: The Creative Imagination

The dramatization of his part in the Anglo-Boer War meant that Morant became known as a war hero. Because of his part in the war, he became both the product and the property of Australian culture. As already argued, Morant was ‘an entirely fictional character’ created by Ed Murrant (Wilcox, 2010a, p. 30), and whilst this is true of Morant’s antics in Australia before he enlisted in the war, he has since 1980 been re-created as an Australian military hero. George Witton was first to defend Morant for his actions during the guerrilla phase of the war, accounting his bad reputation to the lack of publication of the praise Morant received for ‘a good bit of work’ over the capture of the outlaw Boer Commandant Kelly (Witton, p. 72), but Wilcox discounts this. He discredits Morant’s claim to a Distinguished Service Order (2010a p. 31), arguing that the accolades ‘may owe something to the stories he spun’ (2010a, p. 31). His claim to war honours was, after all, a line in Morant’s poem ‘The Breaker’s Last Rhyme and Testament’ and, may have been another of Morant’s fantasies. Writers such as Nick Bleszynski, George Witton and Kenneth Ross, whose play was made into the major Australian feature film *Breaker Morant*, have immortalised Morant despite his war crimes. Whilst it is true that Morant emphasised the more palatable features of his history during his seventeen years in Australia prior to the Anglo-Boer War, the creation of Morant as war hero, however, cannot be attributed to Morant alone.

Morant was the subject of a number of cultural representations of him as a military underdog. Although he was a convicted murderer, Morant’s war crimes have been downplayed by creative artists. As an idealised Australian, Morant was to become culturally immortalised as a ‘likeable’ character. Since J F Thomas’s letter to the Mitchell Library in 1921, the story of The Breaker and his place as an Australian soldier against the Empire has been handed down through the hands of creative writers. The creative characterisation of Morant, this time as war hero, first appears as a fictional character in *Where day begins* (1911) by Alfred Buchanan. In it, a ‘reckless young hero, Mordaunt, is drawn from that fiery but undisciplined character Morant, the Anglo-Australian who was shot by Britons for killing prisoners’ (*An Australian Novel*, 1911). One of the very first direct representations of Morant as character in a larger work appears in 1933 in Hedley Chilvers’ *The yellow man looks on*. Although this is not purely a fiction novel, the characterisation of Morant draws clearly on the writer’s imagination to create a memorable

moment in the text. Following this, one of the most significant novels written about Morant's part in the Anglo-Boer War is the book *The Breaker*, by Kit Denton, which was first published in 1973 and then reprinted in 1981. Denton's story begins with flashbacks of the months just before Morant leaves Australia to serve in the Anglo-Boer War, prefiguring the term 'digger' (Denton, p. 61) in a form of retrospective nationalism, whilst Morant and his companions sign up for service. The novel depicts Morant as a likable, but anti-authoritarian figure in the Anglo-Boer war and concludes with his execution. Denton's novel, however, was later thrown into disrepute by its own author, when, in 1983, he admitted that his earlier novel had done 'much to perpetuate the weeds in the garden of that rocky and worm-laden subsoil' (Denton, 1983, p. 10). This admission by Denton, however, did not prevent creative artists from cultivating and maintaining a character richly imbued with the characteristics of an Australian war hero.

It is the film *Breaker Morant* that has had the greatest influence over Australian perceptions of Morant as a hero. The film's premise is based on George Witton's release from jail and his subsequent book, *Scapegoats of the Empire*, first published in 1907. The court-martial that determined Morant's fate is recounted in Witton's book, but the accuracy of Witton's account has since been thrown into doubt with his confessional letter dated 29 October, 1929 in which he states that he had known Handcock to have confessed to the murder of the missionary for which they were found not guilty (Witton, p. 245). Even with its known inaccuracies, *Scapegoats of the Empire* was the catalyst for a 1979 play by Kenneth Ross. The 1980 film, *Breaker Morant* was based on this play. In turn, the film aroused renewed interest in The Breaker, and the popularity of this arguably 'quintessential' Australian male escalated in the 1980s. Graham Jenkin's *The Songs of the Breaker*¹⁴ published the musical scores to a small selection of Morant's poetry and took advantage of the film to promote the book by depicting an image of Edward Woodward in his role as the film's hero, Breaker Morant, on the back cover. Writer, Nick Bleszynski followed the momentum of the legend created by the film by publishing his part-fiction, part-biography, *Shoot straight, you bastards*, in 2002. Subsequent novels and stories about The Breaker have reflected aspects of the filmic dramatisation of Morant's participation in the Anglo-Boer War. In the years following the production of the film, Morant achieved 'legendary proportion, whether innocent or guilty' (Lord, 1992, p. 7).

¹⁴ Published after the film, *Breaker Morant* and takes advantage of the film to promote the book.

Written in the wake of the film, Nick Bleszynski's *Shoot straight, you bastards*, popularises Morant through the use of a single phrase. Most significant in relation to the perception of Morant as a Ned Kelly-like figure is the over-use of the phrase 'Shoot straight, you bastards'. Although often attributed to Morant, these words were not necessarily his own. In a letter to the Mitchell Library, in which J F Thomas discusses the storage of the trial documents, he uses a quote often attributed to Morant; a quote that has been taken beyond its context and used incorrectly. Within the context of the letter and critique of Will Ogilvie's poetry that had been dedicated to Morant, and in an imagined outline for a creative text drawn up by Thomas twenty years after Morant's death, Thomas wrote:

... Morant was anything but a coward either in life or at the moment of his death. He said to the firing party, as he pulled the handkerchief from his eyes: 'Shoot straight and make a good job of it. I'm looking right down the barrels of your rifles.' (p. 4).

Reminiscent of the way in which the phrase 'such is life' has been attributed as the last spoken words of bushranger Ned Kelly as he was being prepared to be hanged as a criminal, thus immortalising the man for his bravery in the face of death, 'shoot straight' has become the catchphrase that has emphasised Morant's bravery on his last breath. There are many versions of Morant's last words (Woolmore, 2002, p. 129). The lawyer may have remembered the quote exactly as Morant had spoken it on the 27th of February 1902, but it is not recorded officially and it was a highly emotional moment for him, as he was about to witness the death sentence which was the result of his losing the court case. Another witness to the shooting was Trooper Victor Marra Newland, D.C.M. He remembered it like this:

I catch a glimpse of tawny fearless eyes alight with understanding and pity for the man who must call death upon him. Lightly swings his hand to his breast. 'There boys' he says 'don't miss'. (Carnegie & Shields, 1979, p. 2)

There is no substantial evidence that the words ‘shoot straight you bastards’ were spoken by Morant. Witton, whose first account of the incident was published in 1907, witnessed the shootings only from a distance:

While waiting at the Pretoria Railway Station I distinctly heard in the clear morning air the report of the volley of the firing party, the death knell of my late comrades, and I knew they had gone to that bourne from whence no traveller returns. (Witton, p. 154)

In a state of high emotion, when Witton had recalled ‘those awful days, so vividly impressed on [his] memory’ (p. 154), he had inadvertently inspired the creative re-creation of the trial; a court-martial that Witton had once considered to have been one of ‘the greatest farces ever enacted outside of a theatre’ (p. 154). In this respect, J F Thomas was also guilty of creative invention by adapting Morant’s last words for his own use:

Anyhow, when I get a little more spare time I shall sort out the mass of materials and if I can manage after a while get free of business worries I shall re-pen ‘Les Miserables’ and see whether I can (as old Morant said to the firing party) ‘make a job of it’. (p. I)

Various versions of the phrase ‘Shoot straight, you bastards’ have been used by several writers including journalists, biographers, creative writers and playwrights. When he wrote the play *Breaker Morant*, Kenneth Ross re-created a ‘reasonable account’ (Ross, p. 7) of the court-martial as they were seen from the “‘Australian camp” in South Africa’ (p. 7). For the benefit of his contemporary audience, he restrained Morant’s ‘somewhat Victorian romanticism’ (p. 7), but when it came to Morant’s dialogue in court, he faithfully adhered to Morant’s now famous words: ‘we got them and shot them under rule 303’. Ross, however, could not have known Morant’s final words as he claims:

After all, Morant was an established poet in his own time, but I don't think I would have dared to invent the above lines nor for that matter his very last words "Shoot straight you bastards and don't make a mess of it" if he himself had not already spoken the words. (Ross, p. 8)

Ross's version of the trial and shooting is re-imagined from *Scapegoats of the Empire*, which, at the time, was 'the only record of the trial available for public inspection' (Lord, 1992, p. 3). Witton's copy of the original trial transcripts were lost in a fire in the 1950s (Robl, 2012c, p. 176) and, although Arthur Davy announced, in the 1982 reprint of *Scapegoats of the Empire* that the 'court martial papers have been discovered in South Africa' (Walker, 1985, p. 15), they were never forwarded to the War Office (Walker, 1985, p. 15). Walker discusses many reasons why these papers have never been recovered including excuses such as 'these documents were "no longer in existence"' (p. 15) and that 'they were destroyed by enemy action during the war' (p. 15). In 2011, Military Lawyer, James Unkles attempted to locate the missing copies of the trial or the Court of Enquiry papers at the National Archives in London, but was not successful (Robl 2012c, p175). James Unkles has since offered a \$10,000 reward to anyone who may find the original documents (Unkles, 2012). *Scapegoats of the Empire*, for the most part, was written from the memories of George Witton whose account of the Bushveldt Carbineers was published after his release from a three-year prison sentence and, in light of new research, is now questioned as 'being inaccurate and biased' (Robl, 2012b). Robl also suggests that Witton's book is unreliable, in that 'the inclusion of those paragraphs in his book that are not to be found in the standard source' (*The Times*, 14 April, 1902, cited in Robl, 2012c). Certainly, Witton's account of the shootings is second-hand:

At the prison gate I passed a squad of Cameron Highlanders waiting to be admitted. It was unnecessary to ask why or what they were there for. It was a heart-breaking sight.

I was *told*¹⁵ that at six o'clock the warders threw open the door of the doomed men's cell, and asked, "Are you ready?" "Yes!" replied Morant, "Where is your firing party?" Hand in hand in the grey light of the dawn they walked out to their death ... they faced the firing party unflinchingly. (Witton, p. 154)

In the re-created version in the play, Morant does not necessarily speak entirely for himself. He is re-presented through the distorted memory of a very sad and disgruntled George Witton who used creative licence to produce the dramatic effect of giving voice to Morant. It may be possible that Witton, so emotionally charged at the time of the court-martial, remembered vivid moments of conversation, or even that he recorded them at the time, but as to the legend of Morant, like his alleged final words, 'Shoot straight, you bastards', there is much political-poetical licence.

The legend of Morant, therefore, is not about the man or the hero, but about a character that has been taken in hand, modified and adopted by a line of Australian national, contemporary, and modern creative writers. As such, the legend, the Australian national figure, is a product of the creative imagination. Writers asked, 'Who, then, was Morant? Whence came he?' (Chilvers, p. 166). Instead of uncovering the truth, Morant's biographers have played up the ambivalent nature of the legend and used it to add to the mystique of the story, and created, for Australian readers, a trope for easy historical reference. Despite his extensive research, Nick Bleszynski created the basis of an unsupported account of Morant's mother and the man Morant claimed as his father, and the story was adapted within Susanna DeVries' biographical work on Daisy Bates. Even though it is well known that the story about Morant is a 'folk tale that is remarkably baseless' (Wilcox, p. 30), essentially, it is a myth. Creative writers have continued to draw on unsupported anecdotes in an attempt to complete the story of Harry 'Breaker' Morant. Literary critic Graeme Turner once described myth as the tendency 'to supply absences, to play out the resolutions of conflicts that in reality cannot be resolved' (Turner, p. 36). Morant's story is one of those unsolved mysteries and unresolved conflicts that are played out in our Australian historiography and, as such, Australian literature has a propensity to 'supply absences'.

¹⁵ My emphasis.

With their research based on these fictionalised accounts, biographers and researchers have added their own speculations and modifications to Morant's story. Nick Bleszynski (2002) used his creativity when he speculated on possible links between Murrant's mother and the Admiral. Although it can't be proved, Bleszynski places Catherine and the Admiral together at Pembroke Dock on March 12, 1864 and offers theories on how and when the child, Edwin Henry, may have been conceived (p. 11). In 2008, Susanna De Vries, author of *Desert Queen*, an historical work based on the life of Daisy Bates, took up the debate. In this, De Vries dilutes the facts even further, placing the thoughts, perhaps based on Bleszynski's theories, into the minds of her historical characters, Bates and Morant. This is how she states it:

Some time later, possibly encouraged by Daisy, he began to call himself Harry Morant. He apparently believed that his mother, Catherine Murrant (nee O'Reilly or Reilly), had conducted a clandestine affair with a young naval officer named Digby Morant. (p. 71)

De Vries incorporates Bleszynski's speculations into her research. Rather than demand truth or evidence in a conflict that may never be resolved, the text plays into the debate, which arouses more speculation and more discussion. As implied in the definition of mythology, the question of truth is left unanswered and yet both Bleszynski and De Vries have attempted to fill in the 'absences' with story. Meanwhile the facts become less and less clear with each re-telling.

Since 2009, when James Unkles' campaign to have Morant's court-martial reviewed began, dozens of newspapers across the world have followed the story, and journalists have added their own creative aspects to Morant's character. To contend with today's fast-paced news media, the description applied to Morant and his life has been reduced to one or two sentences summing up the minimum possible information about Morant in order to contextualise the story for readers. Often, Morant is described as an Australian 'hard-drinking, womanising English-born itinerant bush poet, drover, horse-breaker and polo player' (*New Zealand Herald*, September, 2, 2011, p. 2). One journalist describes him as 'a skilful and daring horseman' (Maloney, 2007, p. 74) and the accompanying cartoon depicts a Morant who is taller than his horse, an enormous dead pig slung over the saddle and Morant leaning against the horse, hand on

hip, ankle crossed, chatting with Daisy May O'Dwyer. Two Aboriginal shaped silhouettes lean on spears in the background behind a station homestead. It is a stereotypical Australian scene from the 1800s, although Morant's disproportionately large head sports a disproportionately large and English-looking nose and his eyes gaze outward with a debonair glaze. The cartoonist relates to Morant's image of his early days in Australia when he was considered to have been a smooth talker. The writer re-tells, in his own words, the story about Morant's first known criminal act within Australia. Morant 'duded the clergyman of his honorarium, then bought a saddle and a pair of horses with a dud cheque and took off for the lights of Cloncurry' (Maloney, 2007, p. 74). Images and brief descriptions such as these have been drawn from the scant biographies and texts about Morant and his life, most of which, as has been discussed, were based in rumour, speculation, reference to the atypical Australian male and on Morant's own fabrications. These have resulted in the cartoon described above, and in a subject who no longer represents a real historical figure, but a caricature, a trope, or a comical version of a mythological figure.

All of these characterisations of Morant are the direct responsibility of his earliest creators. One of the very first representations of Morant is humorous, depicted in 1933 in *The yellow man looks on*, by the writer Hedley A Chilvers:

Queensland. The scene changes now to Cloncurry, Northern Queensland, the land of the stockmen, bush and gold, where the sun scorches and shrives and the rivers run north into the Gulf. Strange territory this, which has bred big men, tough and good men, with an infinite capacity for friendship! One Sunday in 1886 nine Cloncurry stockmen were sitting on a fence doing nothing. To do this successfully is not always easy; but they were doing it well, thanks to that incredible jackaroo, Harry Morant, who had come to the station not long since wearing monocle, stock, and immensely wide riding breeches. The stockmen had looked disdainfully at him at first. But he made them laugh. How he made them laugh to see him mount a horse and slide ruefully under its belly, having forgotten to tighten the girths! (Chilvers, 1933, p. 159 – 160)

The description above lends itself strongly to the cartoon-like image produced by Malony, but bears little resemblance to the real Morant. Perhaps the most accurate physical description of Morant can be found in the prison record book that recorded his death. In this he is described as 'Eyes – grey; nose – prominent; hair – brown; height 5ft 6¾ in; trace marks left arm' (Denton, 1983, p. 120). There are very few photographs of Morant, but those that are available depict the image of a very attractive young man; sometimes in waistcoat, tie and doeskin pants, hands in pockets and pensive expression on his face (Carnegie & Shields, 1979, p. 9), boxing in shirtsleeves and braces (p. 9) or most famously in slouched hat and army tunic with a bandolier across his chest. These images of Morant represent only a small fraction of his life. He is remembered as simply as possible, with the emphasis on a few areas of his life. In short, he has become a product of the Australian creative imagination.

As a literary representation of an Australian national male, Morant is essentially a metaphor who is made up of the criterion required for that fantasy, regardless of whether he, as a man, possessed any of them. He is required to have been a person torn between his loyalties to England and Australia. He is a composite of Australian literary representations, between Lawson's thief and liar, and Paterson's polo playing, romantic balladeer. Most importantly, in terms of the Australian national male identity, he is a soldier who stands alongside his 'digger' mates as a symbol of resistance to the authorities of the British military. As an icon of Australian male identity, Morant is thus required to be flawless. Although he has become a legendary figure who is largely the product of creativity and folk legend, this identity is now being examined from a new perspective. That perspective is from a retrospective point of view and concerns the ways in which the traditional national male 'hero' may impact on a revised national identity, inclusive of a military past.

The Making of The Breaker: In Defence of the Australian Military 'Male' Identity

Due to the perceived unjust execution of Harry Morant in 1902, the mythology surrounding his life and times has been broadened to include elements of Australian military history, and extended to include politics of the present day. The way in which Morant was executed threatened one aspect of the Australian national identity during a period in which it was striving for, what the historian Richard White has described as, 'a new status, a new independence' (White, p. 112) from Britain. This new independence was already in conflict with several opposing factors. With the advent of Federation, the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Bill had been signed by Queen Victoria of England and subsequently the Governor-General had signed an oath of allegiance to the Queen. Australia continued to rely on financial ties with Britain (Rogers, p. 12) and much of the Christian population remained loyal to the empire (White, p. 112). Writer, A B Paterson, who had promoted *Australia for the Australians* in 1889 in the lead-up to Federation, had 'fled' when confronted with the difficult politics surrounding Australian nationalism, and even though he was Australian-born, continued to call himself 'British Australian' (Roderick, p. 64). Henry Lawson's poetry became even more pessimistic in relation to the values of both the capitalist and the working classes, indicating that 'Australia [was] no place for a traditional, English style land-owning aristocracy but the alternative to it, he [saw] was not very charming either' (Page, p. 90). Lawson disliked the uncultured bushmen, labelling them liars of the bush, and he criticised Australian writers for their romanticised vision of the country (Lawson, 'Some Popular Australian Mistakes'). Nevertheless, in the 1890s the Australian patriotic sentiment that was encouraged was one of 'purity, innocence, wholesomeness and sanity' (White, p. 115). This helped to promote international trade, but most importantly in regards to Morant's story, the emerging Australian nationalism would represent what White has described as the hopes that were being 'invested in "The Coming Man"'. This male, the ideal expression of the Australian "type", had been 'summed up with an eye to his military potential' (White, p. 125).

The Anglo-Boer war, from 1899 to 1902 was the first significant war in which Australians had served as part of an Australian military force. For the first time in Australian military history, the men who were fighting in the Anglo-Boer war called themselves

Australians. It was during the Anglo-Boer War, as a result of 'The Siege of Eland's River Post' in 1900, that the affectionate term 'digger' was applied to members of the Australian Army (Farmer, 2012, p. 7). Within this group of men was Lieutenant Morant. He had already gained the respect of both *Bulletin* editors, writers and readers, and had come to be recognised as the epitome of an Australian male, and so, his service in the Anglo-Boer war automatically posited Morant with the group of respected Australian 'diggers'. When Morant was executed, in 1902, under the jurisdiction of the British army, Australian men throughout the nation, who had identified with Morant's image of a typical Australian male, were outraged and inspired to defend him:

There is no bush town which Morant visited — and droving in Queensland, N.S. Wales, South Australia, Victoria, he visited very many —that has not to-day [sic] sincere mourners for "The Breaker," men ready to swear sturdily that he was no murderer, and to blame anyone but him for those tragedies on the South African veldt which led to his death. (Renar, p. 6).

As a symbol of Australian identity, Morant had been inexplicably tarnished by an accusation of murder and the image of the clean-cut Australian digger was threatened. Morant, notwithstanding his Australian-born companions (Peter Handcock and Lieut. George Witton who were court-martialled for the same crimes), was defended by an Australian public who saw the executions as having been the result of both incompetence and bullying by the British. Following the lines of George Witton's indignant response to the courts-martial and executions, in his subsequent 1907 publication, *Scapegoats of the Empire*, Australians began to view Morant as a martyr. It was perceived by Witton that Handcock and Morant had taken the fall on behalf of the Australian nationalists for the injustice and bullying tactics used by the British military and this resulted, as historian Craig Wilcox would argue, in Morant's undeserved sympathies and continuous memorialisation.

The opportunity to politicise the Australian underdog in the machinations of war was taken up by Australian film producers such as Peter Weir and Bruce Beresford. Films such as *Gallipoli* and *Breaker Morant* provided Australian audiences with a means to a united assertion

of independence and encouraged Australian audiences to look for a symbolic figure that would represent their dissatisfaction with the subordinated role to which they had been displaced by greater powers during times of war. *Gallipoli* (1981), for example, produced by Peter Weir, drew its success, in part, from a time when Australian men needed to assert an independence from authority. It is a film that 'contrasts the essence of Australianness (mateship, the outback, isolation, innocence) with the corruption, depravation and crowdedness of the rest of the world' (Hatlof, 1993). *Gallipoli* was one of a wave of successful Australian films produced in the 1980s, shortly after the Vietnam War, and whose images reflected common themes such as 'a man's country, anti-authoritarianism, a wide-open land, the Aussie battler, and the competitive instinct' (Hatlof, 1993). It was the distinctive and powerful stance of anti-authoritarianism that harks back to the desire for a single, idealised character. This character had been previously established by Bruce Beresford in his 1980 film *Breaker Morant*. The fact that Major Thomas was close to Morant, and was, by association, jilted by the British, points to an opportunity by which Australia could represent an assertion of its independence from England. The film became a political statement that extended the Morant mythology to include Australian soldiers of subsequent wars. Whilst the film 'contains strong references to Australia's Federation in 1901 [it] asserts a national identity that is distinctly anti-British' (Hurley & Caldwell, p. 11). Despite contrary military history, representations of Morant in the Anglo-Boer War glamorize him as an anti-hero and underdog of the kind whose 'bad luck and hard life, his insolence towards authority and nonchalance towards death' transforms rebellion and punishment into 'martyrdom' (Wilcox 2010a, p. 39), but Wilcox debunks the myth of Morant, attributing the success of the film to re-opened military wounds. These films emerged at a time when the pain associated with the more recent Vietnam War was still fresh. *Breaker Morant* had reminded Australian audiences that they had once been 'victims of British machinations' of war and it successfully 'transformed Australians into underdogs of empire' (Wilcox, 2010b, p. 106). In Vietnam, Australians had once again been placed in a subordinate position, this time to America, and although *Breaker Morant* was arguably 'pure pantomime' (Wilcox, p. 105), the film allowed the producer to arouse sympathy for an Australian underdog and Morant's legacy resurfaced.

It is the memories of The Breaker that have allowed the myth to continue, and contributed to the further politicising of Morant in current Australian politics. When the film

producer, Bruce Beresford, portrayed Morant as a poet and a singer, as previously discussed, the scenes evoked an ongoing sympathy for Morant but other attributes that would turn an audience or reader against the character are either ignored or excused. When the scene fades, it leaves the viewer, who knows what is to become of Morant, almost heart-broken for the beautiful woman with 'the trim-set petticoat' who he is to leave behind. Having gained the sympathies of the audience, the Morant scenario could then be used as a conduit to extending the fallacy that the Australian male was the pure and innocent, sane and wholesome male of the 1890s. This purity of the Australian male would once again be tested in the 1960s, and so, the film *Breaker Morant* became a 'comforting fable about the Vietnam War' (Wilcox, p. 102). The film emerged in the 1980s when Australian men were reassessing the parameters of their identity (Hurley & Caldwell, 2002). The Vietnam War had left Australians scarred and confused, and furthermore, 'after the Governor-General dismissed the Whitlam government in 1975, many Australians became concerned about Australia's political and culture links to England' (Hurley & Caldwell, 2002, p. 11). It also served the purpose of, once again, distinguishing Australians from an 'imperial parent' (Wilcox, p. 102). With its emphasis on the heartbreaking and 'tragic' end to a brave-faced Breaker Morant at the hands of the hard faced, stoic British, the film supports a binary opposition in which the smug, hypocritical Briton is pitted against the 'digger'. This sets up a continuous defence of an Australian identity, particularly a masculine one.

It is not only Britain that appears to be viewed as a threat to an Australian male identity in respect of the military, the 'digger'; Australian female identity may also be seen as an antithesis to the masculinity of the Australian soldier. Traditionally, according to White, the Australian national 'type' was exclusively male and femininity was seen as a threat to this:

The emphasis was on masculinity, and on masculine friendships and team-work, or 'mateship' in Australia. All the clichés—man of action, white man, manliness, the common man, war as a test of manhood—were not sexist for nothing. Women were excluded from the image of 'The Coming Man', and so were generally excluded from the image of the Australian 'type' as well. They could acquire a kind of second-rate masculinity by being clever with horses or being a 'tomboy', a phenomenon which began to appear in the late nineteenth century.

More often, women were portrayed as a negation of the type, at best as one who passively pined and waited, at worst as one who would drag a man down. (White, 1981, p. 83)

The film, *Breaker Morant*, can be seen as the inspiration for the resurgence of the defence of the traditional Australian male identity which is negated by the Australian female. Whilst the campaign for a pardon for Morant is not motivated by issues relating to gender, it arouses certain questions as to what may be defined and accepted as the current perception of the Australian national identity. Morant was certainly a real-life criminal, but in cultural references he has become symbolic of the Australian soldier; the most famous image of Morant is a depiction of him in military uniform, an image that is recreated in the film *Breaker Morant*. The film was a 'literal projection and re-enactment of a fantasy about what it means to be Australian and male' (Gardner, 1981). With its emphasis on the lone underdog pitted against the machinations of seemingly immovable British authority, the film is said to have inspired the military lawyer James Unkles to campaign for the case to be revisited (Morant breakthrough, 2011, p. 1). For several years Unkles has worked tirelessly in order to obtain a pardon for Morant, but his work is not to defend Morant alone. Unkles does not deny that Morant was guilty of murder. His argument is that the soldiers were 'denied procedural fairness in the process leading up to and during the court-martial' (p. 1). Unkles' campaign is in defence of Australian soldiers who were pitted against the unfair British justice system of the time. Had Morant been considered 'British' at the time, instead of Australia's own 'Breaker Morant', the executions may not have drawn so much attention, then or now. The court-martial created a fissure that enabled the Australian male to be distinguished from his antagonist. This defines the Australian male by what he was and is not; he is not British.

Since the Australian female was traditionally seen as a negation of the traditional perception of the national Australian male, the undercurrent of the current campaign appears to tend toward a question of gender. This, in turn, may justify suspicions of an Australian female as seen by the response to an open forum on the question of Morant's guilt or innocence. When Unkles and Wilcox debated the question of Morant's guilt at a seminar conducted by The Sydney Institute in April 2012 a member of the audience raised the issue of Morant's nationality:

In 1902, there weren't Australians, really. We had formed a Federation, but people were British, and they joined up with the British Army, and even up to the First World War, we felt British in Australia. So why have we adopted this person as a cultural hero in Australia? Where has all this mythology taken us to take a Briton who did bad in war, got himself executed and we all want to heroize [sic] him. He's not Ned Kelly. (The Sydney Institute, April, 2012)

It is interesting that the question was posed by a woman, in a male-dominated debate which is ultimately about the protection and defence of an Australian soldier. The assertion that Morant was not Australian is not technically wrong. The critical issue, however, is that he was and still is considered to be Australian, and in particular, and Australian male. Morant had arrived and was executed at the moment Australia became a federated nation; he re-emerged during the 1980s when Australian men were seeking re-affirmation of that identity in terms of his difference from a British subject.

Today the military male identity is being defended under a new nationalism arising in which the Australian male is still being challenged. Unkles has produced a song titled 'Breaker's Cry' in which Morant is portrayed as a soldier, who in a hopeless bloody war sees the 'bloodshed from the bunker'. Morant is portrayed as one of a group of Australian men who fight as one ('I squeeze my trigger like the others') and is innocent of any wrong doing ('All this time the Breaker's cry, you know it's not their fault'). The soldier with whom the narrator is identified is given 'a second chance to rise again, defending my [his] honour' whilst 'the king and all his jokers make fools of us all' (Unkles, 2012). In the meantime, the male versus female dichotomy prevails, since, in the words of the song, 'all this time the women cry because they're not coming home' (Unkles, 2012). The Australian identity in Unkles' song is therefore embodied by Morant who is idealised when juxtaposed against the traditional perception of the Australian woman who, in this case, is not necessarily a negation of type, but typically the dichotomous entity who 'pined and waited' for the soldier to return home from war.

The Making of the Breaker: Interpretation and Continuum

As a woman writer I found myself being drawn toward the visceral aspects of Morant's existence. I did not want to depict Morant as a soldier or as a member of the canon of accomplished Australian bush poets, which consisted mainly of male writers, or as a significantly masculine identity. I wanted to visualise Morant through the eyes of a mother, through the eyes of a child and from the perspective of his own fears and desires to belong and to find love. My character, Pilgrim, has the same family, and has the same history as Morant, and yet, he is not a copy of a character that has been created by Australian cultural texts. There are two key differences in the way in which I have depicted my main character. Firstly, I have created him as a character that is not defined by war, and secondly, I have created him with the acknowledgment that I have not depicted the final and 'correct' version of the life of Breaker Morant, but that of a mythology which is in a state of continuous evolution.

Pilgrim is a caricature whose eccentricity borders on the picaresque and yet, my intention is that he be recognised by readers as someone who resembles the historical figure Harry Morant. I could never presume to know and reproduce the thoughts of another person. Attitudes of the 1890s were vastly different from those of today. Feminism is a word that was not so broadly used and accepted as it is today, and racism, in Australia, was an accepted behaviour. The details of Morant's life are so entwined in Australian mythology and folklore that it is impossible to separate the facts from the fictions that have been created by both Morant and by the people who have written about his life. Nick Bleszynski's biography of Morant, *Shoot straight, you bastards*, for example, is deliberately intertwined with purely fictionalised sections of text, and the biographical sections are filled with Bleszynski's well-considered theories and speculations about Morant's heritage. Although I have done my best to decipher handwritten entries into birth records and census books, historical records are frequently found to have variations in spellings of names, and often the dates entered for births are those that are recorded by a Parish or a Church minister on the day of baptism or naming ceremony. The date of birth of anyone born in the nineteenth century, such as Morant, could have a variance of up to two years, depending on when he was baptised or registered by the mother. For these reasons, I acknowledge that Pilgrim is not a real man. Instead, I have created a purely fictitious character

whose life and times resembles Morant's only within the parameters that it follows the same trajectory as that of the real life Harry Harbord Morant.

The novel is framed by the well-known facts of Breaker Morant's life intertwined with the mythology. It is not a documented fact, for example, that Morant removed the blindfold as he faced the firing squad. The number of rifles actually used to execute him is difficult to ascertain, since it varies in different historical texts and biographers as being either twelve or eighteen. Whilst Pilgrim's life follows a similar trajectory as described by biographers of the life and times of Morant, it picks up the story in 1894, ten years after Morant arrived in Australia, and eight years before his death. Flashbacks fill in the details concerning his childhood, whilst the story progresses toward his death in 1902. Wherever possible, I have included subtle details relating to Morant's life, as well as factual data, such as dates of birth, travel, enlistment in the forces and the way in which he died. Like Morant, my character, Pilgrim, has a mother named Catherine whose husband died before he was born, he believes his real father is a British Admiral, and he has an older sister named Annie. Anecdotal stories about Morant are recreated through Pilgrim, as are the subtleties of his personality as told by his contemporaries.

Tense and metaphor are used in the novel as techniques by which I attempted to cross the barriers of time and space. Whilst Pilgrim's point of view is in past tense, the voice of his mother is written in present tense. The present tense is intended to give the impression of immediacy in which I hope to have evoked a sense of urgency to Pilgrim's journey, bringing his distant past to the foreground. Juxtaposed against Pilgrim's voice in past tense, the mother's present tense voice is intended to remind the reader that the past and present are intertwined, meaning that the past cannot exist without the present, and the present cannot exist without the past. The metaphor of the clock is used to support this argument. Pilgrim's mother's first memory is as a child, when she is warned by her grandfather of the dangers of keeping track of time. Catherine's grandfather tells her that time is a thief, manufactured by man, that has the devastating side effect of slicing away one's life increment by increment. The sound of the ticking clock permeates the background of the novel, appearing at times to be random, like the dripping of water from the eaves of a roof, or the ticking of a click beetle. These moments occur to remind the reader that Pilgrim's present life is limited, but they also draw the reader back to the moment created by Catherine's grandfather, connecting the distant past with the present and predicting a possible

future. In the final scene in the book, the connection between past, present and future is realised when the image created depicts the continuum of life and death when he playfully throws the young child into the air, and observes his reflection in the water as he 'flew into the air, at the same time as his reflection dove deep into the earth.'

The clock within my novel also connects Pilgrim with one of Henry Lawson's most famous characters, Arvie Aspinall, and this serves as a metaphor for the relationship between man and parent, and for man and his yearning for belonging. In Lawson's short story, 'Arvie Aspinall's alarm clock', Arvie Aspinall keeps an alarm clock to wake him up in time to work at Grinder's factory. It is a tragic story of a little boy who, without a father, must work to support his mother. He works so hard that he becomes ill and dies. In my novel, the clock is an heirloom that is passed down from Pilgrim's great-grandfather, to his mother, to Pilgrim and then to my character, Harvey. It becomes an extended metaphor to include the passage of time as it relates to the relationship between a parent and child. This parent/child relationship, and the way in which Harvey adopts Pilgrim as his 'father' is further extended to include the way in which Pilgrim attempts to adopt Australia as his father, whilst yearning back to his mother who is in England. The barrier of time and space is transgressed when the clock winds down and stops at a quarter to three and Pilgrim's death precedes his mother's. With the death of both characters, the story begins again, this time, in its re-telling and the re-shaping of the words of the characters.

The final scene in the novel is also symbolic of a subversion of racism and oppression of Indigenous Australians that was present in the 1890s. With one statement, my character Fryingpan subverts the Christian values that Australian society imposed on Indigenous Australians in the 1890s. A B Paterson's Aboriginal character Frying Pan was published in *The Bulletin* in 1893, in a poem titled 'Frying Pan's Theology', a character that is drawn from Paterson's personal experiences with Indigenous Australians (King, 1995, p. xlix). The poem reflects a cultural attitude of racism towards, and oppression of, Indigenous Australians, an attitude that was particularly evident in *The Bulletin*. *The Bulletin* gave Aboriginal and Chinese characters derogative nicknames and created, what was then thought humorous, caricature sketches of Chinese and Aboriginal peoples. Paterson's poem creates humour at the expense of both characters.

Frying Pan's Theology

Scene: On Monaro.

Dramatis Personae:

Shock-headed blackfellow,

Boy (on a pony).

Snowflakes are falling

So gentle and slow,

Youngster says, 'Frying Pan

What makes it snow?'

Frying Pan, confident,

Makes the reply—

'Shake 'em big flour bag

Up in the sky!'

'What! when there's miles of it!

Surely that's brag.

Who is there strong enough

Shake such a bag?'

'What parson tellin' you,

Ole Mister Dodd,

Tell you in Sunday-School?

Big feller God!

He drive his bullock dray,

Then thunder go,

He shake His flour bag—

Tumble down snow!'

(AB Paterson, 1990, p. 207)

In Paterson's poem, Frying Pan explains Christian theology, telling the boy that it is God that makes it snow. In the poem, both characters are seen to accept the existence of God, but from the narrator's position they have misinterpreted the concept with seemingly comical consequences. The identity of Fryingpan in my story is deliberately ambiguous. He was conceived on a cattle station when his mother was only sixteen years of age and she is helped to hide the pregnancy from the 'protection board' by a Chinese cook whose nickname is Fryingpan. Fryingpan's mother mistakenly believes that this is his real name, and gives the name to her son. Fryingpan believes that his father is the priest who periodically visits his mother and delivers packages of money. In my version, the priest is the villain who frequents prostitutes, one of whom happens to be the deceased mother of his best friend, Harvey. Although the reason for the regular 'alimony' is unclear, the implication is twofold: that the priest harbours his guilt for raping the young woman on the cattle station, and secondly, that he has a reputation to protect and he does this by paying Fryingpan's mother to keep his secret.

Fryingpan, himself, subverts the implications of the poem, and of traditional *Bulletin* racism and oppression in two ways. He embraces his name in its full version and seeks to understand and undermine Christian values. My version of Fryingpan becomes a priest and by doing this he is able to ridicule the concept of theology and innocence from within. In the final scene of the novel, Fryingpan rejects Paterson's 'theology' and instead turns to science, explaining to the child in the scene that snow comes simply from 'clouds'. The overarching Christian theology of God as creator is rejected outright when Harvey observes the image which represents the continuum of life, as the boy, who is the new version of Pilgrim, simultaneously moves upward and downward. Pilgrim, it seems, is reborn, literally, in the form of a child who is named after him: metaphorically, in that his poetry is revised, edited and re-produced and symbolically in that his image simultaneously moves in two directions. It is this continuum that represents a revised way of perceiving the subject of a biographical fiction. The most interesting stories are those that gather momentum as the story is continuously revised, reborn and retold.

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