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Shadows in the Cane

*Reconstructing History Through Fiction to Responsibly Reimagine and Make
Accessible the 1930s History of Cassowary Coast Migrant Sugar Workers.*

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Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

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Statement of Contribution

I declare that I have stated clearly and fully in the thesis the extent of any collaboration with others and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

Signed

Gillian Long

Date: September 2021

Abstract

This practice led research project examines how hegemonic Australian cultural and ideological metanarratives continue to influence Australian historical novels, and how I might write against a system that reinscribes the privileges of imperialist culture. My research engages with the problems of representation, referentiality and ethics when writing historical fiction, specifically in the authorial choices made for choosing and constructing narrative form, characters, focalisation and conflict. My historical novel follows on from the radical anti-imperialist literary trends of the 1930s to construct a story about anti-capitalist industrial militancy as the backdrop to a love story between the classes. Writing historical fiction within a contemporary settler society is fraught with controversy, which must be considered when attempting to construct new ways of seeing the regional past, particularly when adopting contemporary social and ethical standards. In this regard I use the past as an allegorical reflection of social relationships today, particularly with regards to the Anglo Australian dominant hegemony. Because writing against the centre is often problematic, I examine the influence of cultural and ideological metanarratives as engagement techniques in fiction, along with how to subvert them to avoid reinscribing colonial tropes. My project examines these issues in relation to the way F.E. Baume's 1934 novel *Burnt Sugar* and Jean Devanny's 1936 novel *Sugar Heaven* covered these same events at a time of significant global uncertainty and Australian social division. I also examine how contemporary historical fiction writers responded to similar ideological clashes during the Australian history wars debate. Such contemporary ideological social divisions echo similar 1930s contests, and I seek to write about these same 1930s events in a way that might draw parallels with analogous events in society today. In this regard I use the past as a comment on the current Australian hegemony.

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Exegesis

1. Writing The Historical Novel

1.1. Introduction

Shadows in the Cane is an Australian historical novel that engages with postcolonial problems of representation, and postmodern issues of referentiality, within the limits of historical fiction. The novel is part of a practice-led research project, driven reflexively from challenges and problems that arose in relation to writing about the industrial activity in the sugar industry of Far North Queensland in the 1930s. I first came across this story when I read Diane Menghetti's seminal history text, *The Red North: the Popular Front in North Queensland*, first published by James Cook University and reprinted in 2018 by *Resistance Books*, an Australian publisher of Marxist literature. Menghetti's text covers the role the communists, many of whom were immigrants, played in the industrial activism in the sugar industry, and their support for the Spanish Republic during the 1930s Spanish civil war, sending several of their members from the region to fight with the International Brigades. These citizens exited Australia illegally in defiance of Australia's ban on Australians fighting in this foreign war. The history remains largely unknown outside of academia and as an aspiring novelist I was immediately motivated to write the history as fiction.

Writing historical fiction is culturally important because not only does it contribute to a nation's view of itself, but it also allows reflection and debate on the human condition and human relationships. Historical fiction allows public debate even though it sometimes provokes violent opposition (Dalley, *Postcolonial Novel* 4). In view of Hayden White's lifelong work, arguing that all historical narratives are constructed, ideological, and of the present (*Postmodernism* 3), my novel reflects on, and constructs, a new way of seeing the regional past, using contemporary social and ethical standards to construct my narrative. In so doing, I

use the past as an allegorical reflection of social relationships today. For as Hayden White also argues, since Foucault, historical narratives are constructed not so much to represent a past time, but to create contemporary meaning as a guide to the future (ibid. 5). Fiction is perhaps the only medium where multiple national and global issues, including ideological perspectives, can be held up to the light for examination in a way familiar to our darkest thoughts and feelings, our prejudices and dreams, our relationship with others and to represent symbolically our society and environment.

Fiction allows the reader to experience and contemplate the self in a different space. In this I reflect on Rita Felski's point as she argues novels, "[t]hrough their rendering of the subtleties of social interaction, their mimicry of linguistic idioms and cultural grammars, their unblinking attention to the materiality of things draw us into imagined yet referentially salient worlds" (*Uses of Literature* 78). Novelists are free to render issues playfully, and to imagine the archival absences, with a caveat that the narrative as a privileged form, also has responsibilities.

The novel allows implied readers to experience and contemplate dangerous, original, or confronting issues and find meaning for themselves. In this respect, historical fiction gives writers and readers the freedom to imagine a new way of seeing the world, using the past as a blueprint for the future. My novel seeks to present a view that challenges contemporary dominant cultural metanarratives, which were set in train in Australia with the advent of colonisation and continue to operate through fiction today. I use the term metanarrative to indicate patterns in narratives that provide meaning. However, this is a tricky prospect as it steps into value-laden cultural space, which is one of the most significant problems with writing historical fiction. I explore these problems in more detail in the next section.

1.2. The Wicked Problems of Writing Historical Fiction

Writing historical fiction within a colonial settler society is fraught with controversy, with disputes over methodology, contested history, accessing the past and who has the right to narrate it. Historical fiction is often considered ethically and culturally problematic in settler societies like Australia, reflecting the British Empire and its form of Enlightenment, rationalism, and the scientific method, which are argued to be oppressive, totalising, and sustain imperialism as a means of driving out alternative views (Davis, *Clash of Paradigms* 7). My novel sets out to challenge this view and in so doing, it picks up and takes forward the radical anti-imperialist literary trends of the 1930s, through a story about industrial militancy in a struggle against capitalism. On the surface, *Shadows in the Cane* tells a story about forbidden love between a cane cutter and the boss's daughter, but at a deeper level it is a story about one man's journey from rejection, to radicalisation, and finally to redemption. It is written using the linear realist form.

This last point is also problematic. Jo Jones argues that historical fiction when written as realism, "has a tendency to imagine itself in parallel with the actions of history, encoding a linear, rational process similarly dependent on Enlightenment positivistic conceptual patterns" (26). This preservation of imperialism becomes a question of historical referentiality as if it is an empirical actuality. Postmodern scholars question ideas of historical referentiality not only as access to an inaccessible past, but through the inability of language to reference the real. Jo Jones argues linear forms of realism imply a sense of referential truth, and the inevitability of history as cause and effect (43). Another significant problem is the subject matter, for it is about communists engaged in industrial activity, and becoming radicalised to the point of engaging in an illegal act, namely exiting the country to join the Spanish Civil War. As a political topic, radicalisation and communism are not subjects that will necessarily appeal

widely, especially given contemporary discourses relating to religious fundamentalism, or China and its Communist regime. Therefore, I also need to consider the structuring of my novel in a way that is engaging and entertaining.

Despite its problems, the mimesis of the linear form suits the ability of an implied reader to enter and lose themselves in an imagined fictional world. There have been different theoretical ways suggested to overcome the problematics of representation and referentiality when writing a historical novel, including the use of postmodern forms. Linda Hutcheon discusses the capability of historiographic metafiction to overcome the challenges of historical referentiality, through the self-referential logic of the narrative's constructiveness, and its representation through language (*Poetics* 54). Historiographic metafiction can take various narrative forms, from highly complex literary novels to covert disruptions of metanarrative expression.

Metafiction can be implicit or explicit and according to Ansgar Nünning can be delivered through multiple points of view, different voices, unreliable narrators, and questionable authenticity (253). Richard Flanagan's 2001 novel *Gould's Book of Fish* is an often-cited example of metafiction, and as Birns asserts, Flanagan's narrative is metafictional through its rejection of the "rational and privileged" (*Contemporary* 186). In the end all metafiction demands, is self-referentiality or foregrounding the paradox of writing historical fiction so that it questions the validity, truth, or legitimacy of historiography. Metafiction can operate as a direct challenge to hegemonic metanarratives, but so too can realist novels.

Hamish Dalley argues that realist novels can be self-reflexive and ambivalent in their desire to, "articulate truths about the (never fully legible) social world and that epistemic criticism needs to be attuned to specificities of text and context" (original brackets) (*Postcolonial* 8). Metafiction questions the nature of any authority to construct history at all, or

for any historical narrative to hold one form of truth. Realist fiction has the same subversive potential, through a critical understanding of mimesis as an ironic referential framework for making meaning from symbolism. Bruno Zerweck argues that through metaphor, “realism has the same subversive potential as all other forms of fiction” (168). Furthermore, rather than any form of actuality, Dalley argues that plausibility and verisimilitude become the historical novel’s realism (*Postcolonial* 9). While my own novel uses the mimetic and linear form that is common in realist forms of fiction, it also aims to question Australian hegemony. Yet, questioning hegemony is also problematic.

Despite the fictional status, many readers want to believe historical novels tell the truth of history. De Groot refers to this as an, “authentic fallacy: the concept that readers of historical novels want to believe that what they are reading is somehow real or authentic” (265). Yet conversely, and paradoxically, readers also have mental models of what constitutes a plausible truth if they are fans of the historical novel. Plausibility through a normative historical landscape becomes a form of supra-referentiality, a sublime solution to transcend through desire an inaccessible actuality (Elias 160). History as the sublime in this sense complicates and challenges existing conceptions of language, truth, and knowledge. Or in simpler terms, “sentences are elements of human languages, and ... human languages are human creations” (Rorty 14). This is problematic for historical referentiality because authenticity can become conditioned by familiar symbolic representations and metanarratives that over time are agreed and recognised as truth.

In relation to my own novel, I have questioned how I could mitigate problems of readers expecting one truth of history or thinking that the story I convey through my novel is the only “truth”. Any form of historical fiction, whether realist or postmodernist, can be perceived as the real, the truth or plausible if it triggers mental schematics of recognisable historical landscapes. What I mean by the term historical landscape is that descriptions do not come into

being as new. For example, a national view of a historical event is shaped by the interconnectivity of symbolism in repeated stories about the event. Thus, through such intertextual representation, we have learned to imagine what it was like for the Anzacs in Gallipoli, in London during the Blitz, or at Captain Cook's arrival in Australia. Repeated symbolism conjures mental imagery in an audience familiar with reading about these historical landscapes. This is a similar concept to what the anthropologist Jan Assmann refers to as cultural memory. Over time and through repeated intertextual allusions, the fictional world whether in popular or literary form becomes part of an accepted historical landscape, symbolic of a nation's history. Such repeated references become metanarratives that operate as a conditioner of historical consciousness.

Historical consciousness is variously defined, but in this exegesis, I use the term in the way Hamish Dalley defines it, as the way historical fiction is created through the coexistence of "spatially and temporally distant moments ... in which the past exists in constellation with ... the present" (*Postcolonial* 115). The politics and international relations scholar, Andrew Glencross defines historical consciousness as, "the understanding of the temporality of historical experience or how past, present and future are thought to be connected" (1). Historical landscapes might be imagined, yet when historical novel fans of certain eras read about them, they can trigger recognition and plausibility in connection with a reader's mental models of what that historical landscape was like. Rita Felski describes this moment eloquently when she explains that "suddenly and without warning a flash of recognition leaps across the gap between text and reader; an affinity or an attunement is brought to light (*Uses of Literature* 23). To get this wrong is to lose a reader's engagement but to promulgate certain tropes through the application of cultural metanarratives, no matter how desirable, may also inadvertently propagate subliminal colonial discourses as a "true" expression of the historical landscape. This is a large topic and I discuss it further in chapters 2 and 3 of this exegesis.

In the interim, for my own historical novel, I suggest there is never simply one representation of historical actuality, neither is there one truth. Therefore, *Shadows in the Cane* adopts Richard Rorty's sentiment asking, what is the point of truth when there are as many truths as there are judgements, and one cannot be privileged over another. Truth has long been accepted as a value, not a fact. "About two hundred years ago, the idea that truth was made rather than found began to take hold of the imagination of Europe" (3). Thus, Rorty refuses the notion of truth outside agreement with other forms of representation.

Frank Ankersmit argues that historical reality is thus, "a matter of degree: the more agreement there is, the more secure its existential status will become" (93). This agreement when represented in historical fiction becomes the mental model for a recognisable historical landscape. For my own fiction, this form of historical agreement comes from preceding descriptions that have common agreement. This is a similar construct to Hamish Dalley's perspective on intertextual historical typification and its exemplars. "Typification in this context produces characters that signify a 'superordinate meaning', making them signs of something other than themselves" (Baucom qtd. in *Postcolonial* 36). Although these images might be far from any form of actuality, they ring true or plausible in readers' minds, primarily because they are familiar, generally agreed upon and unchallenged.

Even common agreement about a particular historical landscape can be problematic in perpetuating dominant cultural and ideological metanarratives. Despite the expectation that there is truth in the historical novel, the concept of referentiality creates a paradox which questions the nature of truth, the past, its representations through the symbolism of language, the role of memory and imagination, and the influence of culture and ideology. As Paul Herman states, "(e)ach ideology pretends to proclaim the truth, to defend the right doctrines and to spread the best morality" (43). Instead of truth then, my novel as a privileged form, requires consideration of how symbolic representations affect mythmaking of cultural

metanarratives that serve to sustain hegemony. This is particularly relevant in settler nations. For *Shadows in the Cane*, the struggle with historical referentiality became how to challenge intertextual historical agreement that places the Anglo Australian settler at the centre of an Anglo Australian historical landscape without losing plausibility.

While I ran into ethical dilemmas regarding the structure of my novel, my problems with writing historical fiction did not end there. Significant controversy over writing historical fiction came to a head during the so-called Australian History Wars, a cultural and ideological dispute that began with disagreements over aspects of Australian history, the nature of the national character and colonial conflict. The history wars debate extended to historical fiction and its propagation of colonial hegemony. Nicholas Birns argues that after this debate there was no longer any, “sanctuary for white Australian writers.” (*Contemporary* 15). Although his statement reflects the privileged position of a white writer in a white dominated Australian context, it is also a troubling statement for me as a white immigrant, imbued with similar Anglosphere colonial conditioning to other white Australians but without the Australian cultural nuances.

This realisation made me question if I had the right to reimagine this story for it is a story primarily about immigrants, mostly Italian labourers, who were a marginalised minority group in the region during the 1930s. To create characters that referenced the actual actors in this historical story brought to the fore issues of cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation has been highlighted recently by the 2020 publication of *American Dirt*, a social issues thriller about Mexican migrants in America by Jeanine Cummins. For example, Myriam Gurba states, Cummins novel is “trauma porn that wears a social justice fig leaf.” (Grady). Furthermore, Parul Sehgal, decries the racial stereotyping of characters stating, “What thin creations these characters are — and how distorted they are by the stilted prose and characterizations” (ibid). Issues when writing about other groups of people are complicated, and while cultural

appropriation is not a new issue, when it represents systemic power differentials as it does in colonised countries, it becomes ethically problematic. Consequently, questions of the ethics of authorship arose in relation to my own creative construction of fictional characters and how to construct narrative conflict.

This brought the political and social zeitgeist of the 1930s to the forefront of my problems with writing this historical novel. The politics in the sugar industry and the society of this period, mainly regarding the issue of race relations, caused me to question if I had the right to write a historical story about other people's experiences. This is particularly in respect of marginalised historical people. *Shadows in the Cane* is set before a backdrop of bitter antipathy between two Australian groups in the 1930s. Both groups lived and worked in the cane fields of Far North Queensland, but one was denigrated and abused because of their ethnic heritage and ideological beliefs. In this historical story it is the immigrant and refugee sugar workers who were the target of racial vilification, called terrorists, and suspected as being fifth columnists for the Japanese. A 1930 *Smith's Weekly* magazine derided these immigrant workers, mostly Italians but also Maltese, Yugoslavians, Chinese, Greeks, Hindus, and others who make up the bedrock of Far North Queensland today, stating that Innisfail is a "town of dreadful dagoes" and "foreign scum oozes from its highways" (12). *Shadows in the Cane* sets out to challenge this stereotype.

I did wonder if Australian readers might be interested in this regional history in the same way as I was drawn to it. Yet, it is not my story to tell, and I struggled with the idea of regional reactions to a historical novel raking over a conflict from the past." What particularly engaged my attention is the history as a microcosm of the international global politics of the period, and how some of those same matters have re-emerged today. It is a historical story of contemporary relevance to the entire nation, for it is a history of class struggle, radicalism, Australia's colonial heritage, and national identity, as well as a reflection on the economics of employment

and the multicultural nature of Australia. There is much about this story that reverberates in the broader Australian society today. My aim is to portray the story in a way that the regional community may see me as an ally to the Italian and other immigrants whose Australian experience was, or is not, equal to community expectations of fairness and justice. In this respect *Shadows in the Cane* aims to expose injustice and how it echoes through time. Particularly as during the 1930s this injustice led to the consequential social effects of exclusionary policies and legislation, most pertinently, the *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901, colloquially referred to as the White Australian Policy, a racist policy unacceptable today.

Racism was, and still is, a widespread problem in Australia. Dewhirst asserts that it is, “widely acknowledged that Australia’s settler society was built on concepts and acts of racism, which established the political and social foundations of racialised systems” (317). She also argues, “[r]acism is a complex phenomenon with its origins stemming from a political construction for economic profit and power” (230). Lyn Henderson describes racism as negative stereotypes and argues it reached alarming levels in this region between the wars (32). Racism contributes significantly to the wicked problems of writing historical novels as a direct result of colonisation’s historical legacy.

The anthropologist and ethnographer, Patrick Wolfe argues colonialism systemises racism in its structures and institutions to perpetuate dominion over those colonised (163). The 1930s reflected this widespread racism at a time when Australia turned back to the shelter of Britain, and at the same time retreated into white nationalism, with escalating xenophobia towards Asia, particularly Japan. During the 1920s and 1930s there was a common fear that non-Anglo immigrants who settled in northern Australia were by nature a risk to jobs, to national security, and likely to side with the “Japanese threat” on “Australia’s doorstep” (Meaney 4). This was an era which David Carter describes as being one of fear when liberal

democracy was under threat (*Dispossession* 13). This was also a global period of upheaval that Gramsci referred to as a “crisis of authority” (276). It was a time when the supremacy of liberal capitalism and democracy was under challenge from totalitarian nationalist strongmen like Hitler and Mussolini on one hand, and Marxist Internationalism on the other.

By the time of the Great Depression, when Australia, along with the rest of the world, suffered economic deprivation and hardship, “race” became the straw man in search of a bonfire with ethnic minorities often used as scapegoats for economic failures. My novel seeks to expose and challenge this negative and damaging stereotype, particularly in respect of my novel’s mediated conflict construction, referencing the 1930s immigrant workers of this region, who were vilified because of their ethnicity. I also sought to explore the attitudes of the Australian hegemony of the period, to expose how such attitudes operate in contemporary society by constructing my narrative conflict around these attitudes. This last point is important because racism along with values that classify race in terms of ethnic superiority contribute significantly to some of the problems of writing historical fiction, particularly when it relies on what is laid down in archival records such as newspapers from the era.

An example of this point is raised by Jan Henderson who argues that racism skewed the crime statistics reported from the period regarding these same immigrants about whom I write. She argues:

The statistical picture of Italian criminality, particularly the inordinately high number of civil jurisdiction charges, manifests the racist assumptions of Australia and allows the use of essential labels to keep Italians “in their place” (40).

Yet, it was not only in the 1930s that this type of statistical selectivity has been used to denigrate immigrants.

The treatment of the Italians in the 1930s and the treatment of crime statistics is a fine example of the problem with writing historical fiction based on archival research, without taking into consideration the political and social zeitgeist of the period. The same issues can be seen to apply today. For example, like Henderson's exposure of the way crime statistics were used in the 1930s to paint the Italian immigrants as villainous, in 2018 *The Australian* newspaper reported that there was a Sudanese youth crime wave in Melbourne. *The Guardian* newspaper took a different view, arguing that these crimes were not the result of immigrants' ethnicity but of factors associated with, "poverty and a lack of engagement in work and school". An online ABC article concurred with *The Guardian* and argued, through one of its headlines, that Sudanese youth crime results from falling into "the wrong crowd for survival" (Clayton). Choosing which statistics to use as representative of historical behaviour and attitudes is another area subject to contest and questioning, which is an aspect of writing historical fiction.

Rather than historical fiction reflecting on race my novel has instead chosen to focus on an immigrant's sense of belonging to a new country. Tahir Abbas argues that a sense of belonging, and identity is critical to immigrants finding a place in a new country (4). I wanted to explore this issue in my novel through the notion of the transitioning Australian settler, one who not only has a new country and culture to negotiate, but one whose children must also negotiate the hybridity of their own ethnic allegiances. Negotiating the liminal space of settling into a new country is a common experience in contemporary Australia. An ABC article by Dr Patrick Carvalho, a research fellow at the Centre for Independent Studies, suggests, "nearly a third of Australia's population" were born overseas. On top of this, the 2011 census showed 32 percent of respondents reported at least two ethnic ancestries. Immigration, either planned or through seeking asylum, is a rapidly expanding global phenomenon, bringing with it a much greater focus on belonging, both for the immigrant and their offspring and for the residents of

the country where they immigrate. Yet immigrants, most particularly asylum seekers' place in Australia, is a contentious issue both in the 1930s and today and the way this is portrayed in historical fiction can also create controversy. Some immigrants today are seen by some sections of both society and politics as a security threat while some are accused of taking Australian jobs.

The same problems were manifest in the sugar industry politics between the wars and creates yet another issue for historical representation in historical fiction from a period which was undergoing a significant culture war regarding Australian identity. These politics sometimes manifest in claims that immigrants were stealing white Australian jobs. For example, the 1927 South Johnstone sugar mill and railway lockout strike was, on the surface, a protest over immigrants taking jobs at lower wages. Kennedy argues the, "initial trouble arose on a question of job preference" (1). The Australian Workers Union (AWU) demanded that seasonal workers should be re-employed each season rather than having to reapply for a contract to harvest sugar cane. To break the strike, the industry employed new immigrants who were unwittingly used as so-called scabs. This led to violence, "to deter non-unionists, a number of whom were New Australians, from entering the mill area" (Kennedy 3). Kennedy argues that the newspapers of the period, "were not above insinuating that attacks on New Australians were part of a preconceived campaign of race discrimination thinly disguised as the assertion of union principles" (3) although he questions if this was really the issue. Yet, Ross Fitzgerald in his history of Queensland argues that "like the Chinese and the Kanakas before them, the Italians aroused the antagonism of white Australian workers by their very presence" (66). It is clear that there was a great deal of prejudice directed towards the immigrants of the period, not only from newspapers at the time but also arising from members of the AWU.

How I represent such political conflict in my own historical novel will also be the subject of contention and open to question. Yet, racism at the time was not just seen when there were

job shortages. Despite relative prosperity during the 1920s, in July 1924 *The Worker*, a Labor Party newspaper wrote, “an immigration plague is upon this country and Labor will have to root it out before it spreads its clammy claws too far” (qtd. in Fitzgerald, 68). Compounding the immigrants’ marginalisation, a 1925 Queensland Royal Commission, along with Thomas Ferry’s subsequent report, classified Southern European immigrants as undesirable and paradoxically not quite European enough to be considered white (Dewhirst 316). Fitzgerald also argues that by the late 1920s unionists were boycotting black Italian labour. He argues that by 1930, the Returned Soldiers League also called for the White Australian Policy to be implemented in recruitment to the sugar industry, so that no less than 90 per cent of the sugar industry work force were to be British labour and within three years an expectation that all labour should be British (69). Fitzgerald claims that by 1930, the push to limit immigrant labour in the lucrative sugar industry resulted in a so-called Gentleman’s Agreement or the British Preference Agreement (BPA), between the sugar industry and the AWU.

Thus, while racism in the early part of the 20th century was widespread, its consequences can impact on what is recorded in archival documents, which historical fiction writers draw on to write novels. Interpretation of these issues can also become open to contestation. As Dewhirst argues, the Ferry report, “moved beyond links between behaviour and racial inferiority to racial stratification” (323). In 1932 the CPA challenged such racism in the region. The barrister Fred Paterson, (who later became the only Communist Member of an Australian Parliament) challenged the use of the White Australia Policy in terms of the BPA on behalf of the Italians, but ultimately lost and the BPA held (Fitzgerald 68). Thus, many immigrants in Queensland, who might be considered “white” today, fell under the discriminatory racist practices of the White Australian Policy until at least the advent of World War II. How these issues are portrayed, from different cultural and ideological perspectives, requires reflection

and contemplation when writing historical fiction, for any viewpoint I adopt can be subject to contest.

I seek to challenge racist portrayals of the immigrants of the period, and to explore the role social prejudice and xenophobia play in radicalising youth, particularly when immigrants are not treated as valued Australian settlers. This is not so much a legal issue as a social and cultural one. For example, Ken Gelder argues that in Australian fiction, immigrants do not form part of the Australian “gang” in the same way as native-born Australians (*The Novel* 505). Yet native born Australians as the offspring of immigrants may be also perceived as remaining outside of the gang. In historical fiction the question of who is seen as belonging in a nation and who is the interloper, can become a significant problem where stereotyping and prejudice play a role.

Jon Stratton argues that the dominant hegemony in Australia sees ethnicity as having a value based on three hierarchical categories: 1. immigrants and refugees; 2. people born in Australia of non-Anglo-Saxon heritage; and 3. those of “white” or Anglo-Saxon heritage who can trace their ancestry back to colonial stock. Yet Stratton argues it is only the Anglo-Saxons who are not reduced to subaltern ethnic groupings (251). My novel questions how much of this social differentiation of a citizen’s value as an Australian contributes to a sense of dislocation in young men who become radicalised? For the purpose of this exegesis, I use the term “Anglo Australians” rather than Anglo-Saxon, in the way Nicholas Birns (*Contemporary* 8), and Gelder and Salzman (60) use it. The Anglo Australians represented in Australian literature are descended from the British colonisers and are distinguished from all other Australians who are not of British heritage. While I sought to explore this issue of a perceived hierarchical value of settlers based on their ethnicity in my novel, I wanted to explore it in contrast to the dominant Anglo Australian hegemony’s points of view, particularly in light of any agreement regarding an Anglo Australian historical landscape.

In so doing I sought to question what role prejudice played in sending the 1930s immigrants into the arms of the CPA, and whether the Communist-led industrial militancy of the era in the sugar industry prepared the men to become radicalised enough to go to war. There were several strikes leading up to the 1935 Weil's disease¹ strike about which I write, including its forerunner, the 1934 strike in Ingham, when both non-Anglo and Anglo Australian Anarchists and Communists teamed up to take on both the AWU and the sugar industry (Bliss 54). The importance of writing this story for a new generation is that the racially based conflict in the 1930s is reminiscent of the rising xenophobia in Australia in the past two decades since the Tampa Affair in 2001. As an immigrant I had not realised that I was witnessing a resurgence of a cultural thread with long colonial links back to Federation and the *Immigration Restriction Act* 1901. After reading Menghetti's history text and seeing the white populist backlash against immigrants, as an aspiring historical novelist, I had an overwhelming desire to rewrite the story as historical fiction.

In this respect my novel aims to engage the power of imperial discourse and then to use it to write against the assumptions of Anglo Australian hegemony, to claim recognition for non-Anglo immigrants as Australian settlers. This is a form of writing a postcolonial critique. However, postcolonial theory is a broad topic and is subject to contestation. In this exegesis there is not the scope to cover it adequately, although in the next section I cover those aspects that are relevant to my own writing and articulate some that are outside the scope of this research project.

¹ Weil's disease is a deadly form of leptospirosis that killed many of the sugar workers before penicillin was discovered.

1.3. Writing Fiction as a Postcolonial Critique

Writing historical fiction as a postcolonial critique requires examining the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, with a focus on the consequences of, usually, European imperial power, control, and exploitation of colonised people. My novel is not about colonised people, but about immigrant settlers in a colonised country, exploited by the colonising power. In this respect there are various approaches to postcolonial critique, although all are designed as a discourse aimed at disrupting “the Western master-narrative” (Gaile xxvi). Postcolonial theorists, such as Vinayak Chaturvedi, argue imperialism renders non-colonist subjects as subaltern (3). In this regard the subaltern in Chaturvedi’s terms might be seen as the Australian Indigenous people. However, I argue the subaltern can also be used with regard to Australian settlers who were not descended from the British colonisers. This point is argued by Jon Stratton, who shows how hegemonic Australia has created a hierarchy of ethnic categories where non-British immigrants and Indigenous people are both considered subaltern to Anglo Australians. This is a form of Western colonial prejudice.

Edward Said argues Western prejudice created the view that people of different ethnicities were Other. He argues Western prejudice created the Oriental as if they were a homogenous group of people. This is suggestive of a, “subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice” originating from false but romanticised stereotypes of Asia, in general, and the Middle East in particular (Said 5). It is a type of exteriority, “often threatening Otherness into figures that are relatively familiar” (Orientalism 29). He goes on to argue that the concept of the subaltern describes people who are seen to have little agency, and that subordination of their humanity justifies the imperial or colonial domination. I argue that the significant prejudice against the non-Anglo settlers in the sugar industry during the 1920s and 1930s created a similar Othering of non-Anglo immigrants.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a feminist scholar, asserts that the term subaltern was originally a word used by Antonio Gramsci in reference to the working class or proletariat oppressed by a system of imperialism. She goes on to argue the subaltern cannot speak without using the language of the white liberal and educated Western world, and while Spivak's point is that the subaltern are often women of colour, I argue the non-Anglo immigrant can fall into a similar category, albeit not as deeply problematic as it is for colonised women of colour. In Spivak's view no white Western philosopher, usually male, can speak adequately for the subaltern, particularly in the case of women.

Furthermore, the colonised subaltern cannot speak adequately for (in Spivak's view) herself unless she learns the language of her oppressors. Spivak argues "(i)mperialism's image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as an *object* of protection from her own kind" (94). This is usually through misinterpretations of the woman's cultural practice (99), and by denying her desires by imagining only what she needs according to Western cultural tenants. Thus, gender emerges as a powerful influence, often central to European paternalism, which becomes a trope in fiction. However, gender and feminism studies are beyond the scope of this exegesis: there is only so much that can be considered in this project. This is not to argue feminism is not important to my writing; it is, but my focus for this research is on non-Anglo immigrants, particularly radicalised male immigrant offspring. Yet, the same issues arise regarding how a white liberal descendent of the coloniser can speak for the marginalised Other.

My research interests are less concerned with the subjective experience of oppression, or the identity claims of the subject, and more interested in the mechanisms and structures of domination and how they are used to repress any challenge to hegemony. The postcolonial position I have in mind for my own work, is that of Boaventura de Sousa Santos' theory. He uses the term subaltern to refer to the struggle against the hegemonic practice of neoliberalism

and globalisation. He argues the postcolonial subaltern in contemporary society is in a struggle against the global hegemonic practice as a kind of social fascism (186). This is a contemporary problem reflecting an updating of Gramsci's view of the subaltern. De Sousa Santos particularly references those who are displaced immigrants and rural labourers (186). Here the subaltern group are the exploited, who have no agency, no voice or at least, not one heard in any hegemonic discourse. Despite de Sousa Santos's argument being a contemporary problem in relation to neoliberalism and globalisation, there are echoes of a similar struggle in the 1930s against liberal capitalism, particularly by immigrant Communist labourers in the Innisfail region during the Great Depression.

The subaltern in effect becomes a form of Otherness, mystified or without definition, to become the object of negative stereotyping, often as a result of the cultural discourse created and reinforced by white liberal dominance. The mystification process of the Other is a Marxist term that refers to a pervasive illusion that casts humans as a market commodity rather than being understood within a social system of production. In mystification, the individual disappears and only their value in the market is considered, effacing the exploitation by hegemonic domination on which the market depends.

The subaltern or mystified Othering is not a static issue. No group or ethnicity remains in stasis over time. For example, the Italian immigrants, once exploited and denigrated in this region, today hold a degree of economic power and acceptance. Vivek Chibber argues that the subaltern view of postcoloniality has a tendency to render subjects fixed, a static category, a form of essentialism that denies human desire and universal interests. He claims that subaltern theories reinforce old notions of Empire rather than challenging them (Chibber *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* 291). Chibber argues that although subaltern theory promotes itself as a postcolonial critique of Othering, it reinscribes those same Imperial

paradigms. In my own historical novel, I seek to avoid reinscribing the primacy of the coloniser.

Chibber argues for a return of postcolonial theory to its Marxist tradition. In an interview with Jonah Birch, Chibber argues:

When Subalternist theorists put up this gigantic wall separating East from West, and when they insist that Western agents are not driven by the same kinds of concerns as Eastern agents, what they're doing is endorsing the kind of essentialism that colonial authorities used to justify their depredations in the nineteenth century (*How Does the Subaltern Speak?*).

In effect what Chibber is arguing is that people cannot be categorised in terms of the subaltern as a static category over time, but instead might be viewed in terms of people for whom change is driven by economic interests and human desires.

Postcolonial theory is too large a subject to give an adequate overview in this exegesis. To narrow it down, I refer to what Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin identify as four postcolonial critique models. These are national/regional culture; race-based including black diaspora writing, comparative models, and hybridity and syncreticity (28). Of most interest for my creative purposes is the national perspective, along with hybridity and syncreticity, particularly the cultural implications. Ashcroft et al. assert this is where a, “country’s most deeply held linguistic and cultural traits depend upon its relationship with the colonizing power” (30). More specifically, this relates to questions about the aftermath of a colonised nation, through what Seth refers to as an examination of how power remains systemically embedded within political and cultural structures (155). My interest, for the history I seek to represent through fiction, is the type of postcolonialism that Hamish Dalley refers to as, “anti-imperialist radicalism” (*Postcolonial* 124). In this way Dalley asserts the

postcolonial historical novel becomes the, “subject of political contestation and public debate” (*Postcolonial* 4). It is this last concept of postcolonial critique that is of interest to my own construction of a historical novel investigating the 1930s as a contested political zeitgeist between communist socialism and liberal capitalism, where the immigrants and refugees in the cane fields were a mystified subaltern category of Otherness in Australian society of the time.

My novel seeks to give voice to the voiceless or silenced, or the below of history, which is an important aspect of postcolonial fiction, where often only the hegemonic voice is heard (Seth 153). In an Australian fiction context, Peter Carey challenges the hegemonic voice as being British. In his 1974 collection of short stories, *The Fat Man in History*, Carey questions the dominant status quo as a British imperialised one (Gaile xx). For the same reason, Carey’s 1997 novel *Jack Maggs* writes back to Charles Dickens’ novel *Great Expectations*. Andreas Gaile argues the novel shows the corrupting influence of British hegemonic power on the minds of its subjects (242). Yet, in so doing Carey creates a new ethnic people – the Anglo Australian ethnic as a subaltern category to their British forebears.

In developing my characters and the narrative conflict this realisation brought me to question the nature of Australian identity. What is at stake is historical fiction’s ability to challenge and resist “the meta-narratives that placed Europe at the center of history making and history writing” (Chaturvedi 18). Such postcolonial conventions when used in writing historical fiction require defining and even challenging what Australianness means. In effect, this is a national image which David Carter argues is the desire of many novelists (*Dispossession* 13). Furthermore, Carter argues that creating notions of national identity is about “the *nation* and the power to identify one’s own interest with those of the national culture” (*Literary Canons* 22). My research seeks to find the narrative levers that propagate a national image as primarily Anglo Australian and show that the Anglo-Australian as coloniser is as much an immigrant to this ancient Indigenous land as any other.

The problem with colonial reinscription is one Jo Jones has identified in much Australian historical fiction, particularly in the use of the realist form. While Jones recommends the postmodern form to mitigate these problems (43), I contend that any form of narrative whether postmodern, realism, literary or popular can equally carry this white cultural metanarrative, specifically in relation to the Anglo-Australian historical consciousness that permeates much contemporary Australian historical fiction as part of an agreed historical truth.

My novel seeks to show that Anglo-Australians, as a collective, are not the underclass or victims of British imperialism, portrayed in several of Peter Carey's novels including his 2000 novel, *True History of the Kelly Gang*. Graham Huggan refers to Carey's novel as, "nostalgia-ridden narratives of sanctified victimhood which continue to block access to Australia's colonial past" (153). Instead, the Anglo-Australian as a collective has become the dominant power in a nation that creates subaltern categories of Otherness, often systemised through legislative practices to maintain Anglo-Australian dominance.

If the below of history, as they are written into fiction, are those characters without power, then each historical event requires defining in terms of the way characters and narrative conflict are imagined and constructed in terms of the cultural hegemony of the nation. In writing back, it is important to note which side of the conflict wins, and thereby creates the ongoing dominant hegemonic accounts of history. This is another slippery and controversial task, and one which can generate numerous problems.

These problems with writing historical fiction led to my research question, which asks, as a white immigrant writer, what method can I adopt to write an Australian historical novel that not only challenges the canon but also challenges white nationalist values, Anglo-Australian historical agreement, and the dominant ideology? Specifically, how can I construct character,

narrative conflict, and the narrative structure to both entertain and engage, but also expose the systems that perpetuate hegemonic metanarratives of an Anglo-Australian historical landscape.

1.4. Methodology

To answer my research question, I use a practice-led methodology. This methodology is described by Smith and Dean as prioritising the creative need to know, a process resembling a “cyclic web” (19). The cyclic web describes an iterative and progressive writing process, through gaining and using knowledge and insights, guided by seeking answers to my creative questions. In this respect, practice-led research is different from research-led practice. Batty and Baker have outlined the problems with different perspectives on carrying out practice-led research and argue that ultimately the methodology outlines the design of the process an artist/researcher takes in seeking answers to research questions (2). I reflected on what my project was attempting to achieve, what I would bring to it, and what I would need to learn, with a space reserved for that of which I was unaware. If I wanted to situate my own historical novel within an Australian context, I would first need to immerse myself in that same context to understand what was culturally and ideologically important, from an Australian cultural values perspective.

Early in this research project I had already attended to the usual methodological concerns of the historical novelist. These included archival research and documenting the history and its timelines. I had immersed myself in what I could find out about 1930s Innisfail, reading memoirs, novels, and histories about the cane fields in Australia including Peter Dalseno’s (1994) *Sugar, Tears and Eyeties*; D.A. Cottone’s (2012) *Canecutter*; Jean Devanny’s novel *Cindie* (1949); Alli Sinclair’s romance *Burning Fields* (2017); and Judy Nunn’s family saga, *Elianne* (2013); John Naish’s 1962 novel *The Cruel Field*, based on his own experiences as a cane cutter in the 1950s, and the self-published historical novel by Greg Johnston, *Sweet Bitter*

Cane (2019). While these texts helped immerse me in the cane fields, many are set in different eras to my novel. For example, Jean Devanny's *Cindie* (1949), Nancy Catto's *Brown Sugar* (1974), and Judy Nunn's *Elianne* (2013), are all set in 19th century Australia and examine an Australian history of indentured labour. While they are set in the cane fields along the Australian east coast, and explore race relations, they are not about the radical industrial history I sought to write about in my novel. Alli Sinclair's *Burning Fields* is set after World War II. While *Burning Fields* explores individual prejudice, it was a time when there was a policy to populate or perish, a time of significant leadership efforts by governments to welcome immigrants, rather than to systemically marginalise them as did the 1925 Queensland Royal Commission. Furthermore, many of these novels derive their conflict from interpersonal relationships, often gendered, whereas my novel is premised on the battle between classes over the means of production to explore and expose the systemic perpetuation of cultural supremacy.

Diane Menghetti's (1981) seminal history text, *The Red North: The Popular Front in North Queensland* was the only text I could find that expanded on the issue of radicalisation in the sugar industry and the Communist commitment to the Spanish Civil War. There are several texts about Australians leaving to join the war, such as A. Inglis, 1987 *Australians in the Spanish War*, and Nettie Palmer's 1938 *Australians in Spain*, but no novels that might shed light on why these young men in the sugar industry in this region, earning good money, would give up everything to leave their families and risk their lives for a cause on the other side of the earth.

Thus, while there are many memoirs, novels, and historical bio-fictions about the cane fields along the east coast of Australia, I found only two novels that mention the militant industrial disputes in the cane fields of North Queensland. These are F. (Eric) Baume's novel, *Burnt Sugar* (1934), and Jean Devanny's novel *Sugar Heaven* (1936). Menghetti claims to

have used Jean Devanny's *Sugar Heaven* as source material for her history text and verified some of the facts in an interview with Eileen Quinn, an eyewitness to the unfolding events of the 1935 strike activity (29). Eric Baume published *Burnt Sugar* about the same people and place as Jean Devanny represented in *Sugar Heaven*. *Burnt Sugar* is also about industrial activity conducted against the workers' own union by Communist and Fascist immigrants in the cane fields around Innisfail. I chose these two novels to analyse, and I discuss both texts in greater detail in chapter 2 of this exegesis. Aside from Menghetti's history text, these two texts are the only narrative accounts of the 1930s' historical events of interest to my own writing, and that can inform the region today of a specific industrial history. My novel aims to retell this story for contemporary society, situating it as an Australian historical novel.

In undertaking to write historical fiction as a form of postcolonial criticism using linear realism for the narrative, there are other problems and challenges that required methodological consideration, such as the narrative tropes used in Australian fiction to represent the transition of cultural memory over generations. Jan Assmann argues that "[c]ultural memory preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity. The objective manifestations of cultural memory are defined through a kind of identificatory determination in a positive ('We are this') or in a negative ('That's our opposite') sense" (130). The metanarratives in historical novels and how they are crafted through culturally influenced choices of voice, character, perspective, and narrative conflict play an important role in the consciousness of human activity and meaning in the present.

Assmann also argues that cultural memory takes 90 to 100 years to form although László et al. maintain it can take as little as 30 years. Therefore, to immerse myself in the Australian cultural context and an Australian form of cultural memory as it is represented in fiction, I read numerous canonical Australian texts from Henry Lawson's poetry and short stories, through to contemporary literary novels such as the Peter Carey novels already mentioned, Richard

Flanagan's novels, Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*, and David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* among others which I did not eventually include in the exegesis, mainly for space concerns. I chose those texts that demonstrated the carryover of cultural memory in character and conflict construction through the use of cultural myths and tropes. I draw on what I learned from these texts throughout the following chapters as I seek to find the Australian exemplars and typification Dalley discusses as an aspect of postcolonial allegory.

Dalley argues that allegory is one of the most contested terms in literary criticism (*Postcolonial* 33). He outlines Tambling's thesis of allegory, where the, "structure of 'double meanings' ... make allegory an extended metaphor" (ibid. 32). Postcolonial allegory in Dalley's terms is a mode in which, "narrative derives its meaning from interpretative structures that cannot explicitly be represented because their present is obscured by ideology" (ibid. 35). He goes on to argue that "[w]hether the allegory is imperialist or anti-colonial, reading involves moving from the literal sign *to* its metaphorical referent" (ibid. 35 original italics). In this regard, Dalley argues the allegory does not have to be anti-realist. It is the similarities between the past and the present in my novel that I seek to use as allegory.

As an immigrant not immersed in Australian culture, understanding how narrative tropes evoke cultural memory was an important aspect of my research. This is particularly necessary if I want to write Australian historical fiction and render it plausible. I need to give my narrative cultural meaning, rendering recognisable characters as allegorical representatives of an idea. Consequently, this methodology documents how my research has answered my practice questions to achieve my writing aims, which is what Smith and Dean refer to as epistemic knowing, leading to broader and generalisable insights into practice (4). In accordance with this view, epistemic knowing is tacit and cumulative and achieved through methods familiar to practitioners (Haseman and Mafé 213). To ensure unconscious knowledge

and values production can be exposed as generalisable processes, my reflections focus on managing unintended consequences or risks to the aims of my work.

These risks may inadvertently support the very issues I seek to avoid. As I am reminded by Harold Aram Veerer, “every act of unmasking, critique and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes” (xi). In this respect my research analyses the patterns that existed at the time the texts were written, finding the cultural poetics discussed by Stephen Greenblatt’s theory of new historicism. Greenblatt describes cultural poetics as the, “making of distinct cultural practices and inquiry into the relations among these practices” (*Shakespearean negotiations* 5). My interest is in finding and using these to write back against some cultural myths in Australian literature.

Ashcroft, et al. define writing back as writers engaging in the power of imperial discourse by writing against the assumptions of a prior claim to legitimacy and power, a “cultural hegemony ... maintained through canonical assumptions about literary activity” (20). This aspect of my creative work underpins my need to understand cultural tropes in the Australian canon so that I can find a means to subvert these by writing against Australian hegemonic power. Writing back requires a special focus on the cultural and ideological values that underpin Australian cultural memory as part of a cultural contest.

I sought to find a way to use these values in the construction of my characters and narrative conflict to act as mechanisms or levers to knock old patterns off course and thereby create new patterns for my novel’s characterisation of Australian society in the 1930s. To define opposing cultural values, I use Shalom Schwartz and colleagues’ extensive research into commonly shared cross-cultural values. My focus in this respect is on the divide between values groupings that Schwartz labels “conservatism” as opposed to the groupings of

“openness to change” (Schwartz 23-26). I use these values along with beliefs and stereotypes and how these are used in the texts.

For this research project, new knowledge and ideas combine with implicit knowledge and writing techniques to create my novel. My process flags challenges, questions, and ethical concerns and then seeks to investigate possible responses through Australian fiction, reflecting on how I might adapt these to answer my concerns. As part of my ethics of authorship, I use my reflections and reflexivity to unearth subliminal colonial metanarratives. This is not a foolproof method, and my experiment may fail. Yet by drawing on theory, textual analysis, reflexivity, reflection, and writing using narrative conventions and engagement techniques I hope to replicate a cultural pattern. The purpose of the pattern is to negotiate a route between complex constructs, their straightforward articulation and recognition of subterranean metanarratives that emerge in Australian literature as narrative tropes. In other words, my research seeks to unearth cultural representations and what meaning lies behind before I consider how to subvert those same cultural meanings.

Throughout this process, it is important to keep the research question in mind. Accordingly, my research methodology throughout this exegesis follows a discursive interaction between my creative practice, and reflexivity from analysis and reflections on cultural tropes and metanarratives in other Australian fiction, including contemporary works of the literary canon such as David Malouf’s *Remembering Babylon* and Kate Grenville’s *The Secret River* in light of the Australian History Wars debate. I also draw on other texts to evidence particular points, such as the work of early 20th century writers. Haseman and Mafé argue this process allows the practitioner to both use and gain knowledge through reflexivity to deal with, “emergence in the research process” (213). My novel comes with the caveat that while it is expressed as Australian postcolonial and allegorical historical fiction, it does not

claim to be the truth of history. Instead, I aim to present multiple perspectival truths for readers to decode and negotiate meaning for themselves.

My first step in this process is outlined in chapter 2, where I examine the key cultural tropes that contribute to Anglo Australia's perceived national characteristics. I then test their relevance against my analysis of the social standards of the two 1930s novels *Burnt Sugar* and *Sugar Heaven*. I use the emergence from the analysis to compare the ethical standards of the texts of the 1930s with contemporary postcolonial standards and use this gap in social standards to create characters and narrative conflict for my own novel.

The second step in chapter 3, is to analyse character and narrative conflict representations in contemporary Australian historical fiction, in light of contemporary cultural discourses, particularly the Australian History Wars. Finally, in chapter 4, I use the emergence from my research to discuss how it has shaped my novel. I discuss what I have learned from this project, and how my research and creative process contributes to the field of Australian historical fiction, with my own novel held up as an experiment in application.

The entire research process seeks to unearth the narrative elements for structuring my novel that are most relevant in promulgating agreed dominant cultural tropes in Australian fiction, how these reflect cultural discourses in Australian society, specifically those that render non-Anglo Australian immigrants as subaltern, and how I can subvert them. With this methodology I bring together the tacit cognitive, perspectival, and cultural memory-related actions involved in my writing. It results in my research synthesising new and tacit knowledge and reflecting on how to use its emergence within a postcolonial allegory about the radicalisation of an immigrant son to an ideological commitment that draws him towards war.

2. Cultural Metanarratives in *Burnt Sugar* and *Sugar Heaven*.

The aim of my novel is to write against an Anglo Australian hegemony that casts non-Anglo immigrants as subaltern Australian settlers. In this chapter, I examine how the Anglo Australian hegemonic agreement of the national landscape and image was formed, how it has changed, and how it was used in Eric Baume's 1934 *Burnt Sugar* and Jean Devanny's 1936 *Sugar Heaven*, before discussing how I might use it in my own novel. My novel follows on from these two novels as a contemporary update to this historical story. My argument in this chapter relates to updating the story to fit postcolonial standards relevant to the social standards today, which I measure against de Sousa Santos theory of the subaltern immigrant worker. This is particularly relevant as the immigrant struggles against marginalisation in a neoliberal society as an allegory for some consequences of that same marginalisation of certain immigrants in Australia today. I examine these two 1930s text seeking to understand the cultural myths they use and the gap in standards this creates that my own novel needs to address, arguing the gap relates to how narrative characters and conflict are constructed.

This is particularly relevant for my novel to appear authentically historical through the construction of an agreed and recognisable historical landscape, populated by recognisable cultural exemplars which I can write against. I argue that both Baume and Devanny's novels contribute to an ongoing referential fallacy, where historical agreement is wrapped up in myths of an Anglo Australian egalitarian cultural image that in turn casts non-Anglo settlers as Other. Primarily, in my own novel I seek to both replicate and subvert these myths to meet postcolonial standards. Both *Burnt Sugar* and *Sugar Heaven* are texts of their time, which is why I argue a new account of this historical story is required. Outside of history texts, such as that written by Diane Menghetti, these two novels are the only access Australians have to a specific regional history of immigrants engaged in radical industrial activism. Yet, the novels, I

argue, are ideologically partisan in their views about the people, place, and activity in the 1930s and require a postcolonial retelling of the same story to undo some of the damage done by nationalist fiction that rejects certain exemplars from the national image.

I will use Stephen Greenblatt's theory of new historicism in my analysis; a theory that asserts novels are written in accordance with the prevailing zeitgeist. Greenblatt argues that literature is influenced by the author's own experiences and standards of the era in which they write. This in turn, underscores the impermanence of the literary text. He also argues literature is shaped by political forces and writers cannot escape the ideological perceptions of their time (*Genre* 3-5). Yet, despite what I will argue are the two novels' problems, it was not until I read them that I began to understand that the disputed opinions, like all ideological arguments, are premised on competing philosophical world views embedded in the broader cultural struggles of 1930s Australia.

The 1930s was an era represented by a culture war over the national image, albeit the Anglo Australian image. This became a contest in literature between anti-imperialism and populist nationalism wrapped up in Empire. David Carter argues the choice of socialist realism as a literary form was used to challenge the dominant populist nationalism of the literary industry status quo through experimentation with, "conventional plots and characterisation" (*Documenting Society* 371). He shows how novelists such as Frank Hardy, Alan Marshal and Judah Waten, Katherine Susannah Prichard and most significantly for my own analysis, Jean Devanny, used this form as a critique of Australian society at the time. These were authors using Marxist philosophy and a form of documentary reportage to invest their novels with Marxist class oppositions, particularly to highlight extreme economic disparity, and by embedding revolutionary metanarratives within their texts. As I will argue later in this chapter, *Burnt Sugar* and *Sugar Heaven* fall into these two categories using both narrative conflict and

characterisations to support their respective novels' premise. In this respect *Burnt Sugar* aligns with the dominant populist nationalism on one side of the culture war and *Sugar Heaven* with the anti-imperialist agenda.

The character types used in socialist realism drew on imagery of the working-class, made heroic in some sections of Australian society by the depictions of the characters in Henry Lawson's poetry and prose among others. These types were egalitarian and honourable: a type promulgated by a desire to distance Anglo Australians from their British heritage. The image was sponsored by print publications such as *The Bulletin*, which also promoted a classless white Australia, through their banner headlines,

All white men who come to these shores – with a clean record – and who leave behind them the memory of the class distinctions and the religious differences of the Old World ... are Australians (qtd. in Carr, *Writing the Nation* 157).

Many fictional representations of rugged working-class rural Anglo Australians followed suit. Thus, the work of Henry Lawson, the advocacy of *The Bulletin* among other print publications, along with texts such as those by Steel Rudd and Joseph Furphy, set out to create this Australian national icon as a white antipodean image of a people separate from their British parent.

Unlike their forebears, these Anglo Australians valued above all an egalitarian and classless existence, with mateship as their primary motivator. This imagery is of “the below of history” encapsulated in Henry Lawson's iconic bushman. The bushman is an image that conjures the “battler” who in times of economic crisis, such as the 1893 Banking Crisis, falls on hard times, when all that can be relied upon is mateship. This is an image used in Steele Rudd's poem *When the Bailiff Brings a Warrant* (Burns 4) and many other texts of the period.

Ann Curthoys argues this type is nowhere more evident than in Marcus Clarke's 1874 novel, *For the Term of His Natural Life* (6). Rolf Boldrewood's 1882 bushranger novel *Robbery Under Arms* is another example of a fictional account from the era, written from the perspective of the below of history (Birns, *Contemporary* 188). Despite the bushman character's use in prose, poetry, and novels, it was not to become the ubiquitous cultural myth it is today until the 1950s, when Vance Palmer and Russell Ward drew on such texts to create a national image of the quintessential Australian (Woollacott 23). Both Palmer's and Ward's characterisations were of an unpretentious type, egalitarian, anti-authoritarian, often a fighter and a hard-drinking and gambling man.

Such narratives set about creating a national exemplar that is still manifest and recognisable. For example, the bushman battling to survive and seeing mateship as his salvation is evident in Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang* (Huggan 153). Birns argues Carey's novel carries on the tradition of Boldrewood's *Robbery Under Arms* (*Contemporary* 188). The typified historical landscape in Carey's novel particularly references the below of Anglo Australian society in the form of the unfairly victimised white working-class man. In *True History of the Kelly Gang*, the protagonist Ned Kelly is victimised by the police and magistrates who represent the authority of the British elite through a class battle carried over from the old country.

The exemplar is also carried forward in Richard Flanagan's 2013 novel *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. Martin Staniforth argues,

The Narrow Road to the Deep North is a national, and nationalist, novel that reinstates and reinforces the values of settler Australia enunciated by Clarke nearly 150 years earlier. The prisoners are participants in a traditional Australian story of victimhood, survival and triumph against the odds, a story about the values and behaviours that

created the nation and that have to be protected. It is, above all, a monument to white Australia's sentimental vision of itself (584).

Despite *The Narrow Road to the Deep North's* sentimental narrative vision, the Australian character traits represented by Flanagan and referenced by Staniforth are discussed by David Carter as premised on the idea that Australians are a, "product of the people not the elites" (*Dispossession* 155). Nevertheless, the image of the Anglo Australian as the below of history obscures the role Anglo Australian settlers played in colonising Australia. By distancing themselves from the coloniser, Anglo Australians downplay their role in the consequential dispossession and genocide of Indigenous people.

Instead of coloniser, the Anglo Australian as the below of history leaves a legacy of a nation's heroes admired for their masculine rural or outback working-class British roots as the battle against a forbidding and empty landscape. Yet, while most depictions of the bushman are Anglo Australians, Lawson did not envision his bushman as necessarily white or Anglo. In his poem "The Rovers" (1899) he writes that "the fairest skin or darkest might hold the roving blood." And in "The City Bushman" (1892) he writes, "sort of British Workman nonsense; that shall perish in the scorn" (H. Lawson 139). Yet this British or Anglo Australian workman was exactly the character that through repeated intertextual representation in fiction, for more than a century, came to represent the iconic Australian hero of historical fiction, picked up and used to separate the colonial child from their British heritage, and to become a mnemonic of the dominant cultural memory.

Despite the ubiquitous nature of the iconic Anglo Australian bushman image today, at the time *Burnt Sugar* and *Sugar Heaven* were both published in the 1930s, much of the Anglo Australian population still embraced Empire, and the popular nationalism that accompanied British colonialism. Bestselling novels followed suit and novels by Frank Clune and Ion Idriess

upheld Empire through, “nationalistic, nostalgic, romantic and heroic” British colonial characters (Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines* 3). The popular British colonial form of the national exemplar in the 1930s was a courageous antipodean colonial adventurer. The character traits admired by imperialism included British tradition, and a form of British (white) merit; reserved and mannerly, but a vigorous and hardy people who valued military style heroism, British honour, security, and fair play.

This colonial characteristic was featured in much Australian melodrama, including that of E.V. Timms, who Dewar argues followed on from the colonial adventures of Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*. These stories portrayed the colonies as places where wealth was waiting to be uncovered by those who were brave and adventurous enough to take it. They portrayed England as the mother country, the men were masculine colonial adventurers, and the women were sporting heroines as comfortable on horseback as they were in the drawing room.

It wasn’t only men who adopted these characteristics in their writing. Angela Woollacott argues women writers from the turn of the 20th century often, “cast the Australian bush as a site of imperial adventure and conquest” (26). Marie Bjelke Petersen romances portrayed white Australia as conservative, civilised, and upper-class, and her novels were hugely popular, both at home and internationally (Alexander 212). Yet despite their popularity with readers, they were derided by some segments of the Australian press. Alison Alexander argues this was because Bjelke Petersen, “was not steeped in the laconic lore of the bush propagated by *the Bulletin*” (213). Yet, it was not only women writers or romances that were disparaged, as can be seen by a spat between Vance Palmer and Ion Idriess over their representations of the national character. Gelder argues that Palmer thought Idriess’s novels were “distorted”, while Idriess thought that Palmer was out of touch with reality (*Recovering Australian Popular*

Fiction 115). Yet this squabble over how the nation and Australians were represented in fiction might be seen as part of a struggle to find a national identity that might capture the soul of the nation, albeit only a white masculine soul with white women as the support act.

Mainly due to the radical nationalists such as Palmer and Ward, the bushman imagery, rather than the colonial adventurer imagery, has solidified into the Australian national image of bushman fame although premised on the white Anglo Australian. The colonial adventurer characteristics are now reserved, in historical fiction particularly, as exemplars of the despised British elite. Richard Flanagan's Colonel Rexroth in *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (2013) is one such character that bears all the hall marks of the British colonial adventurer. He is unemotional and upholds British military honour even in the face of defeat.

Rexroth stands for British tradition, the stiff upper lip as he builds a cemetery with a special place for the officers under shady trees (*The Narrow Road* 48). Rexroth is a quintessentially arrogant and pompous colonial officer, and a historical referent for the British Empire; a cultural symbol that contemporary Australia often uses to portray the oppressor. He is the type of cultural stereotype that is inherent in the archetypal characteristics John Cawelti discusses as an essential part of the popularity of fiction because he is instantly recognisable as a figure to whom the ordinary reader can relate to as a villain. Rexroth is a stereotype and thus a cultural mnemonic of the colonial overlords of Australian history, blamed for the Australian convicts' misery, which in Flanagan's novel is transmitted to the prisoners of war.

Regardless of different exemplars in different fiction published at the time, it is clear that from the late 19th and 20th centuries, popular texts became imbued with images of white antipodean nationalism, either that of the bushman or the colonial adventurer. During this early period of Australian literature, popular nationalism in novels perpetuated masculine concepts of the Anglo Australian man as tough, stoic, hard-working but also laid back, trustworthy and

egalitarian. He was a match for an equally rugged continent as a new breed of Anglo Australian settlers.

The national image in fiction was primed to become one of an Anglo Australian nation of egalitarian and classless people. This is important for writing my own novel because both the bushman character and classlessness are two entrenched Australian cultural myths that colour the themes of many Australian historical novels. Shirley Walker argues that the earlier forms of heroic pioneer settlers in novels such as Steel Rudd's or Joseph Furphy's novels did not distinguish between the wealth of one settler and the hardship of another (166). Thus, print publications such as *The Bulletin* attempted to encourage a form of antipodean egalitarianism, as manifest by an Anglo Australian hegemony of a white Australia. Eventually these, "traits of the mythic bushman became encoded as the traits of the national type" (*Writing the Nation* 157). Despite its detractors, these traits are now used to typify Australians and are still seen in much historical fiction, such as that written by Flanagan and Carey.

In both *Burnt Sugar* and *Sugar Heaven*, the authors' political leanings towards or against Empire have shaped their characters, either as bushman types or those of British colonial merit. This may have had some foundation in the authors' respective backgrounds. Both Baume and Devanny were born in New Zealand and as adults immigrated to Australia during the 1920s. They have a commonality of Commonwealth, or the Anglosphere, with their Anglo Australian cousins. If writing can be said to be shaped by the authors' own experiences and their social environment, and writers cannot escape the ideological perceptions of their time (Greenblatt *Genre* 3-5), Jean Devanny's circumstances were enabled by ambivalent class roots. Her background ranged from expatriate Irish socialite links to British aristocracy, military transitions through Asia and a working-class and money-hungry childhood with a frequently absent father, along with her later conversion to Communism (Ferrier, *Romantic Revolutionary*

12). This is in contrast with the privileged private schooling and wealth of Eric Baume's formative years (Manning 26). Both authors' respective class upbringings show in their choices of character types as heroes of their novels.

This is not to suggest that either Baume or Devanny consciously used popular characteristics, but the cultural struggle between the two-character types of the bushman and the colonial adventurer from the period are reflected in their respective fiction. The character types symbolically represented a similar cultural struggle which occurred over Vance Palmer's and Ion Idreiss's fictional characters. In this case, it was over what Susan Sheridan argues was a public spat about which type better represented the national character (*Along the Faultlines* 3). In Baume's and Devanny's respective novels, their narrative heroes align with the cultural values of the period, divided over what type should underpin the Australian image, although this heroic type remained Anglo Australian.

The heroic characters in the two novels can be divided along cultural values groupings, either conservative values or progressive; in Schwartz's cross-cultural values terms, 'conservative' in opposition to an 'openness to change' (23 – 25). *Burnt Sugar's* Anglo Australian characters fall into the conservative category, which includes values of tradition, security, and achievement, embedded in Empire loyalty. This loyalty also defined the dominant Sydney-based tabloid press, of which Baume was to become one of its celebrated and powerful personalities (Manning 140). National populism as a values-set is central to the heroic type in *Burnt Sugar*.

2.1. *Burnt Sugar*: A White Nationalist Historical Landscape.

The 1934 novel *Burnt Sugar* by F. Eric Baume, I argue, depicts an antipodean outpost of the British Empire, unsuited to becoming a homeland for non-Anglo immigrants. It is a place

where the subaltern, or immigrant labourers, struggle against social marginalisation. This point particularly is in reference to those who de Sousa Santos argues are displaced peasants, immigrants, or rural labourers (186). Here the subaltern is those who are exploited, who have no agency no voice, or at least, not one heard in any hegemonic discourse. *Burnt Sugar* tells a story about the immigrant group that Henderson argues was vilified and criminalised through prejudice. During the 1930s this was a widespread belief held not only by the novel's author but by many other sections of Australian society. This is the primary reason I argue this historical story requires a new postcolonial representation of these historical events.

Baume, according to his biographer, held significant negative prejudice toward the numbers of Italian immigrants settling in North Queensland's cane fields and visited Innisfail to see the problems for himself (Manning 52). Baume began his career in Sydney in the tabloid press where he was mentored by R.C. Packer. Packer held substantial shares in *Australian Associated Newspapers* as well as magazines such as *Smith's Weekly*, which in the 1930s ran a scurrilous article on the immigrants in the sugar industry, described in the introduction. This affiliation aligns Baume with a particular style of populist nationalism that pervaded Sydney tabloid reporting. Baume later turned this to his advantage, first in radio talkback shows, and then in television (Manning 139). These broadcasts might be likened to an early version of those of its radio affiliate today 2GB, featuring similar populist personalities such as John Laws, Alan Jones, or Ray Hadley or even *Sky News's* Andrew Bolt, all of whom claim nationalist conservatism and garner an aligned audience of ardent followers.

As a public personality, Eric Baume was said to have had a "colossal egotism" and as "his audience grew his power became considerable" (Manning 142). In the 1950s he found his way into television where he became an, "outstanding success by anybody's standards" (ibid. 145). However, in the 1920s Baume was just beginning his career ascendancy and by the time his novel *Burnt Sugar* was published in 1934 he was the editor of the Sydney tabloid

newspaper the *Sunday Sun*, with a readership mostly of conservative, anti-republican, and pro-British Australian white nationalists. He had a readership that, like him, was “for God, for King and for Country” (ibid. 31). His attitude was aligned with a conservative and popular nationalistic political era in Australia.

That *Burnt Sugar*'s metanarratives aligned with the industry's perspective is indicated by the novel being published by a branch of the Packer holdings, “MacQuarie Head Press”, a subsidiary of *Australian Associated Newspapers*. Although Baume's mentor R.C. Packer had died in 1934, his son, Frank Packer, took over the media empire and Baume's career continued to flourish. The introduction to *Burnt Sugar* was written by the literary editor of *Smith's Weekly*, Adam McCay, who Diane Langmore describes as another larger-than-life nationalistic and populist Sydney pressman. This indicates Baume was not only supported by the Packers, but his personal network centred itself in the heart of Sydney, and possibly a broader New South Wales press and populist nationalist publishing industry. The Packer conglomerate, along with Baume, retained a staunch view that Australia was part of the Great British Empire and that certain immigrants, most specifically Italians, were not welcome.

Cecil Hadcraft agrees this was Baume's motivation. He argues that “Eric Baume wanted to do a little more than write a novel,” and goes on to explain that *Burnt Sugar* “paints a picture that may be thought a rather exaggerated one” (96). He argues that if a novelist wants to show antagonism, “the temptation is to show that and very little else. And some maintain that this is what Baume has done” (96). Manning asserts Baume wrote *Burnt Sugar* because of a strongly held belief that Italian immigrants were by nature unsuited to settle Australia's northern regions (52). He quotes Baume as saying, “Italians in Queensland not only remained true to the nation of their birth ... (but) ... Australia was nothing to them” (Manning 52). However, while the Italians may have held a fondness and attachment to their homeland, many Italians were

refugees from a Fascist Italy governed by the dictator Benito Mussolini. They came here seeking to make a life in Australia (Papalia 7), despite the significant antipathy in Australia towards them.

Burnt Sugar was reprinted in three editions, published between 1934 and 1938 (*Library Catalogue Worldcat*), although it is now out of print and difficult to obtain. This demand for reprints indicates either extensive marketing or a level of popular commercial demand at that time: perhaps both. A review of *Burnt Sugar* appeared shortly after the first publishing in the *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*,

This is by far the best of F.E. Baume's books. His pages re-create the atmosphere of the small sugar town, with its loves and hates, its ever-present tension between Italian and Australian, his characters really live (6).

The idea of the characters "really living" is morbidly ironic as most of the Italian characters in the novel meet untimely and gruesome deaths. For example, the protagonist Mario's father dies in tragic circumstances. As the narrator notes in an ironic voice, "Primo died, that morning, in a tank of boiling sugar, with much surprise and little pain" (51). Mario's mother is eaten by a crocodile and Mario himself drowns in the river where his mother was eaten.

The novel is written using third person omniscient narration and the plot is structured as a tragedy, and as Hadcraft observes, the tone of the narrative is often mockingly ironic (96). The novel begins by showing a drunk workman, Blue Martin, taking out his rage at his inability to get a job, on the protagonist Mario Zobbler. The workman blames the Italian immigrant settlers for refusing to give an Australian a job and physically hurts the child after which he justifies his actions. Blue says, "You dirty Dagos don't give decent Australians a job. Me with a ticket. Oh no, I'm not good enough for you. Give an Aussie a go" (15). This example shows the

Italian immigrants as a powerful group who hold sway over Anglo Australians stealing their jobs. This is a similar issue to that discussed in the introduction where in 1927 the South Johnston mill went out on strike to ensure the industry would employ Britishers first and resulted in the British Preference Agreement between the AWU and the industry, a point I will come back to.

One major theme of the novel relates to the desire to belong. The protagonist Mario Zobbler is an anti-hero, a despised Italian immigrant (despite being born in Australia), unrepresentative of the British colonial exemplar. At first glance, the novel is a coming-of-age story about an endearing and mannerly Italian boy growing up in North Queensland's sugar country. Mario has a desperate, but ultimately impossible, desire to "fit in" to the imagined town called Eulaville. The *Johnstone River Advocate* assumes Eulaville is Innisfail, and that the well-known journalist,

Mr Baume was the author of a series of articles upon Innisfail which created an Australian-wide furore at the time of their appearance in *Smith's Weekly*, and it would appear as though observations he made when in this centre on that occasion have been utilised for *Burnt Sugar* (2).

A search of Trove newspapers found only one such scurrilous entry on Innisfail in a 1930 edition of *Smith's Weekly*, headed "Innisfail Nightmare" and "Town of Dreadful Dagos" (12). While this entry does not provide the name of the author, it is conceivably the article to which the *Johnstone River Advocate* refers.

The narrative shows how desperately Mario struggles to fit into a "White Australia" and as a small child Mario tells his dog,

“I will be an Australian hero,” he said to Vittorio, the Irish terrier who always sat with him. “I will change my name to – to – Sir Williams.” That was the name of the mailman. “And I will drive a mail car. That will be good Vittorio. A real Australian.” Then he remembered that he was not allowed to speak English at home (35).

However, Mario ultimately fails. No matter how much he yearns to be an Australian, the narrative effect is that his Italian culture, or what by implication is his heritage by way of his Italian “racial blood”, will not allow the transition. This archetype is built on a negative stereotype based on prejudice, later reinforced during a conversation between Mario and his Australian school friend, Albert. Mario says,

“But I am an Australian. Born here.”

“Precisely. Therefore you can tell that to the Marines, as far as some folks are concerned,” said Albert (79).

Whether or not this view was intentional it was a view that was prevalent in the society at the time when Baume wrote the novel.

It is quite plausible to assume Baume was motivated to tell this story and to structure it as a cautionary tale of the dangers of letting immigrants, such as the Italians, populate Northern Australia. Manning claims that when Baume visited Innisfail prior to writing the novel, he came back in dismay at the number of Italians inhabiting the sugar towns (52). Furthermore, the fact that Mario’s most pressing goal is to become an Australian is telling, given he is born in Australia. A 1934 *Australian Women’s Weekly* wrote,

This novel by F.E. Baume brings an unknown Australia to the public. The plot centres round an Australian-born Italian, whose youth is spent on the canefields of the north, where all nations are represented, but where the white Australians are a race apart. Mario

Zobbler's ambition is to become a true "white" and to make his own way in the business world. His struggles against his Italy-conscious mother, and his fear when later he leaves Eulaville that the "whites" will know his nationality and refuse him for it, are vividly told. Mario Zobbler is really a tragic figure, for the more he tries to be an Australian the more he is "really too, too Italian" (6).

This last line references the novel's major theme of seeking to belong, along with the futility of this desire.

The novel goes on to show Mario's mother, Marta Zobbler, an avid Fascist, firing all her Anglo Australian workers in retribution for Blue's attack on her child. She carries out this distasteful task under the benevolent eye and the approval of the Fascist Doctor Marchesini who is at the time tending to the hurt Mario.

The Anglo Australian workers take their dismissal in an understanding and supportive way and leave as requested (25). This minor scenario shows the Anglo Australians as mannerly, decent hard-working men who take their dismissal with a sympathetic attitude towards Marta that strains belief, particularly when considering the antipathy that arose in the 1927 South Johnston strike regarding Italian employment. Notwithstanding this point, the attack on the boy serves to turn Marta Zabella against all Anglo Australians, despite acknowledging they are good workers. Thereafter she refuses to hire them to cut cane on her farm.

Thus, rather than the Anglo worker being defined by revenge, which Blue Martin takes out on the child, the stereotypical notion of the Italian nature is constructed as vengeful, unreliable, and unable to adjust to Australian conditions, even for the offspring of the immigrants. Marta's revenge triggers ethnic tensions that become the motivating factor for the

industrial unrest to come. In this respect the narrator states, “Next season there were words and blows between Italians and Australians ... Marta Zobella named by the union men in their Eulaville office as the cause of the trouble” (62). Thus, the opening incident with Blue Martin, who does not appear again in the novel, sets up the rationale for the narrative conflict and the forthcoming strike over retaining jobs in the industry for Anglo Australians, yet this incident is soon forgotten along with Blue as a character. I questioned if this opening incident in the novel could be read in another way.

Hadgraft argues that a clue to Baume’s motivation can be gleaned from the novel’s foreword by Adam McCay. In the foreword McCay argues that Baume, “has resolved to grip facts ... for the task of coming to holts with whatever radical or national ‘problem’ the book contains” and a little further on, he asserts Baume, “has staged a problem which is of immediate and vital importance to Australia itself.” McCay provides some support for Manning’s later argument that Baume was fixated on a perceived racial problem in North Queensland and sought to inform the nation of what was occurring in their northern regions.

Roslyn Cooper takes a different view to *Burnt Sugar*’s portrayal of the Italian immigrants. She argues the novel illuminates the problem of racism against the Italian Australians in the broader community, and asserts that the,

old myth of the willingness of Italians to work for below-award wages and conditions, their exclusiveness, ghetto mentality and allegiance to Italy not Australia are rehearsed to be counterbalanced by stories of the overt racial prejudice in word and deed of the Australians – it is they who force the Italians into exclusive ghettos.

While the novel does highlight the extreme racism of the era against immigrants, my reading of the narrative sees it as less kindly intentioned than merely a desire to expose Anglo Australian racism against the immigrants.

In effect the narrative argues that the Anglo Australians aren't racist because they mix freely with many other ethnicities including the Chinese. *Burnt Sugar* has a wide cast of characters that reflects the makeup of the region at the time, including both Anglo and non-Anglo settler Australians. Most of the non-Anglo Australians such as the Chinese characters are part of subplots. For example, the Chinese characters are held up as good citizens who know how to keep to their own kind. This is highlighted when Cora Wong resolves, "to marry her own kind, Henry Kee" (144). Cora chooses Henry despite the fact that she is in love with the Italian protagonist, Mario. However, Mario is in love with the mill manager's daughter, but she is warned off fraternising with Mario. She, "can't in any way mix ... with these Italians" (137). The inference in the subplots is that the Chinese are all right, they know and keep to their place, but the Italians are a problem and do not know their place. Furthermore, the novel alludes to the dangers of the Italian immigrants through notions of the Italian nature, their criminality and thirst for revenge.

Notwithstanding the subplots, the main narrative conflict is over the union's right to strike to keep immigrants, mainly Italians, from taking their jobs. Here the narrative conflict is divided by ethnicity, with the fair but long-suffering Anglo Australians on one side of the conflict and Doctor Marchesini as leader of the immigrants including Marta Zobbler on the other. Mario represents the immigrant Italians and Martha and her husband represent the Italian nature, as either crazy and vengeful, or in the case of her husband, shiftless and unreliable. While the firing of Anglo workers is under way, Marta's drunkard of a husband sleeps, and her shiftless brother-in-law does as Marta instructs. The inference here is that Marta and her Italian

nature dominates the family home and its cane-growing business under the tutelage of the Fascist Doctor Marchesini. The doctor is representative of the Italian Fascist system, a reference to Mussolini's extensive control over Italians globally. After Marta fires her Anglo workers, Marchesini outlines Mussolini's industrial policy to Marta (25). The narrative does not say what that policy is until later, when Marchesini leads the non-Anglo Australians, both Communists and Fascists, into battle against the striking unionists.

The dangers of Mussolini's control of Italian expatriates are referenced by a scene in the novel where Doctor Marchesini calls a secret meeting where he forms the Italian men into a strike-breaking army who march on the docks to load sugar. The narrator asserts that it is, "reasonably certain that crazy Doctor Marchesini, in a blind, cold fury of unreasoning (...) prepared the tinder which was to be fanned to a merciless blaze" (180). In this industrial conflict, *Burnt Sugar's* narrator brings the two opposing ideological factions of Communism and Fascism together. When Marchesini whips up fury against the striking Anglo Australians, he addresses a hall full of Italian men about the evils of strikes. "Do we have that in Italy? Do we have strikes? Fascist and Communists alike shouted, No-o-o!" (188). This is an extraordinary conflation of opposing ideologies in the community and one that Baume, as a newspaper editor, would know was extremely unlikely. It demonstrates that the narrative is more concerned with showing the immigrants have more allegiance to Mussolini and his industrial policy than to an Australia that sanctions the right to strike.

Supporting this view is a scene in the novel where an unnamed labour leader holds up the Italian activity as a threat to the rights of workers by, "organised foreign scabs" (192) and goes on to show Anglo Australians are besieged by the Italians. The narrator states that an Italian fires a pistol and a constable falls, to lay face down in the dust from where,

he did not see the cracking of twenty skulls or the bleeding of a hundred faces. He did not see the little Italian Consul wielding his police baton as a Roman legionary may have wielded a short sword. He did not see the rout of the Italians (214).

The Italians here are represented as Roman invaders, whereas the Anglo Australians, at first victimised by the Italian woman's refusal to hire them (in their own country), then having to put up with Italian revenge, are reluctant to engage in violence. Once forced to act, they are victorious: Anglo Australians first are victims, but when aroused, are able to vanquish Rome in a way reminiscent of the eventual British triumph over Roman colonisation of Britain in 350 AD.

The role of colonial adventurer in *Burnt Sugar* is provided by characters who represent all that is colonially British, fair-minded, and unemotional. These characters include the police, Sergeant Tricklebank, a military style hero and the all-Anglo union men led by Fred Haines, as well as Mary Fenton and her father. Fenton is the manager of the mill and refers to himself as, "the Squire of Manor ... the gentry" (137). Tricklebank is also represented as the long-suffering, but scrupulously fair moderator of the conflict between Italian immigrants and the unionists.

The treatment of the immigrant workers in *Burnt Sugar* is reminiscent of de Sousa Santos' social Fascism and the way it is used against the immigrant and displaced rural workers. For "unlike political fascism, societal fascism is pluralistic, coexists easily with the democratic state, and its privileged time-space, rather than being national, is both local and global" (de Sousa Santos 186). Perhaps, as Roslyn Cooper argues, it was not Mario's inability to adjust but the Anglo Australian characters in the novel who were unable to embrace new settlers who were not of their kind and threatened their national image. My reading of the novel was rather than a novel showing the Anglo Australians as the perpetrators of racism in a

struggle against the Italian immigrant workers, it was a novel that warned Anglo Australians of the dangers of allowing such a large and unreliable immigrant workforce to ‘colonise’ the sugar fields of the north, particularly because by nature they were unsuited to the task and to settling into a British outpost.

Notions of essentialism at the time were widespread and as discussed in the introduction, contributed significantly to the notion of British superiority. They underpin ideas of eugenics, a belief arising from the work of Sir Francis Galton and Charles Darwin. Essentialism transitioned into the eugenics movement, which Carole Ferrier claims spread into general, if unquestioning, attitudes among many writers, including Jean Devanny (*Romantic Revolutionary* 62). Although Baume’s opinion on eugenics is not recorded, the fact that he crafts an Australian-born boy as unable to fit into Australian society because of his essentialist Italian nature being “too Italian” (398) indicates there is at least some belief in the essentialism of “race”. Mario is depicted as unreliable, for at the first notion of danger he abandons his farm to take up accounting and goes to live in Sydney, where he becomes a wealthy businessman from trade with the at the time widely despised and feared Japanese.

There are two issues at work here. One is the chosen profession of accountancy which does not seem to be a random choice. Both Manning and Valarie Lawson’s biographies shows Baume had his own difficulties with accountants because he was frequently in debt through his gambling habit. In addition, the archetypal accountant in fiction, Jacobs and Evans argue, is the antithesis of the heroic Australian character (675). I argue this depiction of the character of the Italian Australians in *Burnt Sugar* serves to show that Italians are really unsuited as settlers in the north of Australia.

In line with national fears of immigrants as fifth columnists as discussed in the introduction, the narrative shows Mario as a grown businessman collaborating with the

Japanese. Towards the end of the novel, Mario returns to the north and comes down with fever. He begins to hallucinate, and an angel appears. The angel harangues poor Mario, railing against his duplicity by trading with the Japanese, saying, “don’t call yourself Australian. You’re not.” (381). This statement comes at the culmination of Mario’s lifetime struggle to become an Australian. After the conversation with the angel, Mario in despair recognises his inability to become Australian and wanders off to drown in a river, just as his mother had done before him. Thus, despite Mario having been born in Australia, he is still labelled as a foreigner, untrustworthy and, because of his ethnic heritage, never able to fit into Australian society; never able to become a true Australian settler, for by nature he is unable to adjust. The novel is a tragedy that warns Italian immigrants they will not survive in tough North Queensland’s cane fields.

While *Burnt Sugar* was a product of its time, this is not to say that my reading of the novel’s anti-immigrant views is not still held by some contemporary readers. Recent racist attacks on non-Anglo Australians, along with some political party perspectives, shows that at least a section of Australia hold similar nationalistic populist views to those depicted in *Burnt Sugar*’s historical conflict. Furthermore, a search for more recent reviews of *Burnt Sugar* found only one on the webpage *Goodreads*, which gives the novel five stars and states, “written with verve and insight, this is a finely wrought novel that explores the nature of Australian-ness, as it was before the second war.” This unnamed reviewer seems to find the novel’s character depictions plausible despite my argument that the novel no longer serves the ethical standards of contemporary Australia.

The next novel I examine is Jean Devanny’s *Sugar Heaven* published two years after *Burnt Sugar*. The novel is also a product of its time, although from a Marxist perspective. Jean Devanny’s *Sugar Heaven* also covers labour disputes in the cane fields in the Innisfail region,

which involved a significant number of largely Italian immigrant workers, many of whom had fled Fascist Italy and in effect were refugees. Similarly, *Sugar Heaven* also recounts a story about the same people and place as *Burnt Sugar*, engaging in similar strike activity. While *Burnt Sugar* shows the Italians attempting to break lawful industrial activity led by the union, *Sugar Heaven* recounts an unsanctioned strike by the members against their own union.

2.2. *Sugar Heaven*: a Marxist Historical Landscape

While I have argued that racism against Italian immigrants is embedded in Baume's ethnically constructed narrative conflict, its tragedy as all the Italian characters come to an untimely end, and its Italian negative stereotypes, *Sugar Heaven*'s narrative overtly decries racism. However, the way the narrative conflict is constructed, and the way characters are represented, tends to undermine *Sugar Heaven*'s antiracist attempts.

Carole Ferrier argues that *Sugar Heaven*, "sets out to combat ethnocentrism and racism" (*Romantic Revolutionary* 136). She maintains the race relations in *Sugar Heaven* were the result of Devanny's concern for white privilege and power (*Fictional Critique of Whiteness* 17). In the foreword to *Sugar Heaven*, Nicole Moore, editor of the 2002 edition, suggests that *Sugar Heaven* is an anti-racist counter to an Australian settler history of white nationalism (Devanny and Moore 7). *Sugar Heaven* begins by demonstrating the multicultural nature of Innisfail and indicates its race relations are apparently in the most part quite harmonious. The narrative asserts that in, "Innisfail no colour line was drawn, no distinction among nationals made" (73). However, *Sugar Heaven* goes on to show there is, at least in some quarters, a distinction between the Anglo Australians and the immigrants, specifically the Italians, but that the division is caused by what the narrative calls Britishers, or the Anglo Australians' prejudice.

Sugar Heaven is a romance, in as much as the plot follows the stormy relationship between a married couple, from their marriage of convenience, to falling deeply in love, and ending with a desire to have a baby. However, most of the story covers the unfolding events of the 1935 Weil's disease strike, with narrative conflict constructed between the communist strikers and the AWU. The main focalisation is through the perspective of an Anglo Australian working-class woman from Sydney, Dulcie, who is newly married to cane cutter Hefty Lee. One of the subplots in the novel tells the story of Dulcie's sister-in-law Eileen, married to Bill Lee, Hefty's brother. Eileen Lee has an affair with an Italian man, Tony Pirani. However, aside from Tony as Eileen's love interest, the Italians role in the strike is downplayed.

In essence, *Sugar Heaven's* characters are determined to hide the Italian-Australian involvement in the industrial activity. It might be speculated that this was because Devanny recognised the widespread antipathy towards immigrants at a time when jobs were scarce. She claims to have written *Sugar Heaven* to inform Australia's working class what had transpired during the 1935 Weil's disease strike (*Point of Departure* 190). Given the widespread racism of the era, it is plausible that Devanny would have known that many of the workers she targeted would have related much better to a man like Jack Henry. As the leader of the CPA's 9th District Jack Henry held a significant role in the industrial militancy of the period. He was represented in *Sugar Heaven* as the strike leader called Hendry. After his death John Sendy described Jack Henry as, "a remarkable man. He was a gun canecutter and an expert timber-getter, a magnificent figure of a man, a fighter, a gambler, a drinker, a good mate and an outstanding organiser" (19). Was Henry living up to the national imagery of the iconic bushman or was Sendy promoting Henry's character using the type of iconic hero that Vance Palmer and Russell Ward had promoted as the Australian image in literature? Whatever the case, the type is still an admired heroic icon, evident from literature promoting this cultural type today in a similar way to the way it was used in Devanny's novel.

Notwithstanding the characteristics developed for the communist leader of the strike in *Sugar Heaven*, the narrative downplays the role of the immigrants in the industrial activity. In *Sugar Heaven*, Eileen explains the reason for keeping the immigrants in the shadows. She tells her lover Tony Pirani that the, “Italians must keep out of it,” and goes on to argue that the strikers must be represented by “white” workers (158). This indicates either a widespread anti-immigrant sentiment among the working class or at least in the readership Devanny targeted. Aside from Tony Pirani, there is no other characterisation of immigrants among the workers or elsewhere. They are occasionally referenced with comments such as, “there’s another chap there, too, a little chap, an Italian cook. They tell me he made a great speech” (65). Despite downplaying the non-Anglo Australian involvement in the strike, the narrative makes it clear that racism is unacceptable.

In a discussion leading up to the strike, Dulcie’s husband Hefty and his brother Bill Lee and a friend called Benton discuss the Italians and how they can be included in the strike activity. Bill says, “why in hell they dont (sic) learn the language better than they do beats me.” Benton replies, “that’s the result of the British attitude towards them ... They would have learned English quickly enough if we hadn’t isolated them” (58). The narrative here exposes the problem of racial division as one of British making.

This point is also represented in different ways throughout the novel. In discussing the economic struggle and its exploitation of the workers, the narrator explains that such racism, “could only develop on the basis of the economic conditions, the struggle for markets”. The narrative then points out that racism in Australia arose with, “the predominance of Great Britain in the fight for colonies [which] created a psychology of superiority in the Britishers” (137). The narrative attempts to demonstrate how the economically powerful elites divide

people by whatever means necessary, including using the workers' own prejudice to set them against each other. As the narrator explains,

The Union officials terrorise the foreign workers by threatening to replace them with the Britishers if they resist rationalisation, and at the same time incite the backward Britishers against the foreigners by telling them the latter have been responsible for their worsened conditions (140).

However, the narrative notes, only "backward Britishers" (140), are likely to succumb to that kind of racism. While not explicitly stating this point, the inference from the text is that enlightened or progressive Australians (perhaps the Communists) do not behave in this manner.

It is also clear that *Sugar Heaven* lays racism at the feet of the AWU. "The AWU leaders swung the Babinda workers against us on the grounds that our cutters were Italians" (139). Additionally, the text illustrates racism is institutionalised through the BPA, when during a conversation between Dulcie and Bill, Dulcie asks, "but how did it arise in the first place? I cant (sic) understand." She is told by Bill Lee, "It arose on the same basis as the White Australia policy; the basis of national narrowness and was fostered by it" (136). Eileen later says, "the White Australia policy was first directed at the Asiatics (sic) ... then developed into Australia for the Australians and connected itself with the Italians" (138). *Sugar Heaven* exposes the historical causes of racial divides and shows how such divisiveness is systemised through government policy, which in turn allows institutional racism to flourish in the form of the BPA.

In this way the Communists show workers why the issue of race exists because it has been fostered by British imperialism and adopted systemically in Australia, to be used by the

AWU in an attempt to divide the workers along grounds that have nothing to do with the industrial struggle over Weil's disease. By referring to "our comrades" (76) the narrative states the workers are as one with their leaders (the Communists) against their common enemy. As the narrator explains, "the cutters in particular understood this and came to state freely their belief that the Preference Issue (BPA) had been advanced to foster disunity between foreign nationals and the British workers" (82). This indicates a reference to the 1927 strike against the employment of non-British labour in the cane fields.

The narrative shows a sympathetic attitude towards the immigrants but yet represents the immigrant workers as foreign. This confuses the antiracist message by asserting that the immigrants are not really Australians, they are Other. The narrative ambivalence to racism is also shown when, contrary to the earlier statement that "no colour line was drawn" (73), the colour line is drawn on several occasions. This may be what Ferrier refers to as a "conflicted" white lens in Devanny's novels (*Fictional Critique of Whiteness* 17). The novel soon shows that when Eileen is with Tony and he presses her to live with him, she is "horrified ... for suddenly the flood of waters of her reactionary training regarding his nationality swirled round her and sucked away his individual attraction" (89). At another time, a woman in the crowd says, "I don't want no truck with dirty dagoes" (144). This shows endemic racism in the society, although the narrative goes on to demonstrate that the Communists are behind exposing race as false consciousness. Bill tells Dulcie, "the racial barrier is being broken down by the efforts of the militants" (138). These points demonstrate how the Communists are attempting to expose the purpose in perpetuating racial divides as a union strategy against the strikers.

Despite arguing that racism is unacceptable, *Sugar Heaven* shows a stronger narrative focus on elevating the need for unity and class consciousness, calling on workers to resist

division through the reified concept of race. It argues that solidarity can only be maintained by banding together as a class, persuading workers that unity of purpose is the only chance the workers have of overthrowing oppression. This need for the strikers to band together as a class is important to the success of the strike and is demonstrated throughout the text, albeit not always in terms of overcoming a racial divide.

The need for class consciousness is about winning the 1935 strike. The Communist Party leader of the strike, Hendry, says, “let our slogan be, *Unity means victory! No secret ballots! No scabs!*” (103). In this way, the Communists call on the workers to forget created differences and come together to combat the union’s divide-and-conquer techniques, for it is the only means by which the workers have the power to win the strike. The narrative illustrates how workers are manipulated through their fears of the Other and divided along a manufactured difference to maintain the capitalist position.

Once the strike is lost, the character Hendry states that they lost because, “their forces were now definitely divided” (230). Hendry also tells the workers, “don’t let bitterness keep us disunited ... How many of us have been won to the battle for the class through this strike?” (234). While race relationships are shown in *Sugar Heaven*, they are less concerned with individual reactions, feelings or the trauma resulting from racism. Instead, the narrative appears more concerned with a communist message of interpellation to a common cause. As *Sugar Heaven* maintains, “cutters, mill hands and field workers of all nationalities must be linked in militant groups and coordinate activities on a common policy” (140). By exposing the political tactics used by the AWU, *Sugar Heaven* is more focused on creating class consciousness to win the strike, which will elevate the Communist cause among the workers.

While the narrative does show race relations and the Italians’ involvement in the strike, the narrative still refers to immigrants as foreign and almost exclusively focuses on the Anglo

Australian characters' perspectives in the story. Despite Devanny's narrative criticising racism, the most significant gap that requires some redress and revisioning is *Sugar Heaven's* failure to provide the immigrants and their Australian descendants with agency as leaders in opposing injustice and prejudice. Diminishing the immigrant involvement may have had a purpose, possibly because of the significant prevailing prejudice, yet the novel leaves a sense that the Anglo Australians fought the fight against prejudice and injustice on behalf of the immigrants, a paternalistic view that downplays the immigrants' significant role in the industrial history of the region.

Additionally, by labelling immigrants as foreigners, despite *Sugar Heaven's* overt antiracist assertions, some of the prevailing zeitgeist still infiltrates to show that Australia is an Anglo Australian country where all other non-Anglo immigrants and their offspring are foreign. Devanny was a member of the CPA, and would have upheld the CPA's antiracist policy, and while the narrative overtly opposes racism it is often more focused on gaining working-class support for the Communist-led strike. While *Sugar Heaven* begins by delivering an antiracist message, this is soon overtaken with the eulogization of Communism and its interpellation to revolution through building class consciousness.

The elevation of communism as a theme is repeated several times in the narrative, where for example, Eileen argues,

Now we have as many class-conscious foreign workers as Britishers and, however this strike goes, we shall have to realise practical organisational steps to unite all the militants in a common line of action (140).

By using the term class-conscious, the narrative points at class being the root cause of the problems in the sugar industry. By using overt communist interpellation through terms such as

militants and common action, the narrator makes a covert call for working-class collaboration as a prelude to revolution. Through this depiction *Sugar Heaven* infers the aim of the narrative is a call to revolution.

Significantly for my own creative work, by using the term “foreign workers” the narrative renders immigrants as the subaltern Other and not Australian. While *Sugar Heaven* succeeds in showing the Marxist view of the construct of race as false consciousness and a capitalist means of control over production, it does not succeed in challenging the myth that the Australian heroic exemplar of bushman fame belongs exclusively to Anglo Australians. Although *Sugar Heaven*’s narrative does highlight a real sense of the overt racism prevalent at the time, it denies the Italian Australians a central voice in the narrative conflict, and this serves to reduce the immigrants’ role in the historical events of the period.

Sugar Heaven also promotes an Anglo Australian historical landscape where the so-called “Britishers” or Anglo Australians are held up as the heroes of the strike, just as they were in *Burnt Sugar*. In *Sugar Heaven* the story is primarily told from an Anglo Australian point of view. The role the immigrants played in the industrial struggle is downplayed and their perspective is hidden on the periphery, in the shadows of society. These shadows are evident in Nicole Moore’s reading of an incident in *Sugar Heaven*, which Moore argues is a “mnemonic moment, [...] a reminder to the characters Dulcie and Eileen, at least, about where they are and who they are” (251). This is a moment, Moore argues, when the characters reflect on their place in the history of Innisfail. In reflecting on what this incident shows about the characters place and position I was reminded of British colonisation across the world by, “the towering African tulips” (*Sugar Heaven* 109). “The naked frangipani waved their pulpy limbs” (ibid), brought forward a Jindyworobak reflection that brought to mind D. H. Lawrence’s description of the haunting Indigenous absence in his novel *Kangaroo*, which shows, “tree-trunks like

naked pale aborigines among the dark-soaked foliage” (Kindle location 243). The “graves of the Italian community were piled high with glass-covered artificial flowers” (*Sugar Heaven* 110) provides a recognition that these graves are of people who lived in Innisfail before the characters arrived, and they are much loved, judging from the piles of artificial flowers. My reading of *Sugar Heaven* is that it shows great sympathy and affiliation with the immigrant workers and, as Moore and Ferrier argue, it is an antiracist narrative far ahead of its time.

While *Sugar Heaven's* intention may have been to challenge white nationalism and decry racism, from one perspective it falls short on today's standards, for it leaves an Anglo Australian settler historical landscape unchallenged. The heroic cultural exemplars in *Sugar Heaven* are all Anglo Australian. They are of the bushman type, characterised by their egalitarian nature and mateship but they are all Anglo Australian heroes including the leader Hendry. This is despite the substantial leadership role played by the immigrants who held key leadership positions in the 1935 industrial struggle against racism (Menghetti 34). Ross Fitzgerald's history of Queensland also shows that in 1934 the Italian Australians took strike action because of the numbers of men contracting and dying from Weil's disease (*History of Queensland* 94). The 1934 strike is an industrial activity not covered in *Sugar Heaven's* narrative but there are clear linkages between the two strikes, and many of the people involved in both strikes were immigrants. Yet the immigrant voices are occluded from the narrative conflict in *Sugar Heaven*, rendering immigrants subordinate in the historical landscape of Australian class struggle and industrial history.

It is difficult to determine exactly what Devanny was trying to achieve with *Sugar Heaven*, for she cites different reasons, all of which may have been foremost at different times. As Ferrier states in the afterword of *Sugar Heaven*, Devanny was, “concerned to show that the strike was genuinely a fight ... against ... Weil's disease (not) the fomenting of industrial

trouble by Communist agitators” (268). Weil’s disease is a severe form of leptospirosis, a bacterial infection spread by animals, mainly rats in the cane fields, with symptoms ranging from flu-like fever and pains to jaundice and even brain inflammation causing seizures. It killed many hundreds, perhaps thousands of men over the decades of cutting cane in the tropics, prior to penicillin’s discovery.

However, Weil’s disease is barely mentioned in *Sugar Heaven* and even then, only in passing. It was also clear from newspapers at the time that there was an alternative message aired publicly, that the strike was a Communist plot to overthrow the AWU. The *Cairns Post* in September 1935 wrote, “Mr C.G. Fallon²... said that so far as the trouble in the sugar areas is concerned, it was perfectly clear the Communist Party had used its best endeavors (sic) to destroy the prestige and influence of the Australian Workers Union” (6). Thus, both positions may hold as relative subjective truths.

There is also the possibility that Devanny targeted the novel to gain CPA support. In her autobiography, Devanny claims the novel was written as a report of the strike proceedings to the CPA and proudly claims this as successful when a Communist Party member called the novel a, “classic report of an excellently conducted strike” (Devanny, *Point of Departure* 198). Ferrier also states that the novel’s purpose was to sell Devanny’s Communist messages to the Communist Party (*Romantic Revolutionary* 135). Overall, the multiple competing aims in the narrative creates ambiguity.

Ferrier claims this criticism is often directed at Devanny’s novels, which are, “complicated by class, generational, and country/city divides, and the implied authorial

² State Secretary of the AWU

sympathies” (*Dictionary of Literary Biography*). Ferrier also argues that “any serious evaluation of the context of production [...] would have to take into account Devanny’s own personal and political situation” (*Sugar Heaven* 263). Such ambiguity within the narrative can be understood as competing authorship requirements, which due to complexity can have unintended consequences.

Notwithstanding this last point, it appears the novel was primarily engaged in targeting CPA support. The CPA was usually very supportive of Communist writers and Jean Devanny was an early adopter of Zhdanovian romanticism, a Soviet form that required Communist writers to elevate Communism and Communists above all others (Ferrier, *Romantic Revolutionary* 135). Devanny adopted this form after she helped set up the Sydney Writers League with the support of the European Communist and journalist, Egon Kisch. Kisch was sent to Australia by *The Movement against War and Fascism*. During his brief stay in Australia, he helped establish the Sydney Writers League. The League, along with Devanny, was to adopt the official Soviet literary method. Either Devanny tried to achieve too much with the Zhdanovian form, or her other aims conflicted with its purpose of elevating Communism.

Regardless of intentions, *Sugar Heaven* carries the Anglo Australian hegemony as a metanarrative, doing cultural work on behalf of a white Australia through its depiction of the all-Anglo Australian heroes. While *Sugar Heaven*’s style may have been intended to appeal to the CPA members, portrayals of the Communist men laud them as larger-than-life white heroes. The Communist leader of the strike, Hendry, is described as being, “confident. A big man” (78). The strikers are described as, “the cream of the men: men whose fighting spirit conceived of no limitations, Napoleons of their class” (153). Even the description of protagonist Dulcie’s husband, Hefty Lee, is likewise heroic. “The great muscles of his bare

arms tensed as he knotted his fists and extended them at either side” (23). All these men were Anglo Australian workers.

Sugar Heaven's focus on Communist heroism was not as successful as Devanny might have wished within the Communist Party. Ferrier recounts Jack Henry's reaction to the novel, “He stamped up and down the office, ‘look at the bloody stuff,’ he is quoted to have said” (Ferrier, *Romantic Revolutionary* 139). Furthermore, Ferrier goes on to explain that Modern Publishers, a company that was set up to publish Marxist-Leninist literature, only agreed to publish *Sugar Heaven* if Devanny found half the publishing costs (ibid). Consequently, despite the support the Communist Party usually gave towards their writers, Devanny did not manage to win full support for her novel's publication.

Ferrier argues that this lack of support primarily arose because of the overt references to sexual promiscuity (ibid). Many CPA members found Devanny's views on sexual freedom unpalatable. According to Ferrier, there was one standard for men and another for women as well as covert and overt public messages on sex (ibid. 5). Devanny was keenly aware of this factor when she wrote the novel, claiming, “a puritanical streak coloured the Leader's whole outlook” (*Point of Departure* 168). The leader in this event is said to be the CPA leader J.B. Miles, with whom Devanny was close, although Ferrier asserts that Devanny was closer to Jack Henry (*Romantic Revolutionary* 3). Despite her closeness to significantly influential men in the CPA, Devanny did not succeed in persuading the CPA to fund the full cost of *Sugar Heaven*'s publishing.

The novel seems to have been more of a success with the Anglo Australian working-class, despite some CPA membership reservations. Devanny claims that readers wrote to her about *Sugar Heaven*: “Letters came to me from workers scattered nationwide, acquainting me of discussions held round it in the industries, on the track, on the farms and stations (qtd. in

Ferrier, *Romantic Revolutionary* 135). A Western Australian labour newspaper, the *Daily News*, claimed, “*Sugar Heaven* is an event in Australian literature, because it is the first novel to present life and labor (sic) from the viewpoint of the working class” (Books 9). Thus, the one aspect of Devanny’s novel that fitted the dominant metanarrative of an Anglo Australian working man’s historical landscape, populated by rural workers in the guise of the iconic bushman hero, is also the one area where *Sugar Heaven* achieved its objective and received qualified acclaim. This reflection of the Anglo Australian hero in an Anglo Australian world, gives a form of cultural recognition to an Anglo Australian readership, one with which they can identify.

Writers like Judith Wright and Miles Franklin remember *Sugar Heaven* as one of the most vigorous and lively representations of working life in Australia. Wright called for its republication in 1981, calling the novel, “one of the few early Queensland novels worth reading for itself” (qtd. in Devanny and Moore 7). From this acclaim, it seems that the radical nationalist white working-class hero in the historical landscape conjured by Devanny’s novel was a plausible one for the era, and it succeeded in engaging an Anglo Australian working-class readership.

However, not all sections of Australian society were impressed with *Sugar Heaven*. For example, a 1936 review from the *Queensland Country Life* complained that the novel was, “too much like a Communist manifesto [...] who wasn’t quite certain of what the strike was all about, but thought the men were just too, too lovely just the same” (4). The novel’s reception may have related to its adherence to the Zhdanovian form referenced by Nicole Moore as “clumsy” socialist realism (Devanny and Moore 12), although David Carter argues revolutionary romanticism was working towards socialist realism rather than representative of the form (*Documenting Society* 378). The newspaper, *Truth*, called the novel, “propaganda”

(Books Worth Reading 24), which concurs with Devanny's stated motivation for writing *Sugar Heaven*, "I did what I could to help, by way of general propaganda" (*Point of Departure* 190). Whatever the reason, not all Australian reviewers found the novel engaging.

One reason for this lack of engagement may be in the form, which becomes overpowering in its moralising, serving to create, the type of "asymmetries of culture and politics" to which Rita Felski alludes in her analysis of textual engagement (*Uses of Literature* 95). Its didacticism jerks a reader out from immersion in a plausible historical landscape from the period, to focus on overtly Marxist messaging. The Marxist interpellation to class consciousness is referenced throughout the novel, sometimes couched in flamboyant rhetoric. For example, when Dulcie finally falls in love with her husband, it is with a numinous dawning akin to a religious awakening. Her love is not just for Hefty as an individual, but Hefty as a class.

She got it on the crest of a wave of sublime reason. Just for one blinding flash she saw Hefty in the cane fields, which were filled with a host of Heftys, and knew that in some vagrant way her heart had wrapped itself around that mass brotherhood; her spirit had quivered to the mass music of their calling (123).

Sugar Heaven's flowery eulogising of class consciousness reduces the romance in human love to subservience to a political master. In addition, by turning love into political desire, Devanny's experiment in revolutionary romanticism renders the historical landscape less plausible to any Australian reader of a different political persuasion.

Whatever the most pressing aims of the narrative, *Sugar Heaven's* Anglo Australian focalisation serves to undermine claims of an antiracist metanarrative, for it does not challenge white nationalism. Instead, it panders to racism in a sense, by denying non-Anglo immigrant

Australian workers the agency they clearly had in the industry. As Marcia Langton argues, “the easiest and most ‘natural’ form of racism in representation is the act of making the other invisible” (24). This is not to state that *Sugar Heaven* consciously advocates racism, yet the occlusion of immigrant agency has that result.

By eclipsing an involved and active group from a story they were significantly invested in, and which they shared with other Australian workers, the struggle for the industry to recognise the industrial perils of Weil’s disease becomes, instead, an Anglo Australian struggle for power between workers’ groups and their form of ideology. Furthermore, by referring to the Italian immigrants as “foreigners” (140), *Sugar Heaven* labels immigrants with a form of unknowable Otherness, perpetuating the idea that non-Anglo Australians are subaltern.

This gap in representation in *Sugar Heaven* is one of the primary reasons I wanted to reimagine the novel. Otherness depicted by ethnicity plays into the same systemic form of prejudice as is displayed in Baume’s *Burnt Sugar*. I see *Sugar Heaven* not as a response to white nationalism, but primarily as a narrative interpellation to class consciousness. Yet, if this was the case, once more the narrative confuses this goal with other agendas. For while *Sugar Heaven* may primarily be structured as a gender struggle between a woman and her husband, the novel elevates the theme of class struggle. Despite this, the idea of an elite class remains a nebulous form of British imperialism instead of a struggle against an Australian elite. Although the narrator explains the conflict as, “a big scale ‘boss’ issue” (139), these bosses are not seen or described outside of comments on British imperialism.

Sugar Heaven indicates class is at the root of the conflict. Yet, the background narrative conflict plays out between Anglo Australian working-class men (referred to as Britishers) and their union compatriots, rather than between classes. In *Sugar Heaven* the AWU are the major antagonists throughout the strike; as the narrator states the, “AWU poured out money like

water on propaganda leaflets in Italian and English, linking the known Communists among the strikers' leadership with alleged instructions from their Sydney headquarters" (120). While the AWU historically were a powerful workers' union, it is clear here that the narrative places the conflict between the union and its membership over allegiances to different political agendas. On the one hand this is between the highly conservative AWU (Fitzgerald, *History of Queensland* 90) and on the other hand, the Communist Party.

The novel's subtext indicates a political internecine skirmish rather than an economic class struggle. In this context, the working-class man becomes both the below and the above of the struggle, with Anglo Australians occupying both the above and below of the historical event. The Communist Georg Lukács, in his seminal study of the historical novel, argues that historical fiction is more effective when it shows contrasting perspectives from both the above and below of history (42). By the above of history, Lukács refers to those of the governing or elite class. The below of history therefore are the voiceless with limited archival records and the above of history are the hegemonic elite who create the archives and its content, or what Hayden White refers to as a state-sponsored view of history (*Postmodernism* 5). Lukács further argues that juxtaposing perspectives from both the historical above and the below provides the implied reader with a sense of themselves within a social system. While *Sugar Heaven* is not historical, I argue the same issue applies. For while the text intimates there is an elite class, they never appear fully characterised in the conflict other than by labels such as bosses and sugar barons. For example, the narrator states, "the leaders of the AWU have lined up definitely with the bosses" (76). While *Sugar Heaven* indicates that conflict is between classes, the actual representation of the classes by the novel's characterisation is weakly applied.

While Devanny's novel overtly promotes the theme of class divisions, her narrative descriptions uphold the bush/city concept. The bush/city divide was promoted through Banjo

Paterson's and Henry Lawson's friendly rivalry, earlier encouraged by *The Bulletin* (Murrie 72). For example, *Sugar Heaven*'s protagonist Dulcie Lee meets and marries Hefty Lee in Sydney. When the cane season begins, they travel up to the northern sugar fields. Initially, Dulcie sees Hefty as a city type. As the story unfolds, Dulcie soon finds that beneath the city lies the country, and the masculine world of the rugged bush hero. Dulcie muses that when her husband arrived back in the sugar country, "he had seemed to slough off like a skin the semi-gravity of manner which had marked him in the great city" (24). This statement is as if to assert that the Australian working-class man, no matter where he works, is at heart the archetypal bush hero regardless of the city/country divide.

Whether Devanny's novel was attempting to go in too many directions or whether unconscious cultural conditioning interfered with her construction of class conflict, cannot be known. Shirley Walker argues that the earlier forms of heroic pioneer settlers in fiction did not distinguish between the wealth of one settler and the hardship of another (166). Instead, such fiction supported a form of antipodean egalitarianism, manifested by an Anglo Australian hegemony and homogeneity in a white Australia. Devanny may have been influenced by this earlier Australian fiction.

The influence of earlier fiction in *Sugar Heaven* is shown through a reference to the massacres of Indigenous people. The character Bill Lee says, "it is true that our early settlers used to hunt the abos (sic) as they now hunt kangaroos and wallabies [...] They used to drive the blacks into the trees, fire the trees and shoot them as they dropped from the branches to avoid the fire" (137). This may be an intertextual echo of an earlier novel. Shirley Walker outlines an episode in Rosa Praed's 1904 novel, *My Australian Girlhood*, when Major Mills, "called the black's 'big game' and shot them from the trees" (166). Despite acknowledgment

of the colonial violence against Indigenous Australians, *Sugar Heaven* favours the Anglo Australian exemplar to typify the sugar workers.

The issues of Australian identity and the construction of the narrative conflict are the problematic narrative elements I seek to redress in both novels. Baume's novel *Burnt Sugar* is no longer in print. However, Jean Devanny's *Sugar Heaven* is still available and provides the only fictional access to knowing and understanding this history outside of the history texts. In the next section, I discuss my response to what I have argued are the gaps in the precedent texts by contemporary standards, along with how these gaps have informed my character creation and narrative conflict.

2.3. Constructing Typification and Exemplars

The representation of both the characters and the conflict in the precedent novels *Burnt Sugar* and *Sugar Heaven* are some of the reasons I chose to reimagine this historical story. My novel's narrative conflict is constructed as a class conflict between two settler groups as a dialectical struggle, where the workers including immigrant workers occupy the lower class, and the hegemonic power occupies the elite class. My class conflict renders the individuals as metaphors for their class. I also cloak the characters in the traits of either the iconic bushman or the colonial adventurer in subversion of cultural myths.

The characteristics of the bush legend are often used to typify the Anglo Australian male exemplar. For example, it is used for Flanagan's protagonist, Dorrigo Evans, in his novel, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. Dorrigo is constructed as a respectable, laconic but humble and self-consciously flawed officer who cares for and makes sacrifices for the welfare of his men. Fiona Duthie argues this form of Australian heroism is the "capacity continually to endure hardship while retaining a sense of integrity" (160). Dorrigo comes from a working-

class family and through his own efforts becomes a doctor, which gives him officer status in the war. Dorrigo is structured along the lines of the cultural myth of the Australian radical nationalist image of the bushman. Yet, Dorrigo's commanding officer, Colonel Rexroth, is created as Dorrigo's opposite, the colonial adventurer type.

These are also the two character-types I have used to exemplify my classes as symbolic cultural referents. The Anglo Australian characters are illustrated by the colonial adventurer traits, showing they have inherited the benefits of colonisation. The point of this is to write against the centre, showing those character traits can still be used to highlight the violence of colonisation in Australia. Instead of the British Empire as the perpetrator of colonisation's violence, I have embodied the colonial adventurer type in an elite class of Australians. This makes a statement that a class elite of Anglo Australians are the hegemonic group who have inherited the benefits and privileges of a colonised Australia to the detriment of Indigenous Australians.

It is this elite class that has embedded and maintained systemic white nationalist colonial policies in Australia. This Australian hegemony still categorises non-Anglo Australian settlers as subaltern in a masculinised culture and as an allegorical reference it is intended to show the social consequences of the denigration of the immigrants. In *Shadows in the Cane*, it references contemporary Australian youth, many of whom are the Australian-born sons of immigrants, who are radicalised through feelings of rejection. This type of allegory is often opposed by postcolonial theorists, yet Hamish Dalley cites Imre Szeman's argument, placing such allegory at the "centre of postcolonial analysis" (*Postcolonial* 34). Dalley goes on to argue we reach an "understanding of social transformation through a narrative of typical characters" as they represent social categories (*ibid.* 37). By themselves, the characters are seen as typified realist

characters and represent one concept, and in opposition they become metaphors for other concepts.

The cultural myths I use to construct the characters in my novel are the iconic bushman as hero, the colonial adventurer as antagonist, with mateship as sustaining for the working class. To describe the cultural values held by these two groups, I loosely use Schwartz's cross-cultural values categories where the bushman characters are represented by the categories of openness to change, including the subgroups of stimulation, and self-direction, universalism, and self-transcendence. For the colonial adventure types, I loosely use Schwartz's cross-cultural value categories, collectively referred to as conservatism, including achievement, power, conformity, tradition, and security (23 – 26). The last of the cultural myths I use is the notion of classlessness, a cultural value which I write against. Rather than *Sugar Heaven's* internecine conflict, I have recast the conflict as true class conflict between those with economic power and those without. Unlike *Burnt Sugar*, the narrative conflict is not constructed through an ethnic divide, and unlike *Sugar Heaven* the opposition is not a nebulous imperial elite. Instead, these are wealthy Anglo Australians who control the means of production.

2.4. Chapter Emergence

The significant emergence from reading the two precedent novels in conjunction with canonical texts of the era is an understanding that the character's perspective is only one mediated view on to an area of narrative conflict. How the narrative conflict is constructed to reference a historical event is of most relevance for my own redress of the two precedent novels. Ian Syson discusses the death of radical working-class literature in the 1970s, asserting that "contemporary Australian literary culture suffers through the absence of class" (79). While

the way an Australian protagonist is created can elicit an Australian reader's recognition and therefore empathetic identification with the character's point of view, I assert that the way narrative conflict is constructed is important to how cultural metanarratives such as the Anglo Australian (as the below of history) is carried forward in fiction. It is that power invested in economic class structures and the way it is justified that I seek to expose in my novel.

Regardless of any cultural desire for classlessness there are economic power differentials in Australia that underpin conflict, yet the masculinity of the bushman and colonial adventurer constructions of my narrative characters can be interpreted as reinscription of the masculine culture on which colonisation was built. To explore this point further, in the next chapter I examine the ways more recent highly regarded Australian historical fiction carries cultural metanarratives, premised on the way narrative conflict is constructed as historically referential, and mediated by a protagonist either to uphold Anglo Australian hegemony or to question it.

3. Narrative Conflict and Cultural Metanarratives

The intension for my novel is to make a statement that while immigrants settled in Australia from around the world, once here they are neither Other, foreign nor anything other than Australian settlers in a multicultural nation. While immigrants and their offspring may uphold their cultural traditions, along with memories and attitudes retained and celebrated from their country of origin, I argue that they should not be considered as subaltern to Anglo Australians in the way Stratton has described and which I have discussed in the introduction. In arguing this point, I hope to be seen as an ally to immigrants and refugees in Australia, rather than as Spivak argues, a white coloniser determining what is right for the subaltern. For I argue that along with Australia's Indigenous cultural heritage, this multi-ethnic contribution makes Australia a vibrant country, much admired around the world as a successful multicultural nation. It is a multicultural nation I seek to reflect and celebrate in my novel, pointing out the consequences of systemic injustice caused by racism.

To use this celebrated diversity as ethnic narrative conflict in historical novels, I argue, has unintended but significant consequences for Australian cultural memory when it is reflected by the mnemonics in Australian historical fiction. Using ethnicity as the basis of narrative conflict normalises racist attitudes and is a distraction from the real issues besetting the nation today, which re-emerge particularly in times of crisis, such as economic downturns. In fiction, ethnic-based narrative conflict retains Anglo Australian hegemonic agreement of the historical landscape as white, and all other Australians remain subaltern.

Therefore, chapter 3 extends my research into the relevance of structuring narrative conflict in terms of class, which in Dalley's postcolonial allegory, works to connect, "colonial occupation as an effect of class inequality" (*Postcolonial* 62). In this chapter I explore narrative structure, character, and conflict as a carrier of cultural metanarratives in Australian fiction,

through analysis of David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* and Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*, particularly in light of the Australian History Wars. I argue both novels reinscribe the same colonial tropes that the Australian History Wars brought to the fore, and which my own novel is attempting to avoid doing. Both novels were, in different ways, trying to mitigate the propagation of notions of an Australian 'Terra Nullius' and show colonial violence and injustice towards Indigenous people. However, the way both novels constructed and mediated their narrative characters and conflict is significant in propagating the dominant hegemonic culture, regardless of the different narrative forms used.

Drawing on Stephen Greenblatt's new historicism, I discuss *Remembering Babylon* and *The Secret River* in light of the Australian History Wars debate, specifically because it was a significant discourse, often seen as a watershed in understanding the problems of writing historical fiction to represent colonial history today. I chose *Remembering Babylon* (1993) and *The Secret River* (2005) because the novels sandwiched the main period of the History Wars debate. Jo Jones argues the former Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd's apology to Aboriginal people ended the History Wars debate (7). It was during this period that many of the wicked problems in writing historical fiction became apparent.

Notwithstanding any ongoing debates, my analysis of *Remembering Babylon* and *The Secret River* examines the problem of cultural metanarratives carried by a narrative's character construction, focalisation, and narrative conflicts, and how they contribute to either reinscribing hegemony or challenging it. To understand these problems and how they are reflected, even in celebrated literary texts, helps with my aim of constructing my novel to expose ideological and power-related cultural metanarratives. In historical novels, conflict is often thought to be given by history, but I argue the way fiction represents that conflict, mediated through focalisation of its protagonist, is an important factor in whether a narrative reinscribes the culture it critiques or writes against it.

Yet, my narrative focus on class is also problematic for a different reason. This is because class as an area of narrative conflict in Australian fiction is not particularly valued by the Australian literary elites (Syson 80). As I have already argued, class conflict has become an ambiguous concept, with ambivalence arising out of decades of fiction promoting classlessness. This is despite many earlier novels about class listed by Syson, including Devanny, Furphy, Lawson, Gilmore, Prichard, Palmer, Hardy and Waten (ibid). An example of what I mean, regarding class as ambivalent, can be seen in Christina Stead's 1934 novel *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*.

Seven Poor Men of Sydney represents and sympathises with the poor of Sydney during the Great Depression, but once again the elite or oppressive class are represented as British not Australian. Nicholas Birns argues Stead's novel critiques the elite as a British imperial power (*Contemporary* 24). Stead is also quoted as seeing Australia as a classless society, despite her sympathetic rendering of the working poor. *The Women's Weekly* magazine from the period quotes Stead as referring to Australia as, "the type of society which is near to being a one-class society" and she goes on to bemoan the corrupting British influences (qtd. in Birns, *Contemporary* 14). Thus, class division in this context is between Anglo Australians and the British imperial elite rather than an Australian economic class system in its own right.

Classlessness remains a contemporary cultural aspiration within the Australian national image. Nicholas Birns refers to Stead and her contemporaries as forerunners of the style of writing, "such as Alex Miller's *Coal Creek* (2013) and Steven Carol's *Glenroy* novels" (ibid. 23) which Birns argues are novels concerned with the losers of a contemporary neoliberal society (ibid. 24). In contemporary Australian fiction, Birns argues that Australian novels will often use society's losers to depict conflict, casting their protagonists as the underdog of a neoliberal market philosophy. Neoliberalism is defined by Birns in terms of its representations

of the capitalist market. He references contemporary Australian writers such as Christos Tsiolkas as crafting his characters as losers (*Contemporary* 18). This is a similar construct to writing history from below from the point of view of the social underdog or the silenced victims of oppression.

Birns argument is reminiscent of Boaventura de Sousa Santos's point, where the postcolonial subaltern in contemporary society is in a struggle against the global hegemonic practice of neoliberalism and globalisation. De Sousa Santos argues that while nations were built on smashing the cultural identity of minorities, particularly Indigenous people (49), they now require the coexistence of multicultural citizenship with a, "situated, contextualised, post-colonial, multicultural bottom-up cosmopolitan law" (53). He argues that in literary texts, a counter-hegemonic transfiguration needs to take place as an important political task for the next decades.

My novel seeks to show these oppressors are not the British, but an Australian capitalist elite who have inherited the spoils of British imperialism. Despite fiction's efforts to distance Anglo Australians from the British colonists by creating a myth that Australia is a classless nation, Australian class conflicts exist and include both the economically oppressed and their oppressors. To avoid notions of class distinctions, Australian fiction will often represent narrative conflict as Anglo Australians versus the British. As Schaffer writes, "within the narrative of national identity, Australian native sons confront the British parent to determine who will have authority, power and presence in the land" (21). Narrative historical conflict based on an economic class struggle, within Australian society, rarely represents the Anglo Australian as the working-class oppressor.

However, if historical fiction is to represent society as a counter-hegemonic transfiguration in a way that shows how historical forces shape culture and social systems, the

agreed Anglo Australian historical landscape cannot be seen just from the Anglo Australian losers' perspective as if this is a given by history. Historical conflicts need careful consideration, especially over who is set in opposition and what consequential metanarratives are carried by such a construction. For instance, since colonisation, Anglo Australians as a collective are not the below of Australian history but have benefited by their British ancestors' colonisation of another people's country. Characterising Anglo Australians as the below of Australian history can serve to reinscribe colonial hegemony. This is particularly the case when Anglo Australians as convict/settlers in Australian historical representations are regarded as victims of a British elite. To render convict/settlers in this way carries over an old class battle from Britain. When this victim status is used to represent Anglo Australian settlers, even if they are transitioning from convict to settler, representing them as the below of history can obscure the colonial winner's motivations and justification for their actions in historical conflicts.

Since colonisation, Australia has been dominated by the coloniser's ideological underpinnings, and as Hayden White argues, historical narrative discourse can be seen as, "the very paradigm of all ideology" (*Figural Realism* 118). In fiction, the dominant ideological metanarrative of the Australian historical landscape is premised on a liberalist philosophy, often represented as the only lens through which to view the world – all else is set in opposition. As Vivek Chibber argues, "the error of liberal historiography, then, is its assumptions that the colonial order was built around real bourgeois hegemony, as was the case in Western Europe. It construes the colonial state as an extension of the liberal state of Great Britain" (37). Although Anglo Australians have attempted through fiction to distance themselves from the British Empire, its cultural structures are maintained and perpetuated systemically through its liberally oriented institutions.

These cultural institutions perpetuate metanarratives that glide, often unquestioned, through the substrates of fiction as cultural mnemonics. Such metanarratives are recognisable, but in historical fiction, are often the unquestioned philosophy underpinning an Anglo Australian historical landscape of colonisation. To write Australian historical fiction today, especially when writing against the dominant hegemony, demands that a novelist is aware of stepping into the nation's ideological space or its sense of a national self. The Australian History Wars brought into the public domain a realisation that stepping into this space comes with a caveat to tread carefully, for it is a space littered with mines set for the unwary.

With few exceptions, it wasn't until the emancipation of Indigenous Australians during the 1960s that Australian fiction questioned the whiteness of the Australian historical landscape. When the historian Henry Reynolds published his history text *The Other Side of the Frontier* in 1981, he questioned the validity of a benign white settler historical landscape. This view initiated an immediate backlash by other historians such as Keith Windschuttle, who slammed Reynolds' view of Australian history as revisionist, "legitimizing the claim that Australia was the site of genocide". Others of similar sentiment claimed Reynolds was "romanticising the 'noble savage', blackening the national reputation" (qtd. in Macintyre, and Clark 54). In a similar way to the early 20th century cultural struggle over representations of a national character discussed in chapter two, a new political scuffle ensued over that national character and the behaviour in colonising and settling Australia.

Both eras struggled to control agreement over an Anglo Australian consciousness of what the nation stands for. In the first place pitting Anglo Australian characteristic types against each other, and in the second place, pitting ethnicity against ethnicity over claims of behaviour and sovereignty. In accordance with this argument, Keith Windschuttle argues,

It is important that we get this history right. The debate over what happened to the Aborigines is not only about them. Ultimately, it is about the character of the Australian nation and the calibre of the civilisation that Britain brought to these shores in 1788 (29). Throughout this public debate stakes and passions were high, and novelists soon contributed along the same lines of conflict. The debate itself was premised on the Anglo Australian defining historical events and constructing how the narrative conflict is represented. In the next section I discuss how the Australian History Wars has influenced an understanding of the wicked problems in writing historical fiction, and its implications for either reinscribing Anglo Australian hegemony or subverting it, as a means of informing the writing of my own historical novel.

In Australian historical fiction, up until the past few decades, Indigenous people were rendered a subaltern category of Australians and were often invisible in fiction. Even the 20th century Jindyworobak movement merely appropriated their land and culture and ignored the First Nations peoples as if they barely existed (Fenton-Keane 9). It wasn't until the 1970s that the impact of colonisation on Indigenous people began to create a new political struggle. This was soon followed by narrative accounts of colonisation, reflecting the contemporary national discourse through historical fiction. It is particularly in the light of this public discourse that Jo Jones argues that a writer must engage with the narrative form, "if amends can be made to the groups most affected by various expressions of violence in the expansion and maintenance of modern and colonial systems" (47). She advocates postmodern novels as a means of mitigation. For my own novel, engaging with the narrative form brought my attention to the way narrative conflict is constructed and mediated, which becomes critical to either maintaining or questioning hegemonic themes. This is because there are problems arising from fiction's metanarratives, even in postmodern novels, when they perpetuate a hegemonic view of Australian colonial history.

3.1. The Australian History Wars

The Australian History Wars began as a conflict over the truth in colonial history, basically, over how limited archival material could be interpreted. It turned into an ideological conflict over whether the colonists had brought enlightenment through benign settlement, or conversely, whether the colonists had invaded and seized Indigenous land through brutal and genocidal destruction of Indigenous people and their culture. It went on to explore who had the right to speak for whom about the history of Australia. When the History Wars dispute began, Australia was in the process of tentative steps towards becoming a postcolonial nation. This is an important era for consideration for my own creative work. It is the turning point that has led to the current understanding of the problems in rendering a national image, which often promotes the Anglo Australian settler as convict victim of British colonisation, in an empty and challenging land.

The dawning awareness of these problems in construction of historical fiction from the 1970s to the 1990s can be seen in historical fiction describing an unshakable sense of landed entitlement, for example in popular novels such as Colleen McCullough's 1977 novel *The Thorn Birds*, to a sense of unease over entitlement to Australian land. The latter unease over land entitlement is made clear in Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*, when the narrator notes, "the land's history, no part of yours" (9). No part of yours is an acknowledgment that the land was stolen.

With events such as the former Prime Minister Paul Keating's 1992 Redfern address acknowledging colonial violence and Indigenous dispossession, a postcolonial nation was within sight. Australia became increasingly classified as a postcolonial nation during the 1990s (Birns, *Contemporary* 15). Thus, from the 1960s to the 1990s, the idea of an Australian

postcolonial nation sent out tentative and exploratory roots and became a place, as mentioned in the introduction, that Nicholas Birns argues is no, “sanctuary for white Australian writers” (ibid). Although his statement reflects the privileged position of a white writer in a white-dominated Australian context, it is also a troubling statement for me as a white immigrant because it made me question whether I had the right to reimagine and write this story.

On reflection, regarding how whiteness might shape my creative work, I came to the conclusion that while white writers in Australia have inherited a cultural hegemony established by colonisation, they cannot abandon writing in service to a postcolonial nation of the future. Yet in so doing they must acknowledge and address the possible effects of white privilege. I argue that a writer’s legitimacy, sanctuary, ethics, or otherwise must focus on an awareness of the white colonial metanarratives carried by the narrative conflict, and its mediated focalisation. The next section seeks to explore this point in greater detail.

3.2. Historical Fiction in Service to Postcolonial Australia

The beginning of fiction’s possibilities in service to a promising transition to a postcolonial nation began with the Holt Government ending immigrant restrictions in 1966, through Ministerial decree. The decree meant that immigrants were, “selected for their skills and ability to contribute to Australian society, rather than by their ‘race’ or national affiliation. It followed with the 1967 referendum on Constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians. In 1973, the Whitlam Labor Government definitively renounced the White Australia policy” (“End of the White Australia policy”). Birns asserts the White Australia Policy’s demise was cemented in culture by the 1992 Mabo High Court decision (*Contemporary* 130). However, the Mabo judgement did not change Anglo Australian sovereignty, or its associated historical consciousness of an agreed and established Anglo Australian landscape. Instead, in liberalist

fashion, the Mabo judgement incorporated what was seen as purely Indigenous sectional interests, within the existing hegemony.

The Mabo judgement, while acknowledging Indigenous prior occupation, rejected Indigenous claims to being conquered sovereign nations (Meyers and Mugambwa 1216). Indigenous activists such as “Kevin Cook began to speak of the ‘unceded sovereignty’ exercised by the Indigenous people” (Birns, *Contemporary* 152). The significance of this is that nations conquered under international law require cultural protection and compensation. The Mabo decision denied that position, resulting in the normalising of Australian claims to be a settler state, rather than one colonised by conquest and dispossession (Meyers and Mugambwa 1216). Despite Mabo recognising the Indigenous people as first inhabitants of the land, they were denied their status of sovereignty, and are often represented as subaltern victims without agency or voice. Nothing in the Anglo Australian historical landscape is threatened by the Mabo decision. Instead, the Indigenous prior occupation of the land was merely enfolded into the national story of colonisation.

Non-Indigenous writers such as David Malouf began to incorporate Indigenous Australians into the typified white settler historical landscape. However, like the High Court decision, historical fiction’s embrace merely treated Indigenous issues within colonisation as subordinate sectional interests and not as the central national conflict of nations defending themselves against invasion. Instead of seeing Australia as a 50, 60, or 100,000-year-old historical landscape into which the British arrived/invaded, historical fiction became an exploration of the settlers’ encounters with Indigenous people.

This was one significant difference from earlier Anglo Australian accounts of history. Now the settlers of fiction began to perceive another presence with prior claim to the land as they confronted the Indigenous people. Even so, Indigenous people were not fully

characterised as equal human opponents in narrative conflict, nor were they seen to be defending their land against the invader. They were not depicted as sovereign nations attempting to control the destructive tendencies of the aggressor. Thus, Anglo Australian historical fiction was not perceived as a narrative conflict between sovereign peoples, such as that of wars between European nations, but a conflict of a perceived racial hierarchy and of British merit.

Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* falls into this Anglo Australian world view, which Gelder and Salzman refer to as redemptive history premised on a "national identity in the imagination" (79). Yet this was the national identity of Anglo Australian making that reinforces the idea of Anglo Australian hegemony. Narrative conflict, constructed in this way, leaves settler legitimacy intact and maintains the metanarrative of Anglo Australia as a legitimate settler nation. The following section explores this point in greater detail through Malouf's novel.

3.2.1. Metanarratives in *Remembering Babylon*

Remembering Babylon is often described as a response to Mabo (Brady 94). It is also described as a postcolonial novel, engaged in the struggle to find a unifying national identity, creating a hybrid Australian through the characterisation of Gemmy Fairly (Ashcroft 51). However, I argue the way the narrative conflict and its characterisation of Gemmy is constructed, risks reinscribing colonial tropes. It does this through maintaining Anglo Australian sovereignty, in the same way the Mabo decision legitimises British colonisation through maintaining the notion of Australia as a settler nation.

The construction of Gemmy Fairly as a hybrid Australian in *Remembering Babylon* is often given as the main theme in Malouf's novel. Ashcroft et al., refer to Gemmy as, "*the authentic hybrid indigene*" (original italics qtd., in Gelder and Salzman 81). Jo Jones' analysis

of Malouf's novel takes a similar view, focusing on the narrative as a form of cultural change or social transition where Gemmy is represented as the unifying future – a hybrid Australian exemplar (139). This is a form of postcolonial hybridity, merging coloniser with colonised. Peter Otto argues *Remembering Babylon* is history as the sublime where, “contact between European settlers and the unknown occurs at a place just beyond the reach of imperial power where, thanks to the mysteries of the imagination, it becomes possible to build an authentic Australian identity” (546). Nevertheless, Gemmy's death by settler violence contradicts the idea of the sustainability of an Indigenous/Anglo future hybrid Australian.

Notwithstanding Gemmy's acceptance by the Aboriginal tribes, it is questionable that Gemmy's hybridity is an answer to a unifying national identity. Neither does the character challenge the settlers' establishment of a white ethnic cultural hegemony. My quest for an exemplar of national identity to use in my creative work explored the notion of hybridity and found that it is problematic when constructed as racially premised. As the Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris notes, “hybridity in the present is constantly struggling to free itself from a past which stressed ancestry, and which valued the ‘pure’ over its threatening opposite, the ‘composite’” (Ashcroft et al. 52). Hybridity in this sense may not be as simple as mixing ethnicity in a form of Greer's “Fake Black” (*The Age* 11) because it perpetuates colonial metanarratives that humanity is premised on a racial hierarchy.

My question then became, is Gemmy the hybrid indigene of the future, or is he the Anglo Australian divorcing from his British heritage? In effect, Gemmy becomes the white Judeo-Christian scapegoat, referencing the History Wars' discourse about colonisation. Rather than a hybrid, I see Gemmy as symbolic of the hapless “white” who leaves the slums of a Dickensian London and arrives in Australia, just as the convicts had done before him, transported as

wretched victims, rather than colonisers. In other words, Gemmy is symbolic of the convicts exiled to “Babylon,” an act beyond their control.

Does Gemmy’s characterisation, rather than serve as a hybrid national image, instead reflect the national historical consciousness of the Anglo Australian imaginary and the polemic debates of the History Wars? Malouf’s narrative structure makes a statement that in hindsight it is easy to engage in condemnation of the British convicts for they were as much victims of British imperialism as the Indigenous Australians. This reflects the historical landscape in contemporary fiction, harking back to Marcus Clarke’s *For the Term of his Natural Life*, a position that belongs to an Anglo Australian mythology of colonisation’s victims rather than perpetrators.

With the advent of Indigenous Australians’ emancipation and decisions like the Mabo decision, *Remembering Babylon*’s narrative structure supports an allegorical reading of reference to the modern world. The first part of the novel is structured as a realist or mimetic text where time passes from past to present to future, providing a verisimilitude of the everyday activities and the gradual maturing of the novel's characters. The conclusion of the narrative structure is a reflective memory of the past, in the narrative present. I question whether this mixed structure is a critique of Australia’s argument in the history wars, for the second part of the narrative looks back in judgement of the past. As Malouf stated during an ABC Boyer lecture, “we remember the bits of our history that speak well of us, the freedoms we have achieved, the good life we have created for so many here; the dark bits we suppress” (*A Spirit of Play* 6). Gemmy’s history as a hapless victim of a cruel system and his transportation to Australia, gives a clue to Gemmy’s characterisation as symbolic of the ill-fated convicts. He is destined to be dumped in a far-off land, lost, and picked up by tribespeople, and where he struggles to make the best of difficult circumstances. This is an idea supporting the Anglo

Australian hegemonic, but chimerical, perspective that they are the below of Australian history; working class people who arrived against their will and were forced to struggle for survival.

The character Lachlan Beattie symbolises the Anglo Australian in judgement of the past. Towards the end of the novel he reflects, “they were living in another country. He could afford to admit that now that it had not ended. Something Gemmy had touched off in them was what they were living” (Malouf, *Remembering Babylon* 197). The narrative structure seen through Lachlan’s perspective, shows that with hindsight the past, and the values of a past era, may be understood quite differently upon reflection in the present. The narrator states, “the word was on them; some old darkness out of the depth of things was scribbled there forever and could never now be eradicated” (ibid 116). The life in Australia that Gemmy was living was neither British nor Aboriginal, instead it carved out a place for a new Anglo Australian people, distancing themselves from their British forebears, as a people with their own national identity.

In judging the past, in the second part of the narrative, Lachlan Beattie looks back on his life, and remembers an event in which he suspects Gemmy died.

It involved a ‘dispersal’ six years before by a group of cattlemen and two native troopers, too slight an affair to be called a massacre, and no newspaper had got hold of it. The blacks had been ridden down and brought to earth by blows from stirrup iron at the end of a stirrup leather – an effective weapon, when used at a gallop, for smashing skulls...the story already had elements in common with others he had heard up here, which when he tried to track them down had proved elusive (196).

The term ‘dispersal’ is possibly an accurate historical representation of how such massacres were seen at least by some white colonisers and riding the Aboriginal people to earth has connotations of ‘riding the fox to ground or the fox gone to earth.’ This aspect of the novel

indicates the narrative showing how a different set of values were held by the settlers, which are difficult to judge by standards of the present.

Lachlan's reflections of this last point are reinforced with the narrative metaphor of bees. When as a grown man Lachlan Beattie goes to visit his sister Janet in a convent, she takes him to see her bees. As the siblings look into the hive Janet thinks, "It was like peering through into the City of God ... it reflected them" (192). The bees operate through the novel as allegories for humanity, driven by their own natures and immersed in their own world to act according to their nature. Lachlan describes the bees as, "clean little bees", but his sister corrects him, "cruel little bees ... there's nothing noble about them" (191). If the bees are a metaphor for Australia, the clean bees are a view of a benign settlement. Yet Janet sees it differently, and the cruel bees are a metaphor for the cruelty of the settlers.

The scene with the bees is as though, in the present, we look back at the past and make judgements as if those judgements might have been relevant at the time. At the end of the novel Lachlan and Janet look back and remember Gemmy, when he balanced on the fence before he makes the transition from the world of the Aboriginal people into the world of the settlers. Janet says, "I sometimes think that was all I ever knew of him ... there's nothing clear in my head of what he might have been before that, and afterwards he was just Gemmy" (194). It is as if the last chapter of Malouf's novel acknowledges history as being judged through present day dominant cultural values about what was right and wrong about the past. Yet the narrative also argues that such judgements cannot be seen clearly, for it is difficult to judge the activities of the past by present-day values. What the characters knew as children, and what they might see differently from the distance of hindsight as adults, is a metaphor acknowledging that while it was not understood at the time, colonisation and the violence done by settlers in the name of colonisation to the Indigenous inhabitants of Australia, was wrong.

Yet, while acknowledging Indigenous occupation of Australia prior to the British arrival, the narrative links the land to notions of encountering Otherness, symbolic of, but occluding the Indigenous people's perspective and agency. When Gemmy arrives at the settler village, the narrator describes the land beyond as creating a sense of dislocation and fear of the unknown, a suspicion of the strange land surrounding the white settlers. The white settlers' feel it is a land they cannot know, cannot understand. In reference to Gemmy's arrival, the narrator states, "The country he had broken out of was all unknown to them [...] Even in full sunlight it was impenetrable dark [...] land to the south was also unknown [...] It was disturbing" (ibid. 8). This view of the land is never countered by a different point of view, leaving the land as the unknowable Other.

Malouf was wary of cultural appropriation, which was why he did not characterise the Indigenous people in his narrative (Delrez and Michel-Michot 170). By doing so he has denied the Indigenous people agency in these historical events, rendering them as subaltern to white settlers in an Anglo Australian historical landscape. Delrez and Michel-Michot claim Malouf's view was, "the Other can never speak for itself" (170). Yet, they argue that a refusal to speak for the Other, "effectively precludes the possibility of postcolonial identity" (170). In order to create a fictional Australian exemplar who is not of British colonial heritage, Australian historical fiction must be able to speak for other Australians. To occlude the voice of the opposition risks wiping one side of what is in effect a shared history of colonisation from the national narrative, leaving the winners' justifications for their actions unchallenged by their opposition.

However, in doing so there is always a risk, which must be a concern for white writers. This risk relates to causing offence, denigrating, or stereotyping another people and their traditions. Yet if white writers cannot speak for other Australians, this silence reinforces the

privileged white Anglo Australian exemplar of historical consciousness by placing them and their world view at the centre of historical novels. Instead of barring white writers from representing the other of history, perhaps they should be criticised if they are disrespectful, engage in negative race-based stereotyping, or get the other perspective wrong, in the way Jeanine Cummins' novel *American Dirt* was criticised for its negative racial stereotyping. By not characterising the Indigenous people in *Remembering Babylon*, the narrative conflict perpetuates an Anglo Australian sovereignty rather than rendering all Australians as participants in the conflict.

Don Randall has a different view from Delrez and Michel-Michot for he argues, "Malouf's creative wager is that one can cross interpersonal and intercultural borders imaginatively" (128). Yet, Malouf did not cross this threshold in *Remembering Babylon*. Randall also goes on to state that "a common motivation for Malouf's characters, albeit often unconscious, is the quest to find the perspective of the other – to see the self from the other's perspective" (128). However, in *Remembering Babylon*, Malouf's narrative explores only the white settlers' perspectives.

Rather than exploring Indigenous perspectives as the other side of the narrative conflict, Indigenous people are cast, along with the land, as the unknowable Other. The Indigenous tribesmen in *Remembering Babylon* might be acknowledged as the First People inhabiting the land, but by denying them sovereign agency in conflict they become a subaltern category to the Anglo Australian settler identity. Even when seeing the world through a hybrid mediator like Gemmy, the Indigenous people are presented as the unknown and unknowable, and as such every action is attributed with suspicion and through fear.

This then is the problem with creating an unknowable Other, it is a way of morally justifying the perpetrator's actions without any counterbalancing perspectives. When the

Aboriginal tribesmen visit Gemmy and sit in silent and voiceless communication, “having a powwow”, something passes between them (Malouf, *Remembering Babylon* 94). The settlers see the visit as suspicious. As Randall argues, the narrative explores the settlers’ consciousness (128). Yet exploring how the settlers jump to false conclusions about things they do not understand about the cultural behaviour of the Indigenous people, the “something that passes between” becomes the inexplicable. The inexplicable is later turned by white men into an imagined object, a stone. This stone is created from white superstition, for the inexplicable behaviour is not a part of white settler culture, and therefore misunderstood. Stones can represent danger, and because the act appears different and unknown, it creates fear. That fear motivates the settlers to seek the source of their fear and a stone is a weapon they understand. It is representative of a danger that has caused their fear.

Just as in the 1930s fear of the Other bred increasing xenophobia, the unknown in *Remembering Babylon* leads to fear in the settlers’ minds. In effect, this fear becomes the explanation and justification for the settlers’ violently reactive behaviour. The narrative asserts it might be wrong, but it can be justified in a way that can be recognised and understood. After the incident where Gemmy sits down with the Indigenous men, things in the settler village go awry. For example, the, “geese are found with their throats cut” (ibid. 113). The settlers see this as proof of their earlier fear, and how it has potential to bring violent retribution against the settlers.

Consequently, a meeting between Gemmy and the Indigenous men transforms a simple interpersonal communication between friends, into the idea that the Indigenous men have handed Gemmy a weapon in the shape of a stone. This incident demonstrates the settlers’ fear of the unknown and explores the psychology of this fear as a way of understanding settler violence as a reaction to fear. The problem with such representation is that the Indigenous

perspective is never given to challenge this view. Creating the Other as the unknown and unknowable is problematic, for it casts fellow humans outside into the shadows and on the margins of what remains a sovereign Anglo Australian nation.

Remembering Babylon leaves Indigenous people incorporated into a transitioning view of colonial history where their prior occupation of the land is recognised, but by not recognising their sovereignty and agency, Indigenous Australians are relegated to a subaltern category of Australian. The novel engages with the native title debate but in a tentative way, as an issue of cultural change where a new group is enfolded into the “broad church” of a liberal Anglo Australian historical consciousness. As Jo Jones argues, Malouf’s novel is a, “well-intentioned and, to an extent, politically effective liberalism” (139). Yet, while this may satisfy a liberal view of restitution, in effect it becomes a second wave of dispossession through fiction. Views of colonisation from both sides of a narrative conflict between two sovereign nations might have ameliorated unintended consequences of rendering Indigenous people voiceless. Showing the conflict as a British initiated war against a sovereign nation would question colonial moral justifications and the underpinning assumptions.

As outlined in the introduction of this exegesis, presenting the perspective of the Other is politically fraught with accusations of cultural appropriation. How then can writers attempt to view conflict from the other side? This is an ongoing challenge for historical fiction writers, and although my creative work is not about British colonisation, the same problem applies. Nicholas Birns discusses Malouf and other Australian novelists’ concerns over bringing Indigenous people into colonial history as one of authorial motivation or intention. This is a question of whether Australian authors are concerned with altruistic purposes or with salving their own guilt, or even are motivated by a form of non-violent coercion to adopt the author’s views (Birns 123). To cope with the problems of fiction carrying white liberal colonisation

tropes, Jones discusses settler historical fiction as redeemable through trauma narratives (171). In dealing with past trauma, particularly intergenerational trauma, this perspective is important because there is a growing body of trauma narratives written as historical fiction.

There is also a scholarly debate on the role of trauma narratives in intergenerational dysfunction. This is specifically in the way trauma is couched in either positive or negative frames and how narratives remake a sense of self (Leo, Bal, and Crewe. 42). While trauma narratives can be designed as coping mechanisms for dealing with horror, they also may be used to perpetuate trauma by consistently reinvigorating subjectivities of trauma for new generations to experience and remember, albeit vicariously. This may be a psychological necessity for individuals coping with trauma, but trauma narratives are not a technique designed to generate postcolonial change. Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman argue, “the shared collective experiences of trauma experienced by First Nations peoples, coupled with related collective memories, and persistent sociocultural disadvantages, have acted to increase vulnerability to the transmission and expression of intergenerational trauma effects” (6). They also argue the narrative effects depend on the positivity of representation, particularly how it reshapes the traumatised sense of self. Trauma narratives require careful consideration regarding perpetuating a negative view of past victims of trauma. In a study of Canadian Indigenous people, Kirmayer, Gone and Moses conclude that “the construct of trauma does not capture many of the important elements that are rooted in structural problems, including poverty and discrimination” (313). Trauma narratives do not necessarily challenge the structural systems that contribute to retraumatising intergenerational trauma victims.

An alternative view is one Hamish Dalley cites from Lorenzo Veracini’s argument, that in the process of colonisation, settlers, “are traumatized by the violence that attends their seizure of land” which in turn leads to denial and the creation of mythologising (*Settler*

Realism 463). Dalley likens the psychology of this process to how, “conflicts are mystified by their displacement into symbolic systems” (ibid. 464). In other words, the trauma of colonisation leads to a form of denial as a defence mechanism against the moral implications of colonising another’s land. For my narrative purposes, Dalley’s explanation seems most plausible because Australian mythology of the Anglo Australian as the below of history and separated from the British imperial elite, is a defence mechanism against accusations of colonisation. This defence is explored in *Shadows in the Cane* with the aim of exposing the economic and cultural forces that maintain the dominance of white liberal capitalism as a continuation and perpetuation of an Anglo Australian colonial imaginary. In the next section I take this discussion further, examining Birns’s view of authorial motivations and their impact, through Kate Grenville’s novel *The Secret River*.

3.2.2. Metanarratives in *The Secret River*

Kate Grenville’s 2005 novel *The Secret River* was published more than a decade after *Remembering Babylon*. By Grenville’s own admission, she wrote the novel out of a sense of guilt and sought, through her novel, to make a personal apology to Indigenous people for her ancestor’s culpability in the historical events of colonisation (*Searching for The Secret River* 14). *The Secret River* did what *Remembering Babylon* had barely suggested, it brought the historical colonial frontier conflict to the fore. Grenville also explores settler consciousness of Indigenous people through the eyes of Anglo Australian sovereignty, mediated only through the liberal justifications for conflict by her protagonist William Thornhill. The problem with Grenville’s rendition is that, notwithstanding narrative apologies, *The Secret River* also occludes the Indigenous perspective and maintains the white metanarrative of Anglo Australian historical consciousness. It does not question the role liberal capitalism plays in colonisation, except through Christian sentiments of uneasy guilt in the face of liberal notions of sin.

The Secret River also uses cultural mythology to create its historical landscape where another Dickensian working-class character is transported to Australia for a minor crime, (another victim of an unfair system) and sees his chance to acquire land, a driving desire of the colonists. He soon confronts the local Dharug people who attempt to defend their traditional lifestyle and almost inadvertently, Thornhill becomes the murdering colonist in pursuit of his own goals. At the same time, he acquires the gentrification that land ownership endows on the colonists – a winner of history, although he is never at ease with his newfound position, always aware that it is based on a heinous crime against the Dharug people.

Grenville's protagonist William Thornhill, a waterman, sees having land as emancipating and therefore justifies his claim on Indigenous land as a fight for his own freedom. Yet he remains uneasy, indicating the defence mechanism of denial in play, or at least a sense of cognitive dissonance. This reflects guilt as a result of a liberal consciousness, which is outlined by Dalley (*Settler Realism* 463), Birns (*Contemporary* 123), Gelder and Salzman (96) and Jones (41). The constructed conflict in *The Secret River* is viewed through a lens of the Anglo Australian perspective, without a perspective from the Indigenous people and thus leaves the narrative firmly embedded within a colonial framework that perpetuates Anglo Australian hegemony.

Grenville's novel is a significant example of the problems confronting any historical novelist. In one respect this problem stems from the neglect of describing an alternative way of viewing the world other than through contemporary Anglo Australian hegemony. Although its narrative conflict is one of morality, it is viewed from only one side. The moral conflict only reflects the perspectives of the colonisers, white men of various moral standing, subverting the notion that all colonisers were good or decent people. Despite this last point, the novel perpetuates the metanarratives established by British colonisation, systemically embedded in

the Australian social and cultural fabric. The metanarrative states that Australia is a legitimate settler nation, albeit based on the sins of some convict forebears. It intimates that although some colonists were evil, most were good. This sounds like an excuse for colonisation rather than a statement of culpability.

Despite the novel's white characters attempts to understand the Indigenous perspective, it renders the Indigenous people as subordinate to the moral consciousness of the settlers. Rather than the Indigenous people as brave heroes of resistance, they become interlopers, making life "difficult" in the settlers' struggle to survive in a hostile land. Sheila Collingwood-Whittick refers to the omission of the Indigenous perspective as "egregious" because it "causes the transgenerational trauma of Indigenous dispossession to fade, if not from sight entirely, then at least into the periphery of the reader's field of vision" (17). This is also Jones's position (26). The absence of an Indigenous voice and perspective, in what amounts to a shared history between the colonisers and the dispossessed, serves to exacerbate complications with colonial cultural memory remaining unchallenged by an alternative point of view.

Anglo Australian settlers and convicts as the below of history, is a carryover of historical consciousness from a 19th century British class divide. Today, rendering Anglo Australian settlers as the below of Australian colonial history leaves Indigenous people without expressed sovereignty, agency, or motivation in the historical conflict. Anglo Australians, regardless of when their ancestors arrived, have inherited enormous benefits from the colonising of Australia, and can no longer be represented solely as the victims in historical renditions of colonisation. Indigenous Australians who are represented in fiction must be recognised as proud sovereign people, conquered, brutalised, and dispossessed of their land, and who, if any atonement can be made, must have their former sovereignty recognised as a strength. These problems are a salutary lesson for a novice historical novelist, to ensure that the narrative aims

do not lose sight of the larger debate and perpetuate the very issues the novel attempts to overcome.

Another lesson for a historical novelist is that *The Secret River* brought the author's methodology to the fore in the Australian History Wars debate. In an interview on the Australian national broadcaster (the ABC) with Ramona Koval, Grenville made an unfortunate remark about sitting up a ladder looking down upon the History Wars. The problem here was that Grenville, "steps into a politically loaded area of history" (Nelson 12), at a time when the Australian History Wars was at its peak. When challenged over her remark, Grenville tried to explain that through the combination of archival research, imagination, and empathy, she could reimagine what the past was like. This comment resulted in historian Mark McKenna accusing Grenville of promoting fiction as having a superior "interpretive power" (6), more able than history to tell the past. He claims that because Grenville wanted her novel viewed as historically authentic, it should be subjected to scrutiny, as would any academic history text. Yet the issue of historical truth in Australian history is so clouded by ideological struggle it may be difficult to gain an agreed position.

This confronting spat with history's "truths" is a cautionary warning for a novelist who is aiming to write back against the centre, for the turf warfare between Grenville and a cohort of historians did not end there. In two subsequent quarterly essays Inga Clendinnen took Grenville to task over her temerity, thinking a novelist had the authority, the training, or the experience to write history and castigated her use of empathy and imagination as a methodology. Yet Clendinnen had done the same thing with her own novel *Dancing with Strangers* published in 2003, albeit hedged with the historian's paratextual caveats and explanations. Gelder and Salzman argue this is merely Clendinnen scolding Grenville for not, "reproducing the past in the right way" (100). However, other historians agreed with Clendinnen's dismissal of

novelists being able to write history. John Hirst states that Grenville's sentiments, "are the product of liberal imagination. Its decency knows no bounds" (85). This is an old debate between historians and historical novelists, and today there is a sort of truce, but the historians have a point, although it is not about historical truths, or the methodological process or otherwise of narrating history.

The point is that *The Secret River* perpetuates hegemonic agreement with an Anglo Australian historical landscape. The metanarrative gives meaning that argues, poor William Thornhill was a victim of circumstances, and while his actions were not perfect, they were not as evil as some. The sympathetic way Grenville renders her protagonist William Thornhill is therefore problematic. Gelder and Salzman refer to this as "a rather uncomfortable quest for a white dreaming – for a sense of belonging even if tinged by guilt" (100). However, the novel poses a similar ambivalent apology to that of *Remembering Babylon* in as much as both novels ask, "what else was the settler to do given the circumstances?" This last point too reinscribes the metanarrative of colonial settlers as victims of British imperialism and points to the problems of colonial mythologising as a defence mechanism.

Grenville argues she was trying to be faithful to the shape of the historical record, and the meaning of all those events that historians had written about. "What I was writing wasn't real, but it was as true as I could make it" (*Searching for the Secret River* 191). The factual as Grenville writes it is only real from her subjective perspective, how she has interpreted the historical record and relayed it through her construction of the conflict, mediated through her choice and characterisation of the protagonist. In Grenville's defence, Sue Kossew argues that Grenville's novel, "draws attention to the ambivalent nature of this settler culture, haunted as it is by a paradoxical mix of affiliations, of resistance and complicity" (3). Hamish Dalley refers to this paradox as a form of postcolonial allegorical referentiality with the, "historical novel as

a genre predicated on formal hybridity.” (*Postcolonial* 17). The hybridity is between the presumed historical facts and the imagined construction as symbolic representations of the actual, based on typified aggregations of a figuratively abstract or allegorical form. Yet, without any other character questioning Thornhill’s mediated view of the conflict, the narrative perpetuates an authentic fallacy, supporting an agreed and conditioned historical consciousness in favour of Anglo Australian hegemony.

3.3. Chapter Emergence

I have argued the greatest problem with several Australian historical novels is viewing colonisation from the point of view of the convict settler as victim, and the below of history, which serves to occlude those they have rendered voiceless. This view of history hides the fact that Anglo Australian cultural hegemony remains as the inheritor not the victim of colonisation, regardless of the individual colonial prisoner, or settler’s plight. This is the reason referentiality as paradoxical, the authentic fallacy, national myths, and the underpinning narrative conflicts, are important aspects for my consideration and reflection in writing my novel. These factors are critical considerations for understanding how unintended cultural metanarratives are reinscribed through the construction of the narrative. Knowing how each of these issues can be constructed, and the risks in doing so, will determine whether my novel supports the maintenance of Anglo Australian hegemony or exposes it.

This chapter has shown that the way historical events are represented by conflict, and how they are justified from both sides of the conflict, is important in writing against dominant cultural metanarratives. *Shadows in the Cane* is set during the Great Depression, and this was a period which brought radical class conflict to the fore. I have chosen to divide the conflict along class lines. However, to do this requires articulating the characters’ values-based

justifications from both sides of the narrative conflict so that both sides of the conflict are shown, exposing values and justifications for action.

To show the values and justifications for both sides of the conflict, I have used two well-known world views from the 1930s, liberal capitalism in opposition to Marxist socialism. Embedded within these ideological positions are economic and values principles, including power derived from control of production, the primacy of the individual as opposed to the social collective. In this sense I have placed the conflict arc within the broader economic, social, and political environment of the period, setting economically powerful Australian characters in opposition to the working-class, using power differentials and ideological perspectives to orchestrate the conflict. To avoid rendering a position on morality, I represent both ideological beliefs through the symbolism of rationality, refusing absolute judgements of truth. In this I adopt Rorty's argument that good, and evil are nothing more than culturally relative, "viewed as a built-in righteousness detector" (34). This is the character transition I create for my protagonist, who comes to see there is never one absolute truth. I hope notions of truth, whatever they are, will be determined through the implied reader's own judgement.

To represent these opposing ideological world views, I have used a multi-focalised narrative so that I do not sanction one above the other but leave the reader to make judgements about the truth. As the American scholar Roger Sell argues,

Writers who try to send some particular message may thereby allow their addressees relatively little scope for their own perceptions and evaluations. Other writers, by contrast, offer their audiences an opportunity to compare notes about life from within more than one life-world, so agreeing, as it were, to dis-agree when necessary (201).

Juxtaposing one world view against the other, from alternative focalisations, allows implied readers to draw their own truths from two different ways of seeing the world, and having the

characters justifying their actions in conflict. The significance for my own creative work in having two different, but equally plausible economic and ideological positions, renders notions of historical truth moot, and relies instead on what is recognisable and broadly agreed, juxtaposed against what is plausibly conceivable through the world view of the protagonist.

4. Reflections on Writing Against the Centre

This exegesis has examined the problems in writing historical fiction in settler societies like Australia, especially when attempting to write against Australian hegemony as my own historical novel seeks to do. A novel that seeks to expose the systems that perpetuate the hegemonic metanarrative of an agreed Anglo Australian historical landscape is in danger of reinscribing the colonial metanarratives it seeks to criticise. My narrative construction seeks not only to meet contemporary ethical standards of a postcolonial society, but also to write against hegemonic views of Australia as a nation of Anglo Australian settlers. I have argued that two pervasive cultural myths perpetuate colonial reinscription in historical fiction: the national image of Anglo Australian bushmen as the victim of British imperialism, and the ongoing notion of Australia as a classless nation, both of which I write against. In this chapter I discuss some of the problems I confronted with attempting to make radical labour history more appealing given my desire to write against cultural hegemony. To do this I examine some genre techniques that I might use in the construction of my novel that might appeal more broadly.

My novel follows in the tradition of an Australian anti-imperial radicalism, which was promoted by sections of the early 20th century Australian literary set, including Jean Devanny. Drucilla Modjeska discusses the way in which Nettie Palmer, particularly, advocated progressive writing as the social divide widened between conservatism and labour politics of the period (5). I have carried on this tradition of anti-imperialist radicalism as a way of opposing the current widening gap between conservative and labour politics and Australia's increasing economic disparity, using class as the narrative conflict. To achieve this, I have used characteristics taken from earlier fiction that either support Empire or radically oppose it.

The characterisation of an elite class perspective is adapted from 20th century Empire-supporting novels that Robert Dixon discusses as emulating the colonial adventures of Rider

Haggard (80). These are characteristics that in contemporary Australian historical narratives might be allocated to the British and include notions of power, imperialism, white meritocracy, military valour, and a vigorous and hardy people who value self-sacrifice and public duty. They justify their actions in terms of God, King and Country, along with a ‘conservative’ brand of morality that Schwartz’s value-types represent as tradition, security, and merit, in this case a “racialised” hierarchy of merit.

In my novel, I pit this elite class of Anglo Australians in opposition to the 1930s striking sugar workers, made up of working-class Australians (of all ethnicities), characterised as iconic bushman from all ethnic backgrounds, and imbued with Schwartz’s ‘openness to change’ cultural values set, including universalism. The immigrants and refugees of the 1930s in my novel, stand as metaphors for all non-Anglo immigrants and refugees who are subject to racism and injustice. This is not to suggest the 1930s immigrants have remained in a subaltern social stasis. As outlined in the introduction, Vivek Chibber argues that in postcolonial theory, people cannot be categorised in terms of the subaltern as a static category over time, but instead might be viewed as intent upon pursuing economic interests to further their own human desires, which is what this group of 1930s immigrants have achieved over time.

One problem with using the myth of the iconic bushman legend for my radical multicultural working class is that there is a more recent perspective of the myth. For example, Richard Nile argues, “conservative-right elements ... have authorised themselves as the legitimate inheritors of the legend” (*The Australian Legend* 1). Notwithstanding this last point, people will always adapt cultural mythology to suit their aims. For instance, politicians from opposite sides of the political spectrum, such as former Prime Ministers Paul Keating and John Howard, both called on Lawsonian imagery for political purposes (Ashcroft *et al.* 138). Schafer also argues that depending on values, “critics describe Lawson as either a socialist or a Fascist”

(42). My novel seeks to reclaim the bushman legend for multicultural radicals and relegate the characteristics of the colonial adventurer to an Anglo Australian elite.

The characteristics of my novel's protagonist Mark Anders, are created as an allegorical representation for the many Australians of non-Anglo background, born in the country but with multiple ethnic heritage, and is positioned as anti-imperial. However, as a result of my research into conflict construction I decided that his perspective should be matched with that of an Anglo Australian colonial elite. Therefore, the novel is multifocalised from primarily two perspectives, with Mark's point of view from the working class. From the elite class I have provided a perspective through the eyes of Beatrice Langham, Mark's love interest. Using a love story to carry the plot caused me to reflect on how my novel might be categorised according to genre conventions.

Pierre Bourdieu defines the difference between literary and popular fiction as the former being high art, or "art for art's sake" and the latter as commercial storytelling for the marketplace (232). Ken Gelder refers to literary narratives as national, local, or regional and popular fiction as global, and suggests hybrids between the literary and popular can overcome the binary between local and global fiction (*Recovering Australian Popular Fiction* 114). Notwithstanding these definitions, any genre classification refers to the use of shared professional conventions reminiscent of Michael Bakhtin's chronotopes where, "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" (84). Yet these classificatory conventions change over time and are now mostly used by the industry to categorise fiction for the market in line with conventions that appeal to specific readers' preferences.

I used a love story to carry the multifocalised approach partly because love stories are popular and can address my concerns about the political and communist themes. In the words

of Richard Flanagan, “in the end, the only answer we have to politics, to power, to horror, is the love we might know for each other” (Flanagan and Bausells). Furthermore Fletcher et al. argue, “popular romance fiction is the most prolific and profitable genre globally” (997). Not only is romance popular, but it can also reflect social transitions or act to support cultural change (Flesch 2). The popularity of the romance genre is also referenced by Catherine Roach, who writes that “[r]omance is America’s bestselling genre” (3). Thus, I sought to use love as a narrative technique to combat the industrial and political nature of the historical context of the story. However, although I did initially attempt to adopt the romance genre, I found I could not use its conventions to shape my plot. This was primarily because of the romance genre’s gender-based conflict, which I found interfered with my desire to construct my narrative conflict along class lines.

Genre conventions are important to get right because they form mental models or cognitive schema, which Busselle and Bilandzic argue are, “an important factor related to experiential engagement with stories” (256). The romance genre conventions are no different. For example, Janice Radway cites three conditions of the romance. These include the “developing relationship between heroine and hero”, the resolution of “differences between two principal characters”, and “either a male or female rival” (122). However, the “reader always knows that the principal in question is not attracted to the rival” (123). While Catherine Roach argues that although there are significant differences in romance, the basic plot structure remains. This is, “find somebody to love, work through the problems, be happy” (2). That happy-ever-after in Roach’s analysis is important to the romance genre where, “love has a mythic or idealising force strong enough to mend tragedy,” along with the promise of redemption (26). I tried to use these techniques but failed to make my novel fit the romance genre. The problem for my novel was the nature of the romance conventions in narrative conflict, which is primarily gendered, premised on relationship conflict as central to the

narrative (Roach 41). This became awkward, not insurmountable but difficult, if I was to centre my narrative conflict on class. I chose to keep my love story as one between the different classes, but to not allow any gender narrative conflict to distract from my main aim of exploring the immigrant son's radicalisation as the result of systemic prejudice, oppression, and injustice based on economic power. For this reason, my novel cannot be considered a romance.

I turned to seek narrative techniques from different sources and found that the area of popular fiction I could adopt was what Felski refers to as cultural symmetry. Cultural symmetry seems to cross both popular and literary genres. It is of primary concern in the construction of characters in Dalley's conventions for postcolonial historical allegory as a form of cultural plausibility (*Contemporary* 51). It has currency throughout all the genres. For example, John Cawelti argues that genre narrative conventions of popular forms should be imbued with traditional or cultural metaphors and similes that have specific meaning during an era or within a culture. This accords with Roach's argument that the romance genre is a cultural narrative (1). László et al's research findings, regarding the most successful historical novels, support this point. In their research, they found that popular historical novels in this respect share familiar cultural features to canonical texts (70). Furthermore, cultural conventions, Cawelti argues, "particularly fulfil man's (sic) need for enjoyment and escape" where the main characters must embody heroic types, recognisable by the culture that produces them (ibid. 5). This is similar to Hamish Dalley's postcolonial conventions for crafting characters through, "a crystallization of socially typical qualities" (*Settler Realism* 464). However, as discussed throughout this exegesis these conventions will often reinscribe colonial hegemony, so I have attempted to adopt and then subvert the popular cultural hero convention, in favour of the non-Anglo immigrant working class character.

This is the paradox my writing faced because historical fiction has a tendency to strengthen the hegemonic culture and I was trying to avoid falling into this same trap. Consequently, I decided to give a perspective from both sides of the political and economic divide by creating a multifocalised narrative through different interpretations, coloured by different belief systems and their perspectives. Therefore, my novel has two primary focalisations for the story. One is the immigrants' son Mark and the other is the wealthy Anglo Australian woman Beatrice.

Including a love story and focalising from a woman's perspective caused me to reflect on whether my novel fell under a category of women's fiction, which is also often premised on gender conflict. I found my novel did not sit comfortably within that category either. Gelder and Salzman state there has been a shift in representation of women in literature over the past decades, away from the radical towards exploring new ways of viewing the world (192). What this might mean for my own novel's construction of its secondary character Beatrice, is that as a member of the colonial elite, she will present an asymmetry of culture in Australia today, one that values the progressive social underdog and eschews elite characteristics. For example, Beatrice's character is made up of the type in colonial adventurer novels such as that of E.V. Timms and represents an old hegemonic construct that is not an admired cultural trope today. Beatrice begins the novel imbued with the values of her class although she is oblivious to their existence and therefore remains unassertive over their value. Towards the end of the novel the two ideologies draw closer, represented by Beatrice and Mark's union. It is then Beatrice asserts her independence and strength of will and Mark relaxes his idealistic attachment, symbolised by giving away his Communist Party card toward the end of the novel.

At least until the latter part of the novel, Beatrice's characterisation writes against popular culture in women's fiction to enhance the heroic status of the immigrants represented

by Mark. While Beatrice is represented as a woman on the brink of radical change in her views, she begins the story as a woman who is not yet certain of who she is, although she knows she desires freedom from male domination. Women's fiction today will mostly present strong independent women who embody a continuing response to earlier feminist critiques. This has led, in contemporary fiction, to female archetypes or exemplars in popular Australian novels that are often similarly based on the bushman legend.

Ann Summers argues women in Australian mythology have been schematised as *Damned Whores and God's Police*, the former connected with the ex-convicts or the Irish and the latter patterned on the stoic drover's wife of Lawson fame (Schaffer 31). In Judy Nunn's 2019 historical novel *Khaki Town*, she bases her protagonist, Val Callahan, on both types. For example, Callahan is fiercely loyal and protective of those she considers within her care. "She could be mother, a lover and a wife all in one" (26). By nature, she is the quintessential "Drover's Wife" although she is also the "dammed whore" proud of her background as "Caravan Callahan", touring the mining towns with her mobile brothel (25). Prostitution in Australian fiction is traditionally represented as the subordination of women (Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines* 58). Yet, *Khaki Town* subverts this traditional cultural view to represent prostitution as feminist freedom. However, Summers' *Damned Whores and God's Police* is not about women at all but about masculine power and how men perceive "female sexuality" (Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines* 69). Yet, as is the case with *Khaki Town* the characteristics of the bushman type have seeped into depictions of women exemplars in Australian historical fiction written by women.

The Lawsonian version of the Drover's Wife, left to cope alone while her husband tends his sheep on an outback station is the subject of the conflict between a husband and wife, in Nicole Alexander's 2020 novel *The Cedar Tree*. As in the Drover's Wife, *The Cedar Tree's*

protagonist Stella O’Riain is left alone at home while her husband Joe is away tending sheep. As she wanders through the house, she is forced to deal with a snake, when, “something slithered across the floor” (117). While Lawson’s drover’s wife has children, Stella loses her only child and then loses her husband. This allows the protagonist the freedom to move away from the sheep station to find revelatory experiences elsewhere, a kind of narrative second chance.

Women’s fiction today is also often critical of masculinity, rendering flawed men to diminish that same power (Bode 443). My novel’s protagonist is a male cloaked in the guise of the heroic and iconic bushman, a rendition that might be construed as reinscribing Australian masculinity. Yet, criticising power, including masculine power, is one of the themes in my novel and while Mark’s perspective is foremost, Beatrice’s perspective is also important along with her goals. At the end of the novel, she achieves freedom from male domination. Over the time of the narrative, Beatrice has changed to the extent she embraces progressive values and demands her own independence. She argues that if Mark wants to marry her then he must embrace her and her background for what it is, just as she accepts his background and beliefs for what they are. This is a reference to multiculturalism and tolerance, or liberal notions of tolerance for other beliefs.

While Beatrice is a secondary character to Mark as the protagonist, this is not because she is a woman, subordinate to her lover, but because she represents the above of history and I seek to foreground those who in this story were the below of this historical event. Because Beatrice is a woman, she is also as per the conventions of the 1930s era, subordinate in relation to her masculine relatives. In this way Beatrice and Mark have a commonality of powerlessness, for Mark is also oppressed by her relatives as metaphors for the hegemonic system. Curthoys argues Australian women writers will often show the subaltern status of

women as a means to expose, “power, inequality, exploitation, and oppression” (3). The men in *Shadows in the Cane* still assume an everyday power over Beatrice, and as she becomes more imbued with progressive values she begins to rebel against their restrictions, which in turn brings further oppression from her father, until she eventually breaks out of those restrictions by demanding her own independence.

Notwithstanding this last point, in accordance with my research regarding narrative conflict as a carrier of metanarratives, I did not seek to set up the primary narrative conflict between male and female power, although this is an aspect of human relationships, particularly within the era in which the novel is set. To create narrative conflict premised primarily on a masculine/feminine divide would have reduced the main aim of my novel to a secondary place. For this reason, I also chose to alternate perspectives on the unfolding events through both Mark’s and Beatrice’s points of view. Although Beatrice is a secondary character, I chose to give her an equal role in mediating the conflict with Mark.

While the protagonist is Mark because the story is about oppression and injustice, Beatrice shows how the unfolding events are seen from the other side. The novel ends by showing how history has resolved in favour of the British heritage Anglo Australians as a continuing dominant Anglo hegemony, a hegemony into which Mark is enfolded. Mark Anders is created as the son of immigrants, a working-class Australian with desires and aspirations to lead a comfortable and unconstrained life as one of the cane farmers, the powerful landed gentry of the region. This is a metaphor for both a belief in the idea of individual meritocracy (a liberal value) and the desire to feel a sense of belonging as an Australian settler albeit with a recognition that the land has been stolen from the Indigenous people. However, exploitation and injustice lead to his radicalisation where he commits to Communist ideals, to the extent that he secretly exits the country to join the Spanish Civil War.

As discussed earlier, Tahir Abbas argues children who are born in the country in which their parents have immigrated, “can often experience a complex and dislocated existence” (3). There is a similarity of psychology between the feelings Abbas discusses and the liminal space between the old and the new that leaves no place for the hybrid. Hybrids are often scapegoated, as discussed with regard to Malouf’s Gemmy Fairley. Abbas argues despite the desire to belong, immigrant offspring can struggle to fit in to their adopted society (5). In my novel I wanted to show the possible consequential effects of scapegoating, or the denigration of immigrants and refugees. When people are explicitly socially denigrated, they often feel they do not belong anywhere. If they do not become traumatised and develop a form of learned helplessness and victimhood, they can become angry and seek a way to find revenge.

By the same token I wanted to show how acceptance can lead to redemption. When Mark is accepted into the family through the intervention of Beatrice’s grandfather, crafted as a metaphor for the British imperial establishment, his radicalised choices are curtailed. The end of the novel is what Dalley refers to as synthesis, or “time as linear and progressive, tending towards the resolution of conflict in synthesis” (462). The ending shows Mark drifting towards becoming enfolded into the family of the winners of history. This is a metaphor for what has happened to both the Australian hegemony and the 1930s immigrants, who are now some of the leading citizens of the Far North Queensland region. This ending is also a metaphor for the outcome of the historical events as they have unfolded today. The novel ends with Beatrice’s growing and assertive independence, also demonstrating how radical and progressive values of the earlier 20th century influenced the earlier conservative colonial social systems and structures that eventually led to the welfare society of the late 20th century, one that is becoming eroded as the divide in the Australian economy grows.

4.1. Research Emergence and Conclusion

The main themes running through this project are the problems of Australian identity in fiction and the associated metanarratives promulgated by fiction's narrative conflicts. This is particularly in regard to those that categorise different groups of Australians into ethnic hierarchies of value and set them against each other. As Jon Stratton has argued, Anglo Australians tend to see non-Anglo Australians as a subaltern category of Australian. My writing sought to write back against this perception. Yet, this aim often leaves novelists struggling on the edges to gain any traction with the publishing industry who have their own set of values and conventions.

For this project, my research sought to find traditional cultural tropes used to write an Australian historical novel, and to use these cultural tropes both as engagement mechanisms and to write against a system that perpetuates colonial metanarratives. As engagement techniques, I drew on Cawelti's and Dalley's arguments for crafting my protagonist as a popular hero exemplifying the dominant culture, along with Rita Felski's recognition and cultural symmetry and asymmetry. To distil these exemplars from former Australian literary works, I drew on Stephen Greenblatt's notion of cultural poetics and Assmann's cultural memory along with Schwartz's cross-cultural values, to analyse Australian fiction from a culturally etic perspective as an immigrant writer writing Australian historical fiction. In writing my novel, I used these cultural tropes as both engagement techniques and as postcolonial mechanisms or levers, to knock old cultural patterns off course and thereby create new patterns.

One of the significant concerns in writing this novel was that as an immigrant writing Australian history through fiction, asymmetries of culture may seem implausible to an Australian readership. My methodology therefore was an instructive process for an immigrant

writer. Focusing on how to construct conflict to avoid both the ethnic or internecine divisions of *Burnt Sugar* and *Sugar Heaven*, has illuminated the problems associated with the cultural myth of Australia as a classless society. This led to my use of this knowledge to expose how Anglo Australian hegemony is maintained. However, writing against cultural hegemony, even when paired with popular narrative conventions as engagement techniques, does not necessarily mean the narrative will have cultural appeal. Conforming with hegemony may have greater traction with the historical fiction industry.

Nevertheless, despite criticisms of realist fiction carrying colonial metanarratives, I have argued that it is not the narrative form or genre – postmodern versus realist, or literary versus popular – that is problematic. My argument remains that it is the cultural metanarratives that can be carried by any genre form. For instance, *Sugar Heaven* shows that Soviet realism or Zhdanovian romanticism also has the potential to uphold dominant Anglo Australian hegemony, merely through the rendition of, and justifications for, characters and narrative conflict. Even though *Remembering Babylon* is acclaimed as a postcolonial novel, Malouf's novel works in a similar way to reinscribe Anglo Australian hegemony.

My research shows that exposing dominant cultural metanarratives requires that narrative conflict is constructed, mediated, and justified by both sides. The design of the narrative conflict for my novel was crucial to exposing the motivations and justifications for human behaviour. Exposing the bones of cultural beliefs for examination through fiction has the potential to create a new postcolonial historical consciousness, provoking debate about what it might mean to be Australian. If Australian fiction can move on from a view of the Anglo Australian as the below of historical conflict, other Australians in these shared histories might be seen and heard.

In the end an author can only write what it is they aim to say according to their own ethical framework and the impulse or desire that initially led them to write a novel. My research concludes that the narrative elements of most importance to my desire to write against the centre, are characterisations and conflict constructions, along with multiple focalisations that expose moral justifications for conflict. Reflecting on these elements and what they mean for the propagation of cultural metanarratives can contribute to scholarship on writing historical fiction as a serious cultural artefact. Experimenting with narrative conventions and subverting them in some way is often represented as a form of historiographic metafiction and considered a function of the literary novel (Millard 1). Nevertheless, my experiment with writing historical fiction, using selected postcolonial/popular conventions and summoning national myths and agreed historical landscapes as recognition factors, has straddled the divide between the literary and the popular novel although it is not necessarily classifiable into a particular genre.

While my research contributes to the debate on writing history through fiction by broadening the research scope to include the relevance of cultural myths and values in challenging hegemony, so too does it contribute to a debate about the kind of future Australia wants. Creative writers can enter this debate through plotting historical novels ethically to engage, entertain and educate. Extending the narrow definition of our cultural heroes may have the added benefit of including immigrants and refugees in Australian society, and not merely as subaltern settlers. My novel is historical fiction, not as an adjunct to history, nor just as contemporary allegory, but as a national political commentary, lifting the veil of politics to reflect on what was at stake then. For what is at stake today is a new conversation about what we stand for as Australians in a world that, like the 1930s, becomes increasingly insecure, as displaced people grow in numbers and the gap between rich and poor increases.

Shadows in the Cane has the potential to become a novelised series. The word limit of this research project means the novel has been deliberately constrained. The story form also has the potential to extend my research into the literary hybrid by next examining the conventions of a thriller and how a novelised series might extend this story into three separate novels, where Book 2 covers the Spanish Civil War, and Book 3 involves World War II, although these novels have yet to be written.

5. Shadows in the Cane – A Novel

The following novel is longer in word length than the required length of this entire thesis and therefore this chapter will only include, parts one and two of the novel. Part three is included in an appendix. At the end of this chapter, I have included a brief summary or synopsis of the remaining chapters which make up part three of the novel.

Shadows in the Cane

A Historical Novel

about

Rejection, Radicalisation, and Redemption.

Part One

1.

Innisfail 1934.

It is reasonable to assume that any ordinary person, presented with compelling evidence, couldn't fail to act accordingly, but it seems no one had explained this simple philosophy to these people. Someone had to stand up to them! The band around his head tightened as Mark gazed around the crowded picture theatre. Smoke from countless cigarettes and pipes drifted towards the ceiling. He blinked and shifted his gaze back to the speaker, a balding man with a paunch—clearly not one of them.

The man's forefinger jabbed the air, his voice rising. "You men must take your own precautions, wear sturdy boots, wash your hands, look after your personal cleanliness."

He was standing on the stage in front of red velveteen drapes, hooked back to expose a large white movie screen. A cane rat ran along a batten above the screen and several men pointed and jeered.

The paunchy man turned around just as the rat disappeared through a gap. He said, "The blighters are everywhere."

A voice from the front row shouted, "What's the council doing about it?"

"Everything within our power, but in the end it's up to you men to protect yourselves. I'm just here to tell you, cleanliness is the key. The company and the Cane Growers Association agree ..."

That statement propelled Mark from his seat. “Bullshit! Men are dying.” He pushed his way into the aisle. “Doc. Coffey says it’s the rats causing it. Just like in the Somme trenches.”

The paunchy man glanced across at the union organiser, but the organiser looked away.

Mark drew a breath. He hadn’t wanted to put himself forward, believed that rational men would come to see the real problems, and act on them without a need for any theatrical posturing. Yet here he was, and he knew he would regret it. “You know, and I know the only way to get rid of the problem is to burn the cane before harvest.” He turned to address the men. “Up north, Mossman cutters fire the cane, and they don’t have the problem. Are they better men; are their wages different?” His gaze travelled over worried faces. All he’d ever wanted was to be one of them, but his action made that impossible now. “I tell you, it’s company greed. Their foremost thought is profit. They care nothing for workers’ health.” He paused again, giving himself time to take in the men’s expressions, before he continued. “While they swill French champagne and cognac – bought with our sweat and blood mind you – our mates sicken and die, wallowing in this rat-infested swamp, and the bastards in charge do nothing, just blame us for not washing properly.”

Murmuring came from the rows and men shuffled their feet.

Mark narrowed his eyes as he said, “Not just one man – but one hundred men – and more!” He breathed deeply to force the drumming in his head to slow down. “These are our mates.” He gazed around the expectant faces. “These are men like us, in hospitals across the region hanging on to life right this minute. How many must die?” He pointed at a man in front of him. “You?” The man shrugged. With a curt nod, Mark formed his two fingers into the barrel of a revolver and said, “That’s right mate, the next one could be you!” His breath

exploded behind pursed lips. “Dead!” he said as his fingers jerked upwards with the imagined recoil.

The man was visibly shaken, and said, “Not me, mate.”

Mark walked away. “We all think that it will never happen to me – until it does.”

The men nearest him shifted in their seats to watch what Mark would do next. He wasn’t used to performing for crowds, preferring to remain in the background, but someone had to act. At least he’d got the men thinking.

He asked, “Does the union act in our interest by leaving a man to die because of the work we do?” He turned to the union organiser. “What are you going to do about it?”

The man shrugged but said nothing.

Mark swung back to the men, his fist thumping into his hand. “We must demand the company recognise this thing as an industrial disease, pay compensation to those affected and protect us by burning the cane.”

Murmuring rose to a loud hum and then another man took up the challenge. “Burn the cane!” he shouted, and others joined in, shouting and stamping their feet.

Mark thought it was more to voice their fears than in real anger, but he hoped that would come, before they all died. At first, he’d thought the bosses just didn’t understand how fearful it was to go to work every day, knowing this threat was out there. Then he realised they knew, but just didn’t care and the injustice ate its way into his soul. This was not a hygiene issue but an industrial disease. They couldn’t just blame the workers. That made men responsible for

something outside of their control. The mill had the power to do something and if they refused, then the union must act to force them. If the union wouldn't, then the militants in the rank-and-file would.

Mark vaulted onto the stage and held up his hands. The men's conversation dropped off, and once more their faces lifted towards him. His voice rang across the smoke-filled hall.

"We pay our dues, 25 bob for the union to look after our interests. Now we demand they act, or we'll take this into our own hands."

At this point it was an empty threat, but the men erupted: standing up and shouting, some turning to each other for confirmation.

Before the meeting ended Mark left, squaring his shoulders as he stepped out from the foyer of the Airdome Picture Theatre and on to the pavement. He stood next to the road while he waited for the gang's new cook Bert Manzoni to join him.

Bats swooped and dived under the building eaves and the early evening air was clear and winter fresh. He inhaled its sweetness after the smoke-filled hall. If only he'd kept his mouth shut. Still, at least they knew what was killing the cutters in Ingham 90 miles to the south. But the disease was creeping closer, bringing men down in El Arish not 25 miles away. A new chum at the Mourilyan Mill down the road had died just days ago, and Mark also owed his place in the Goondi gang to a man's death.

He sighed, rolling his neck on his shoulders to relieve the tightness. Behind him he could hear men clattering out from the theatre. Some stopped to congratulate him, slapping his back before walking away. He knew then they had high expectations and he wasn't sure he could

live up to them; never wanted to get involved, knowing once he did, instead of the rats, he would become the target! He'd learned that early in life.

Mark had only come to Innisfail for the work, crossing the Great Dividing Range to the coastal fringe south of Cairns, to cut cane. Sugar was the country's salvation, and he counted himself lucky to have a job in the industry. Over the past few years, a lot went without, men with haunted eyes and hollow bellies crisscrossing the country in search of work or starving on the Government's parsimonious Susso. So, first his brother Finn had crossed the range, and a year later Mark left his father to manage the tin dredge alone and had followed his younger brother.

Just at that moment, Finn tumbled out of the Airdome Theatre sparring with his mate Billie. He saw Mark waiting on the pavement and yelled out that they were heading for the pub. Beer, two-up and the odd fight was Finn's idea of a relaxing evening after a gruelling day in the cane paddocks, but Mark wouldn't join him tonight. He'd promised Jack he'd be there for the campaign launch.

Finally, he saw Bert come out with the union organiser. Bert's patrician features were solemn, but his hands flicked and flew in his cajoling way. Mark looked away. Bert was wasting his time. The union wouldn't listen – they just didn't care.

A car crested the hill a block away, its headlights illuminating the Catholic cathedral. It was a building the community were proud of, something even a bigger city might envy, and Mark quietly admired the building's gracious lines. The headlights lit the building with a golden glow before swooping along the road, the vehicle growling effortlessly towards him. Its chrome flashed in the streetlights and the wheel arches flared into running boards that dipped

and swooped along the length of the car. Someone behind Mark whistled, and the men walking away, stopped and turned to stare.

As it came abreast, he saw it was a 1930 Bentley 8 litre and he gazed in admiration at its sleek lines. A face stared out the rear window and seemed to fix on him, swivelling as the car purred past. Conflicting emotions coursed through him. What would it be like – that kind of life? Despite everything, he couldn't help but hanker after it.

The Bentley slowed towards the junction at Edith Street, turned right and disappeared around the corner.

A hand on his shoulder startled Mark and he looked around and into Bert's wise black eyes.

Bert said quietly, "So, comrade?" His gaze was searching as he nodded approval at Mark.

Mark shrugged; his mouth twisted in wry resignation. "Come on, we'll miss Jack's launch."

Bert said, "You'll be a fine delegate."

Mark shook his head, less in disagreement than in amazement at the randomness of it all. They set off along Rankin Street, heading towards the intersection at Edith Street, the same direction the Bentley had taken. As they approached the junction, an evening breeze danced up from the Johnston River, stirring eddies of dust in the gutters and ruffling Mark's hair. He refused to wear a hat, reasoning there was no sun at night, so what was the point. His old cloth hat worked well when he was cutting in the sun but these hats in the evening are just a fashion

statement, aping the ruling class, and he had better things to do with his hard-earned cash than buy fancy hats.

The breeze brought with it the smell of salted fish and bananas from the river wharf. It eased past him and on towards where Jack was holding his campaign launch at How Kee's corner. When it reached the junction, it eddied around the gathering crowd, lifting the women's skirts and billowing the men's shirts. The men clung to their hats while the women turned their backs and held down hems. For a brief moment his anger was forgotten as Mark, buoyed by their laughter, joined the crowd.

Beatrice stared out the car window as they arrived in the little township, surprised by the numbers of people milling about in the streets. It was so different from Sydney. She smoothed the silk over her lap, glad to be out and about in society. Since she had arrived in Innisfail, she had been cooped up with no company worth speaking of. She didn't know how she could bear it for much longer. Still, tonight looked to be mildly amusing even in this provincial backwater. She exhaled slowly as the car moved along the main street in what Queensland quaintly called the first-class section.

Then she spotted a crowd of men loitering on the pavement outside a large building. "Oh, a picture theatre. How wonderful." She spoke to her aunt who sat on the seat beside her.

Her Aunt Emily smiled. "You may find yourself pleasantly surprised at how much a small country town has to offer."

Her Uncle George, sitting in the front passenger seat, grumbled. "Full of riff raff."

Beatrice stared out her window wondering why only men seemed to be congregating at the pictures.

The car moved on and rounded a corner, before approaching another intersection where a new crowd gathered on the street corner ahead.

She pushed her forehead against the glass. “What are those people doing?”

This time the crowd included women. A red sandwich board on the pavement proclaimed boldly *Vote Communist!* The billboard sported a picture of a man, arms raised, clutching a hammer and sickle crossed above his head.

A strange noise emanated from the front seat. It sounded like a hastily swallowed expletive.

“Who are they?” she asked.

Her uncle said, “They should be outlawed. Look away my dear.”

She craned her neck. A man, standing on a box, addressed the crowd. Who would have thought it; Bolsheviks in Innisfail, but then her uncle had told her that sugar was a beacon of hope, drawing people from around the world.

She lost sight of the crowd as the car slowed to a crawl, and they pulled up in front of a large building with raised ornate plaster letters proclaiming *Regent Theatre*. A white banner hung below with *The Ambulance Ball* embroidered in red. A red carpet ran across the pavement and in through two large open wooden doors. Festive lights spilled out across Edith

Street, illuminating cars lined bumper to bumper along the pavement. The driver pulled into the entrance gap at the edge of the carpet and stopped the car.

While Beatrice waited for him to open her door she glanced towards the crowd, but it was obscured by the cars lining the road. She fidgeted with her reticule, wondering how she might get away to see what was happening. Such a strange place: a society ball held half a street block from a Bolshevik meeting. But her aunt and uncle would never allow her to wander about the streets by herself. Perhaps she could slip away just for a quick peek. She would never have another opportunity like it, and how grand to be able to boast of such things when she returned home to her set in Sydney. Lawrence would call her brave, although he always said that.

Beatrice followed her aunt and uncle into the theatre foyer, from where a wide archway opened into the ballroom. Green bamboo canes crisscrossed alcoves casting colossal shadows across the dance floor. Gilded mirrors reflected glittering orbs of light along the walls, and red and gold streamers fluttered across the ceiling. On a raised dais across the room, the Rah-Rah Boys swung out a spirited *Tiger Rag*.

Beatrice gazed about the foyer. She hadn't realised Innisfail could produce anything so magical. When she had arrived a month ago, she had been dismayed by an unending landscape of flowering sugar and wild forested mountains. When she and her father got off the train her skirt had stuck to her thighs, suffocating in their silken encasements, and she wondered why she'd agreed to come here, leaving behind the delicious cool of the Sydney winter? But tonight was charming, and the tropical winter evening relatively cool.

Her uncle interrupted her thoughts, nodding at the hall's décor. "Colours of the Ambulance Brigade." He took her hand and bent over it slightly. Then he said, "Your aunt will make the introductions." With a small bow of his head, he turned and strode towards a group of men on the other side of the ballroom, all similarly dressed in the standard evening dress of white tie and tails.

She followed her aunt across the ballroom floor, casting a glance at her reflection in the mirrors they passed. The backless oyster satin had been a good choice, paired as it was with the iris mink stole. She was relieved to see all the other women wore similar evening wear although possibly not of the same quality. But then they didn't have her advantages or the availability of Sydney fashion houses.

Her aunt looked a little livelier this evening, patting her neat blonde hair as her faded blue gaze flittered about the room. She took Beatrice's elbow and said, "Come my dear, I will introduce you to the good ladies from the hospital committee who have organised all this." Her hand gave a small all-encompassing sweep.

As they passed the group of men with whom her uncle conversed, Beatrice heard him say, "Another war's a certainty. You mark my words. It's just a matter of time and Chancellor Hitler, now that he's President, will sort out those Russian Bolsheviks once and for all."

A man broke away from the group and came to an abrupt stop before her aunt, almost blocking their way. He said, "Good evening Mrs West, may I ask to be introduced to your niece?"

Before her aunt could respond he was speaking again, but this time addressing her. “Miss Langham, it’s a pleasure to meet you. Howard Rainer, at your service.” He grinned, placed his hand on his left breast and bowed his head.

His obliviousness to protocol caused Beatrice some amusement as she noted her aunt’s frown, but his fingernails certainly needed a manicure.

“I wanted to be the first to claim a spot on your dance card. I’ve heard so much about you. Well, I should say the whole town has been looking forward to meeting you. You are the closest thing to royalty we’ve ever had visiting our town.”

Beatrice felt her face growing red. How awful that they all knew. She shrugged. “You’re mistaken Mr Rainer. It is my English grandfather to whom you refer. I am no one, not even close to anything, let alone royalty.” She modified her tone, and said, “Really, I’m just a city girl out of my depth in all this glorious tropical wilderness.”

On the street corner less than a block away from where the Ambulance Ball was held, Mark and Bert stood among the crowd of working men and women. They listened to the barrister Fred Paterson as he launched Jack’s election campaign. Mark thought Fred’s commitment to the cause was admirable but he pitied his wife, who, rumour had it, often put up with pumpkins as a pay packet in lieu of money. He’d met Fred once or twice, but he really counted Jack Henry as his friend.

Jack had been in the cane since the Tully Mill opened in ’25. Now, he was the leader of the Party’s 9th District, although everyone still thought of him as a gun cutter. Mark gave him

good odds in the election this year, maybe not to steal the seat of Herbert from Labor, but to show the growing commitment of the sugar workers to the working-class cause. Mark reckoned Labor had lost its way under Forgan-Smith and his AWU cronies, but everyone admired Jack. He was fair-minded – a straight talker, held his liquor and looked after his mates. You couldn't ask more. Besides, he'd got it right when he said the only thing the bosses cared about was reducing wages to increase profit.

A streak of light blazed across the tropical night sky and vanished. A pang of nostalgia took Mark by surprise as he remembered wishing on shooting stars, closing his eight-year-old eyes and refusing to speak in case his voice broke the magic. Now here he was, not through enchantment but serious graft, and it wouldn't be long before he'd have his own farm, master of his own destiny. That's if he didn't die of Weil's disease first.

The farm was all he'd ever wanted, although his father called it a fool's dream, and blamed his mother for creating the desire in the first place. His dad's Norwegian stoicism and socialist outlook remained unimpressed by land ownership. His father was actually his stepfather but to Mark he'd always been just dad. Mark's mum had always enthused over his ambition, painting pictures of the rolling green hills of Italy's mulberry estates where her Nonno once laboured to produce silk. But Mark wouldn't grow mulberries for silkworms. Sugar! That was the future.

He glanced around at the people in the crowd, searching for anyone else he knew. He imagined Finn and the rest of the gang were probably elbowing their way to the front of the bar at the Exchange, guzzling down beers before the last tram back to Goondi. Most of them weren't interested in politics or who was running in the next election. He couldn't understand

that. Politics affected their lives, but most of the gang, including his ratbag brother, only worried about where the next beer was coming from, or where they might find a game of two-up without the coppers catching them.

A hundred yards or so further along Edith Street, Regent Theatre was lit up, its lights bouncing off the chrome bumpers and headlights of vehicles lined up outside. The place crawled with cockies attending the fundraiser. Mark had been invited by his cousin's nursing friend, who was apparently keen, but he declined—didn't want to give the wrong impression.

A movement from across the street caught his attention. A woman in evening dress hesitated, glancing behind her before stepping on to the road. She looked like a ghost sheathed in mercury drifting across the void, sidestepping horse dung and puddles. Her form filled Mark's vision as the breeze flattened her dress against her body, showing the long curve of her waist and the sleek length of leg beneath its fluid cling. Soft hair fluttered about her face and lifted to expose a pale neck.

"Merda!" Bert's exclamation jerked Mark from his fantasy.

Bert nodded towards the woman. "She shouldn't be here."

Mark's eyebrows rose in surprise. "Do you know her?"

"No," Bert shrugged. "Ah, maybe a little. I met her last week in the library. She let me have the newspaper she was reading, and we had a brief conversation."

She stepped onto the pavement as Jack swapped places with Fred. The crowd jostled and Bert moved to protect her, gesturing to Mark to join him as he stood behind the woman to keep the rowdy crowd at bay.

A fur wrap hugged her shoulders but beneath, Mark glimpsed a smooth and naked back above the low scoop of her dress, the exposed band of flesh merely an arm's length away. He stared transfixed at the curve of her cheek. A long slim hand slid up to cup the back of her neck as if she could sense his gaze hot on her skin. He willed her to turn around but of course she didn't. What was she doing here? He tried to imagine what she saw as Jack took off his hat and jacket and rolled up his sleeves, then stepped up to shake Fred's hand.

Mark turned his attention back to the campaign launch. Jack's serious dark gaze swept the crowd. His silent authority drew everyone's attention until talking stopped, and only the shuffle of feet remained.

The silvery woman inhaled, placing her palm at the base of her throat. What Mark would give to have that effect on her. Her skin was so pale and soft in the streetlight he wondered what it would feel like and imagined his hands running down her naked back. He rubbed his thumb and forefingers together, feeling the ridged calluses and knew his hands were too rough for such delicate skin. He folded his arms as Jack's voice carried across the crowd.

"Shall we strengthen a Fascist Lyons government?" Jack asked.

Mark grinned and looked around as the mob shouted, "No!" They were on Jack's side. That was certain.

Jack asked again. "Shall we endanger the labour movement and impoverish small farmers and the workers?"

Again, the mob shouted back. "No!" They jostled and Mark held out a hand to keep them away from her.

“Shall we allow our wages to continue being reduced and lower the living standard further in Queensland?” Jack demanded.

The roar became louder as Jack worked his magic on the crowd. But the unruly mob seemed to upset the woman, and she looked around with darting gaze. Mark wished he had the presence of mind to do something, but he was too late.

Bert stepped towards her, lifting his hat, and saying, “Miss Beatrice, it’s a pleasure to see you once more.”

She flinched, and Bert said, “I did not wish to startle you. You were engrossed, no?”

She sounded uncertain as she said, “Doctor.”

Bert filled in the rest. “Manzoni.”

Mark could see the heightened colour in her cheeks even in the low light from the streetlamps. Jack’s voice faded and became meaningless as he watched Bert take the woman’s elbow and escort her away from the crowd. He found himself following as if drawn on by magnetism.

Behind him, Jack’s voice rose. “Shall we defend the Italians, the Aborigines, the Chinese, Spanish and all other workers who toil on this land?”

Men folded their arms, their faces grim and muted murmuring rippled out. The woman stopped and looked back, her gaze brushing past Mark to fix on Jack.

But Jack’s gaze was directed at those with folded arms. “Will we fight chauvinism, Fascism and victimisation?”

No one said a word although some shifted uncomfortably under Jack stare. Then some wag broke the tension.

“What about the women Jack, can we defend them against your charms?”

Laughter and cheers.

Jack smiled. “The women must join our cause for they can fight alongside us just as well as the men.”

The silvery woman took a step towards the crowd as if she would leave Bert standing in the street, and Mark took a step towards her.

Someone shouted, “You haven’t met my missus, Jack.”

“Better he doesn’t, chum,” a man in a singlet called out.

More laughter broke out, and two men wrestled briefly.

Bert said, “You should not be out here alone, Miss Beatrice. I shall escort you to your destination. Which way are you heading?”

She shook her head. “It’s all right.” She was still casting rapid glances back at Jack. “I just stepped out for some air. It’s just a little way to the side door of the theatre, but I should get back. They’ll have missed me. Thank you for looking out for me.”

She caught Mark staring at her and dropped her gaze. “I must go.”

Mark watched her walk down the road towards the Regent Theatre before he turned back to Bert.

“Why didn’t you introduce me?”

“Ha! Chi non vede il fondo, non passi l’acqua,” Bert said and walked back to listen to Jack.

Don’t cross the water unless you see the bottom. “What the hell does that even mean?”

He frowned at Bert’s retreating form, and then turned back toward the Regent Theatre, but she had gone. He sighed and followed Bert back to the crowd. If only he’d accepted that invitation to the Ambulance Ball.

2.

Beatrice had so wanted to study English like her cousin Charles, who had just come down from Cambridge University in England. Now, the letter that arrived this morning said he had an offer from the British Broadcaster. It wasn't fair. She had always longed to go to university, find a paying job and become completely independent of her father.

Her Aunt Beryl, her father's cousin, was the first woman in her family to go to university and now she was a columnist with the *Women's Weekly Magazine*. She admired Beryl more than anyone and tried to emulate her. Beryl had told her not to let her father dissuade her and said no amount of longing would give him back the days before suffrage, no matter how much he might wish it.

But her father had said girls didn't need an education to marry, and Beatrice knew he thought his cousin was a very bad influence with what he called her brazenly modern ways. But Beatrice didn't want to get married. She wanted to travel and find adventures and be of use to the world. The last thing she needed was to settle down with sweet little Lawrence Anderson and his persistent desire to marry her. He was so keen that in terror of succumbing to his gentle but unrelenting pressure, she had seized on her father's offer to accompany him to the north, just to get away from Lawrence for a while.

Her father approved of Lawrence because his family were as rich as the mythical Croesus, from some alchemy to do with the manufacture of beer and spirits. Not even the financial crisis had made much of a dent in his family's profits, although they needed her father's sugar.

Sometimes Beatrice thought she was the pawn in a pact to cement a business relationship. But she would soon come into her own money from her grandmother's legacy, although her father would remain a trustee until she married. Not that she intended to marry. That seemed a career in pursuit of slavery. She planned to be a journalist and earn her own money come hellfire or flood. She glanced about guiltily as if her blasphemous thoughts might be overheard but she was alone.

She was only here because her mother had to go to England to see to her grandfather who was poorly. To distract Beatrice from pursuing a university education, her father had offered her this trip to the tropics. She thought the visit might be romantic, imagined Creole islands with cool breezes, waving coconut palms, inviting turquoise seas, but it wasn't like that. It was hot, and sticky with only taciturn jungle or whispering sugar stalks for endless miles. She sighed: at least it would give her an opportunity to write about a tropical life living in the sugar. That would please her father. In Arthur Langham's book, anything to do with sugar was all right.

She would find an angle and try to get an article published. There was more than one pathway into paid work. She just needed to be imaginative and use her time wisely. But now she wished she'd gone with her mother or remained at home with the housekeeper. She missed her Sydney set, to the point where she even thought of Lawrence with nostalgia.

The tropics were dull, and she secretly thought not even the pioneers, who had seized the area for the Crown, had any imagination. Both big rivers, distinguished only by geographical designation, north or south, that converged at Innisfail were named after the Native Police

Inspector Robert Johnstone. He had stumbled across their confluence when searching the jungle wilderness for the shipwrecked survivors of the brig *Maria*.

Beatrice didn't know why he should be so honoured when really, he sounded like an opportunistic thug, although her father called it the law of nature where civilised races must inevitably subsume the natural world through modern progress. It all sounded horrendously cruel, at least judging by the stories she had overheard her uncle telling her father about the dispersal raids that his father and the Inspector engaged in.

When she asked, her father told her the natives don't settle, they just amble across the land in a kind of migration, hunting along the way. They're a menace to any landowner. Trouble is that domestic animals are too tempting an opportunity. Easy prey, d'you know. But Beatrice didn't believe it and had asked why if they don't settle, did they need dispersing?

Her father expressed his usual exasperation at her curiosity about unsuitable subjects. So now, she only ever heard snippets when she eavesdropped. Not that she approved of any undignified snooping but sometimes it was unavoidable. And no matter what evil deeds he'd done, the man had given his name to the North Johnstone River that now cradled her uncle's farm, *Sunrise Sugar Estate*.

The farm occupied a sprawling swell of land just outside the township and was surrounded by plantations of Badilla sugar cane. Besides the sugar, paddocks for beef and dairy cattle, horse yards and outbuildings surrounded the main house. Flowering trees from the far corners of the Empire flanked the gracious homestead, casting shade and crimson petals across the gardens, protecting the house walls from the blistering sun.

Yet, the only people who ever seemed to visit were old military men, public officials and businesspeople from the town. All after her Uncle George's money, her father had complained. That's all anyone cared about these days was money. Beatrice thought people were far more important. To her, money was merely a means to an end. She had once voiced that opinion, to one of her teachers. The teacher retaliated that was because she had never gone without. She wanted to argue but remained silent as manners demanded. Money wasn't real, merely a fabrication of a sovereign state.

The same teacher had told her class a story about the British colonisation of West Africa, which proved Beatrice's point. The teacher had said that when the colonisers wanted to establish the value of British currency, they demanded the West Africans pay tax and when they didn't, they burned down their huts as penalty. The irony was that the currency was only available if the Africans worked for the British.

Beatrice couldn't understand why the Africans hadn't revolted. She would have if someone had burned down her house. How angry would they have been? Surely the villagers outnumbered the British coffee planters. Shortly afterwards, the teacher who had challenged her had vanished, and Beatrice never had a chance to interrogate her further.

Still, she understood money was a necessary evil, one that the old Scotsman, Adam Smith, who her father was fond of quoting, said organised the way the world operated, although it wasn't doing a very good job of it at the moment because it seemed there wasn't enough to go around. She didn't understand why the Government couldn't create more, given it was theirs to make and theirs to take. Really the whole Depression situation had ruined conversations at the dinner table. Now it was all about balancing accounts, balancing debt,

balancing payments: it drove her to distraction. She secretly believed money was the Mammon of her father's existence although of course she could never say that out loud. In fact, there wasn't much she could say aloud in polite company. Perhaps after all, tradition and manners would prevent her revolt even if her house was set on fire. She didn't have the courage to go against protocol.

She put her thoughts aside as she strolled through the house looking for someone to talk to. Anyone! But it seemed she was alone in this mausoleum. She imagined despondency oozing from its walls, seeping through the clutter. Everywhere lay artefacts and reminders of pageantry. She stopped in the drawing room. On one wall a painting of her uncle's father, William Archibald West stared out, with forbidding expression and rigid self-righteousness. Cruelty creased into the bracketed lines around the mouth, and an air of indifference to humanity was etched deep in his leaden eyes. She glanced around for a portrait of her uncle's mother, but the dead woman remained unremembered, except for the whitewashed headstone in the family cemetery that Beatrice had seen when she arrived at the farm. She had died when George was only a boy.

Beatrice liked to imagine ghosts drifting through these rooms. They seemed so stale as if imbued with the private despair of history. She'd read somewhere that the dead don't know they are dead, but drift among the living in ignorance. It would explain why her relatives chose to ignore her, even though she was a guest in their house. Perhaps they were all dead, which would clarify an awful lot because that would mean she had come on this trip, not as she had thought of her own volition, but because death gives one little choice. She stopped. Why on earth would the dead come to this godforsaken place? She shook her head. The dead could not be expected to know everything.

Even so, she quite liked the notion that she might be no longer mortal flesh, for it would explain why, when she came upon her Aunt Emily, she usually didn't react. Beatrice found clearing her throat occasionally worked. At least Emily offered a flicker of recognition through her habitual Bayer's induced heroin fog. She would turn her face towards Beatrice, a radiant but inane smile plastered across her face. Any acknowledgment of her niece occasioned nothing more than the shiver one might feel in response to clammy ectoplasm, an attention so vague it might snuff out as easily as extinguishing the Tilley lantern flame Beatrice had seen the maid Ida carry when she would make her way home at the end of her day.

Beatrice's roll of fantasy stopped abruptly, and she tilted her head at the painting, having no idea where Ida lived or any of the servants for that matter. She turned away and continued her journey through the house, whiling away the minutes until Howard Rainer arrived to collect her.

She had danced with Howard several times at the Ambulance Ball, and she liked him. His manner was confident and authoritative, fitting for an officer in the Commonwealth Investigation Unit. He'd told her his role was to keep watch on foreign criminal gangs. Beatrice remembered the newspaper headlines she had seen in Uncle George's office shortly after they had arrived. The article talked about terrorists in Innisfail. But her uncle had assured her that was all over now. Howard had patted her hand and told her that it was nothing for her to worry about and a sudden desire to stamp on his toes swamped her. It was just the sort of thing her father would say, but she'd averted her eyes to hide her irritation.

He'd missed none of her expression. That was the trouble with policemen, they saw too much, but he did explain that the criminals who called themselves the Black Hand had been mostly deported.

Innisfail was so full of people from across the world that Beatrice sometimes felt as if she'd wandered into a foreign country. Not that immigrants in Sydney were scarce, but here they were more obvious, occupying the streets as if they owned the place, talking loudly in funny languages, and besides, it was so hot and sticky all the time, and so full of strange creatures and manners.

She wandered out of the drawing room, trailing her fingers along the walls, curious as to the whereabouts of her aunt and uncle. Her father, as usual, was away on a business trip. The first she knew about his plans was when he'd come out of the house at the beginning of the week, holding a suitcase in his hand, his air forbidding, his posture upright and his suit as sharply tailored as ever. He'd stooped to bestow a kiss somewhere in the air above Beatrice's head, leaving behind a waft of Blenheim Bouquet and cigars as he told her he was off to Ingham and would be away for a few days.

Beatrice had tried to look cheerful, but she was ready to scream. All she did was read, write letters or fill up her journal. Occasionally she dabbled with embroidery, but she wasn't much good at sewing and preferred anything, even a constitutional walk, to the constraint of tidy stitches. She resolved to make inquiries about volunteering for the Ambulance Brigade or the hospital just to get out of the house. It was why, when Howard had asked if she would like to attend the rowing regatta today, her gratitude had been almost pathetic.

The doorbell jangled but Beatrice refused to appear eager and continued her amble along the corridor, waiting for Ida to find her. At the hall mirror she stopped and pinned on a straw hat.

A little way along the corridor, her uncle's study door was ajar, and she pushed it open to peek inside. The room was empty, so she walked across to look out the window to see what kind of vehicle Howard drove. Of course, it was dull, black and official like a policeman's car. Nothing like the red and gold trimmed Cabriolet that Lawrence drove. She sighed. The roof creaked with her as if in sympathy.

Her hand slid down the brocade curtain, and she admired its quality. The house had been added to over the decades and was now a warren of architectural styles in deference to Empire, with wide verandas accommodating the tropical weather, and a new wing added after the 1918 cyclone.

Her uncle told her his father had built it in the days when Innisfail was still called Geraldton. That had perked her interest, especially when he had said a Japanese ship had arrived to collect timber, only to find they were supposed to be in Geraldton in Western Australia. So, she could understand why Geraldton in Far North Queensland became Innisfail. How easy to change a name when it was inconvenient!

Her uncle had gone on to say that before his family cleared the scrub, only 50 years before, the blacks overran the place, paddling the rivers in canoes and living off fish. It had sounded so romantic until he added, rather disparagingly, the natives hadn't bothered to clear the forest and grow crops. As if hard physical work and the destruction of nature were the only things worth doing in life. But now the natives were dispersed and there was not a black in

sight. That is, aside from the Melanesian servants ... although her aunt told her there was most probably a good deal of native blood in their veins, but best not to mention it.

Despite those in his employ, her uncle complained of too many foreign blacks, and they should go back from where they came. To her great puzzlement, he referred to the Greeks and Italians and other foreigners. Her father had to explain that Uncle George referred to a special Queensland Royal Commission that had categorised Italian and Greek immigrants as non-European, which seemed decidedly odd. Didn't they come from Europe and if they were living here now, could they be classified as foreigners?

If that was the case, was she herself a foreigner? After all she had been born in England, and her mother was English, although Beatrice really knew nothing about Britain other than from books. She had never felt any different from her father, born of a long line of settlers who had taken up land grants on Liberty Plains, now part of Sydney and where the family had their home.

She should go back to the School of Arts library in town and carry out further research about the royal commission. Last week in the library, meeting Doctor Manzoni had quite distracted her from her sugar industry research mission, although the sugar industry was quite boring, refusing all humanity in favour of plant strains and biological agents.

Thinking of Doctor Manzoni brought a reminding flash of the political candidate speaking on the street the night of the Ambulance Ball. Mr Henry had said the most amazing things. She had allowed Doctor Manzoni to lead her away from the crowd despite wanting to stay and listen. Just as she was about to protest, she saw Doctor Manzoni's companion staring

at her, very boldly. It had quite taken her breath away and she suddenly felt an urgent need to flee back to the safety of the ball.

A voice from behind her said, "Miss Beatrice?"

Beatrice jumped and swung around. Ida stood in the doorway, a small dark figure dressed in white, with a white cap pinned to her head. She bobbed, a small jerk that acted, Beatrice assumed, as a curtsy.

"There's a gentleman, Mr Howard, asking for you. He's waiting in the morning room." She bobbed again.

Beatrice tried to gain control of her thumping heart, and said, "Thank you, Ida."

She checked herself in the mirror once more, pinching her cheeks to gain some colour and then made her way towards the morning room at the front of the house.

In the motor car on the short drive to town, she quizzed Howard. "I saw a man speaking on the street corner the other night. A candidate for the seat of Herbert, a Mr Henry I think."

"The Communist leader?" He glanced across at her, his brow furrowed. "You shouldn't wander the streets by yourself at night. It's not safe."

She ignored his concern. "He called the Prime Minister a Fascist."

She waited for Howard's reaction. She knew Mr Lyons and several of his Cabinet including Mr Menzies. They had been to the house to visit on occasion, and it wasn't the first time she'd heard the word Fascist. Her father had much admiration for Mr Mussolini's Fascist

Italy and said it was exactly what Australia needed to recover from the Depression. But why the candidate had looked so angry was a mystery.

Howard said, “You needn’t worry about Fascists. They’re mostly the stalwarts of the community, many of them are doctors or returned soldiers, and farmers, even some of the lawyers in town are Fascist sympathisers. No, it’s the Eytalians, the Black Hand and the Bolsheviks we need to worry about. In my opinion, they’re the ones likely to cause trouble. But it’s the Bolsheviks who are the real terrorists and they’re a growing menace in this town. All they want is revolution. They’re too lazy to work, and it’s much easier to overthrow hard-working businesses and landowners and steal their profits.” He glanced across at her. “It’s my job to make sure they don’t get their way, and Jack Henry is the red devil behind much of it.”

Beatrice glanced at Howard’s beaked profile, noting the clenched jaw beneath a pencil thin moustache. She admired men who did not bend to fashion, but she suspected Howard’s moustache had nothing to do with the changing times and everything to do with inflexibility. His knuckles on the steering wheel showed white-edged strength as he turned out the driveway on to the road leading into the town. Fine black hairs like sparse wire coils coated the backs of his hands and disappeared up his wrists into his jacket sleeves, reminding her of an animal pelt, although nothing about him looked soft.

She turned away to gaze out the car’s window. Beyond the garden’s tree-lined borders, an impenetrable wall of cane appeared as wave after wave of endless green, topped with silvery-mauve feathered flowers, undulating prettily across the alluvial valleys. But up close the segmented stalks holding the silken heads looked blood-streaked and creaked menacingly

when the wind blew. Sometimes, passing clouds cast moving shadows as if some monstrous beast slithered through the stalks to its secret lair.

She shivered, imagining becoming lost, forever condemned to wander alone in a maze of sugar. It was of such density, surely only insects, rats and snakes could prosper. She had imagined the tropics would be so romantic, but they weren't at all. They were too lush like overripe fruit, and perspiration coated her skin as if at any moment she might turn into some fetid marsh creature.

“Howard, how far away is the seaside?”

“As the crow flies about two miles I'd say, but there's no direct road. The only way without travelling for miles is to go to Flying Fish Point by river ferry.”

“Oh.” She waited, hoping he might suggest they go.

He glanced at her. “I would take you to the beach, but I have to go down to Ingham tomorrow, there's some civil unrest. These Bolsheviks again, I'm afraid. Perhaps when I come back.”

“My father's in Ingham.” She clutched her gloved hands tightly, raising them to her chin.

“Yes. I know,” he said. “But you needn't fear, he'll be fine. I'll be there to protect him.” He grinned at her, and the smile changed his face, softening its hawkishness and making him appear more endearing. Then he ruined it by saying, “It's nothing for you to worry over. Seriously, your father will be fine. They're just some disgruntled Anarchists demanding better wages or some such nonsense.”

Why did men always assume they could tell her how she should feel and behave? If she wanted to worry, she jolly well would, regardless of what Howard Rainer said she need or need not do.

3.

It was Saturday. A soft drizzle fell, and mist lay like smoke puddles in the shallow valleys. As far as Mark could see, sugar cane flowered across the land, acre upon acre, topped by feathery fronds that glinted in the dawn light. On the western horizon, squatting amid the Bellenden Ker mountain range, the great bulk of Bartle Frère was free of its perennial shroud. So, despite the mist it might still turn out fine.

He grabbed a canvas water bag, hooked his knife to his belt and picked up his file then followed the gang down the barracks steps. When they arrived at the paddock, he saw the tangle of thorny weeds and his shoulders sagged.

Finn glanced at Mark. "Should chuck a match in."

"If only." Mark ran his knife edge against the file while he looked out across the field.

Danny said, "How're your hands?" Danny was the ganger, a giant of a man who held the men's respect.

"Good now." Mark scrutinised his palms.

He knew Danny worried about infections. He couldn't afford to lose another man at this stage of the season, especially as he'd lost the last bloke Johnno. Mark had never met Johnno, but Finn said they'd found him running down the street naked and shouting demons were chasing him. They'd got him to the hospital, but he'd died hours later.

Keith Bannerman joined them, wiping mist from his face. He was a wiry man who walked with the rolling gait so often seen in cane cutters. He unhooked his cane knife from behind his back and said, “Delicate hands, dear.”

“Piss off Keith,” Mark said.

When Mark had first started in the cane, for a week or two he had been unable to even hold a drawing pencil. To him that was the worst punishment. On his first day cutting, tiny pearl-like blisters spread across the criss-crosses of his palms. By the end of the second day the blisters had grown into great pulpy envelopes. The next day they burst leaving his hands like raw meat. Danny had told him to piss on them, but he hadn’t thought that was a good idea. The skin scabbed over and eventually grew hard with calluses. He knew Danny had worried he wouldn’t make it, but Mark was not going to quit.

Mark had never regretted leaving home to come here, although he worried about his dad working the tin dredge by himself, but since the crash there just wasn’t the money in it for three grown men. Aside from that, he wasn’t sorry to leave the comfort of his neighbour’s delicious thighs, nor his mother’s cooking. Not even the nostalgic spice of Iron Bark trees, as they shivered off dust in the bone-bleaching winds, called to him. He hadn’t minded the almost exclusive company of hard-eyed men or the decay of humid, mist-filled valleys at the base of these jungle-clad mountains, because at £5 a week this was the best paying job around. A bit of pain wasn’t going to make him quit.

Finn’s best mate, Billy Hewitt, arrived and lifted one leg letting rip. Danny looked at him with disgust. “Point your arse at the cane and shoot one of your Goding’s fireflies at that Badilla bastard.”

Danny grinned at Mark's bewilderment and said, "Great fire of Tully in '32."

Lance Mackay rode up and chucked his bike down as he blew a gob of spit to the ground. "The Tully fire got rid of the weeds, but." His face was a mass of dark freckles under an enormous straw hat that got knocked off regularly when he cut.

Mark reckoned he was probably lucky his own skin just got darker in the sun. Even Finn suffered with sunburn.

Billy grinned. "And the rats."

Danny said dryly, "And most of the cane once the fire got out of control. They lost a lot of the crop; too much burned to harvest in time before the sugar was lost. Goding was lucky he wasn't caught. The growers would have strung him up."

Lance and Keith didn't live in the barracks. They were both married and didn't mix much with the rest of the gang outside of work. Billy and Danny had been harvesting cane the longest, and then there was Javier Cruz, an American who'd only been in the cane a little longer than Finn.

Javier stood next to Mark and for a moment they were quiet as they surveyed the crop. Javier took a rollie from his breast pocket and lit it, his cupped hands sheltering the cigarette from the drizzle. His fingers were grimed with embedded red dirt and nicotine stains. Then in his American drawl he said, "Burning's better than getting the rats' disease. I heard more guys are down with it in Ingham. They are demanding a meeting with the union to do something, but the union say there's nothing they can do unless we find out what's causing it. Mark, you

should go down to Ingham and talk to the fellows. The least the union can do is hold a meeting and discuss what can be done.”

Danny said, “The Ingham men are saying it’s the rat poison that the council are using for bait.”

“Bejesus,” Lance said. “Last year they said it was typhus, then they said coastal fever.”

Javier ignored Lance. “They might be right; the baits stink enough.”

Danny laughed and said, “You forget the rain, they always blame the effing rain. You’d wonder why we do this graft. Come on lads, finish your smokes. Time’s a wasting.”

Mark suspected Danny made light of it to prevent the gang getting panicky, but the company’s reluctance to act was beyond him. He had written a letter, requesting a meeting as the rank-and-file minority delegate, but a week had passed, and still no response. He stabbed his copper file-tube into the ground and took his place at the head of a row of cane. “Maybe if we get up a petition.”

“It’s worth a try.” Javier chucked his smoke into the dirt and ground it out beneath his heel. Then he took the row next to Mark.

The rest of the gang each lined up at the start of a row. On Danny’s signal, they moved forward together in rhythmic battle. One step forward, bend, grab the cane low, slash, straighten, then top and tail the stalk to remove leaves and roots, and chuck the cane stalk behind to form windrows. Then on to the next plant. The critical thing was to keep up with each other. The line of men remained strung out in an even row. If they moved at a different pace it became dangerous, especially if you met a cutter coming back along the row next to

yours. The slash from a cane knife could be the end of you. As it was there were too many accidents.

The bone crushing weariness Mark had felt in the first weeks of the season had abated, just as Danny had promised it would. At first, he doubted he'd make it. Even at night, he dreamed he was redoing the day's work. All night long, bend, grasp, slash, top, tail, twist, stack and on to the next plant, to do it again. On and on along the rows, plant by plant, tram by tram, hands stinging from a thousand tiny cuts, blisters popping and bleeding making the knife handle sticky.

Yet even though he was now accustomed to the work, as the new chum Mark had to work hard to keep up, and barely raised his gaze even when bees crawled up his arms vying for the oozing sugar juice. He switched off his mind, imagining he was a machine in perpetual motion, ignoring the smells of musty brown silt, sour rat's piss, acrid sweat and the sharp herby smell of the weeds, but he remained alert for snakes, particularly the vipers that lay in ambush.

At the end of each day, he would stand straight, stretching his back, ignoring his own stink, and sweat, and dirt and pain, gazing with pride at the great expanse of cleared paddock. As the sun sank behind the mountain range casting the plains in purple shadows, he would look back and see only stalks left upright, poking out of the trash and loamy soil and feel proud of the job they'd done. The earth looked ravaged, but he knew that in a few months new cane would sprout from the ratoons to cover old scars, just as new skin formed hard calluses on his palms. It was a protective shell for the soft underbelly of land that was once forest floor.

At the end of each day, it was Mark and Finn's job to lay out the tracks for the wagon to collect the cane. Then the gang would load the wagons, stacking clean stalks in layers, in a kind of cross hatching that gave the whole thing balance.

When Mark first started, he was slow. He knew it and was mortified when the others jumped across to help him finish cutting his rows, or when his stacks on the wagon slid sideways, sending the lot crashing to the ground. Finn had reassured him; they forgave inexperience easily, but they didn't forgive slackers.

This was the hardest work he'd ever done, much harder graft than working on the tin dredge back home. But at least now he no longer lagged behind the others, although he had a way to go before he could beat the pace of the experienced men, particularly Danny. He admired him most. This was a different game from tin mining, all right.

Saturday was a half day so at knock off time, when they got back to the barracks, Mark stripped off and threw his clothes into a copper Bert had left on the fire for them. Dressed only in a pair of frayed shorts, his feet bare in the dust, he used a wooden paddle to stir the boiling clothes. The strong smell of tar from the carbolic soap mingled with the scent of wood smoke, and the heat from the boiler sent sweat trickling along the contours of his chest.

Finn leaned on the barrack's veranda rail, smoking and intermittently making scornful comments, but Mark didn't want to get the rats' disease, not if he could prevent it. Anyhow, he had thrown in both sets of working clothes, so why Finn complained Mark had no idea. It wasn't like he was doing the washing himself.

At times, Mark thought he was cursed with having to look out for his reckless brother who seemed to believe he was invincible. The council's health officer at the meeting said

cleanliness was the key, so that's what Mark would do, until he could persuade the bosses it was in their interests to let the men burn the cane before harvest. Burning did no real harm to the sugar content so long as it was harvested immediately, so he couldn't understand their reluctance.

Billy came out of the room he shared with Javier. Finn threw his cigarette away and said, "Mark, we're off. Meet us at the swimming enclosure, then after we'll get something to eat at the pub."

Half an hour later, Mark pulled up at the swimming enclosure in his battered 1924 Dodge truck. He parked and got out, his gaze sweeping the area for any sign of Finn or the gang. A couple of dozen people sat on the grassy bank watching others swimming. Rowing skiffs moored to posts bobbed on the swirling waters outside the wired-off enclosure. Bikes and cars cluttered grassy verges lining the road. A horse stamped in the sulky's traces and dropped its head to nibble the grass next to a model-H Triumph motorcycle, propped up on its back-wheel stand. People stood around in groups or sprawled on picnic blankets spread out beneath the trees.

He waited, not keen to barge in anywhere, particularly when the place was full of strangers. Besides, he felt self-conscious with only his old fraying shorts among people in proper bathing suits. The wealthy Britishers particularly bothered him, with money to spare, their parents somebody in the town, well-off farmers, business owners, officials. They could be as friendly as the next person one minute but turn on you for what seemed no reason at all. He'd seen it at Herberton station. They'd collared a man riding the rattler and almost strung

him up. If Mark hadn't stepped in and taken him home for a feed, he didn't know what they'd have done.

They never worried Finn, but he was fair-skinned and light-haired like his dad and was often taken for one of them. Mark had inherited his family's colouring and cutting in the sun all day made his skin even darker. When he'd first joined the gang, Billie had stared at him before asking Finn if he was sure Mark was his brother. For a while afterwards, jokes came thick and fast about his mother and some imagined milkmen. Mark ignored them but they stopped when Finn explained they had different fathers, although Mark had known no other.

He spotted Finn leaning against a tree, chatting to a curly-haired brunette. Maybe the rest of the gang had gone to the pub already. Mark pulled off his shirt and stripped down to his shorts. He left the pile under a tree far enough from the crowd to be inconspicuous, and walked down the sloping bank, slipping into the river, and swimming underwater across to the other side of the fenced enclosure. He surfaced and trod water looking back towards the riverbank.

It looked like Finn might make headway with the girl. She giggled and looked around for her friends, or maybe she was looking for an escape route. Mark grinned and rolled on to his back, his mind drifting as he gazed up at the sky, blue and cloudless. It was warming up. Another month and the heat in the cane would be a killer.

His stomach rumbled. He wondered what his Aunt Zarah was cooking for supper. It would be good to eat something decent for a change, although the food had improved markedly since Bert arrived. The cook the gang had for the first few weeks of the cutting season seemed to know nothing more than salt beef, cabbage and boiled potatoes.

A splash outside the wire caused him to roll over and swim to the bank. Even the chance of a croc in the vicinity wasn't one he was willing to take. As he hauled himself from the water, he saw her. She was standing higher up the slope with that Federal john, Howard Rainer, who asked too many questions. Rainer had a dossier in his office on each of the Party members. It was best to avoid him.

Mark walked up the bank and picked up the exercise book and pencil that he carried everywhere. He sat with his back against a tree and sketched the scene in front of him. It gave him an excuse to watch her without being too obvious.

After a while, Rainer went down to the water in his one-piece bathing suit. The woman was fully dressed and sat on the grass in the shade, her legs bent at the knees and folded neatly to her side. Mark was certain she was the same woman he'd seen the other night. Beatrice. He couldn't forget that face.

As he sketched, he forgot he was staring, until she looked up and caught him at it. He nodded and gave a small smile, but she ignored him and looked away. Damn it. How was he going to contrive a meeting?

Beatrice sat in the shade, wishing she could go home. Howard was all right she supposed, but all he talked about was himself and his job, making sure she knew he was very, very, clever and a masterful trickster. He said his role in the Commonwealth police was all about strategy and intelligence and just to prove it he would begin a story, think twice and then pause, raising his eyebrow as if questioning her courage and worldliness. Then his sentences would become almost cryptic. Most of the time she had no idea what he was talking about and nor did she

care. The theatrics just irritated her. If he didn't want to tell her something, he shouldn't start the story. She knew she was being harsh. He was trying to be gallant, but she wished he wouldn't treat her like she was a helpless girl.

She watched the people gathered on the grass. A family with two small children were having a picnic. The small boy knelt at the edge of the picnic blanket and took a sandwich from his mother. As he bit down into the soft bread, Beatrice's stomach growled, and she looked away. Across the clearing a man stared at her. She pulled down her hat, and squinted sideways beneath her brim, hoping he wouldn't see her gawking.

He smiled.

Hastily she turned away, but his face was familiar. Did she know him? She didn't know anyone in the town and glanced back. He inclined his head towards her, but almost imperceptibly.

She looked away, plucking at the bits of grass poking up next to her ankles wondering what she should do. After a minute, she stood up and walked down to the water's edge. Howard was in the water, hanging on to a skiff through the wire fence, talking to another man. He took no notice of her, so she turned back and marched up the slope.

As she arrived, the man stood up.

"Have we met?" She crossed her arms and clutched her elbows, wishing she had stopped for a moment to think through her actions before barging up to a complete stranger.

The man closed the book he'd been writing in. "Yes, sort of." His free hand slid across his naked chest and rubbed his shoulder.

Her gaze followed his hand across the smooth round deltoid and down the long bicep. She noticed his neck flush beneath his tan. The day suddenly seemed airless.

“Where?” Her face burned and she squinted up at him, tilting her head to deflect the blinding sunlight.

His gaze was intense, so she stared at the ground.

“You were at Jack and Patto’s street meet.”

She tried to place the names but failed. “Who?” she said, risking a peek at his face.

A frown flittered and was gone. Perhaps he didn’t approve of her directness.

He said, “You’re Bert’s friend.”

“Who?” She repeated the word again, and the blood rushed into her face. “I’m not sure who you mean. Perhaps you have mistaken me for someone else.”

“No.” He shook his head and lifted his hand towards her as if he might prevent her leaving. “I remember you in your silver dress. You spoke to my friend Bert Manzoni.” A brief smile showed even white teeth.

“Oh.” She breathed out. “I remember—Doctor Manzoni.”

“Yes, Bert—Roberto. I’m Mark Anders.” He made a move as if to hold out his hand but hesitated and dropped it to his side.

For a moment she held his gaze, remembering the night in the street outside the Regent Theatre. Her lips parted and a strange thumping at the base of her throat began, and she dug her

nails into her elbows, glancing away towards the rail line where a tram rattled past. She should walk away.

“Is it true that he’s a doctor and a cook?” she asked. “He told me that when we talked at the library, but I wasn’t sure if I believed him.”

He smiled. “He was an academic at the Milan University in Italy before he came to Australia.”

“But he said he’s a cook now.” Her voice sounded incredulous even to her own ears.

His smile faded. “A job’s a job.”

She glanced sideways at him. Tiny golden flecks gave definition to otherwise unfathomable dark eyes. “What were you writing?” She pointed at the book he’d closed.

“It’s just a drawing.” He moved the book behind his thigh.

Before thinking, she blurted, “Oh, please show me.” That was gauche even for her, but he didn’t move.

“Beatrice.” Howard’s voice came to her like a distant, disembodied thing, but it came closer. “Beatrice!”

She clamped her mouth into a frustrated line and turned to see Howard walking towards her. Then she swivelled back. “I must go.”

He said in a low voice. “I’ll show you my drawing, next Sunday, here, same time?”

She didn't reply, her mind a vortex of indecision, desire and propriety as she turned away to meet Howard.

Howard said, "What did he want?"

"Nothing."

"Did he accost you? I'll have him arrested."

Howard seemed to quiver with righteous indignation. His wet hair plastered to his skull, reminded Beatrice of Rat from *Wind in the Willows*. She had an urge to laugh and suppressed it firmly, composing her features into what she imagined appeared stern.

She said, "I just asked him if he knew the time. He was very respectful. But I should get back home. My aunt will worry." She felt her colour rising again at her deception.

Howard looked crestfallen. "But it's still early. The next race is about to begin, and I'm in it so I can't leave now."

"Oh well. Just a little while longer then."

She watched Howard run down towards the water before she looked back. The man had gone. She sat down again under the tree but all she wanted to do was go home.

4.

Mark was shown into the Ingham Cane Growers building by a man who left him at the door of the conference room. The place was noisy with conversation, but it stopped as soon as they saw him. He had always harboured aspirations to become a member of the Growers Association once he had his own farm, not the Ingham branch, but in Innisfail. They were a powerful regional force with influential links into state and national decision making, and while he didn't always agree with their policies, they had the potential to make a difference in people's lives. If he was ever going to become one of them, here was his chance.

He set out to make a good impression. "Good morning, gentlemen. I'm Mark Anders, from the minority group. You responded to my letters."

"Ah yes." A man nodded. "The militant minority group I think you call it." He emphasised the militant part. The man looked him up and down and turned back to face the men around the table. "Pack of Bolsheviks!" he said under his breath.

It wasn't strictly true. Many of the minority group weren't Party members, but it was a bad start. He'd just have to persuade them he was no danger to them, and just wanted to see justice and decency served. Surely, they wanted that too.

Mark didn't know where to sit so he stood back, leaning against the wall and clutching a wad of papers to his chest, waiting until someone directed him. No one did, and no one introduced him. Perhaps it was the usual procedure. He'd been invited to the meeting, although only after his fourth letter demanding someone speak to him about the Weil's disease

problems. Maybe he would get his chance to address the meeting and ask a few questions later on.

Another man, obviously the President, called the meeting to order. Then he said, ‘We are honoured to have two special guests today. Dr Cilento, the director-general of health whom you all know, and you’ve all met Arthur. We are very privileged to have someone so distinguished from CSR visiting our humble neck of the woods.’

The man called Arthur nodded. He was obviously someone high up in the company, and wore an expensive suit, gold cufflinks, and a gold tie pin with what looked like a diamond stud. A Homberg hat and cane lay on the table in front of him. CSR must be worried to send such a high-ranking executive.

The two men on either side of Arthur had pins in their suit lapels, gold rods bound together with an axe head on top. Mark frowned and looked down at his feet. He’d read a couple of years back in *La Riscossa*, before the paper was banned, that Frank and his mates had put paid to any designs for establishing a Fascista in Ingham. The pins were bad enough, but he should focus on the meeting. These industry men and farmers were practical people, and Fascist or not, the disease still killed you.

Mark had brushed up on the facts before the meeting and was sure they would see reason. So far this season 120 men were down, with six deaths in Ingham alone, and the harvest was only a few weeks in. The hospitals were full, staff working around the clock. They’d commandeered private homes for the sick because the wards were overflowing. He could scarcely bring himself to believe the growers and the company weren’t keen to act.

Before he'd arrived in Ingham, Mark hadn't realised how badly the disease was affecting the blokes here. Even when Jack had said the men were afraid to go to work, it hadn't dawned on him how dire the situation was. They were all scared, but these blokes had greater cause and if the Growers knew the dangers, they would see the need to do something.

Eventually the President invited Mark to speak. He stepped forward and respectfully but firmly put the men's petition on the table and explained its purpose. He spoke for about two minutes and then summed up. "Burning the cane before harvest is the best way of reducing the risk and it will save the industry having to pay out compensation."

Another member interjected. "It's not a compensable industrial disease."

Mark was about to speak when the President showed an open hand toward Cilento. "What do you think, Doctor?"

Dr Cilento said, "The disease is almost certainly typhus fever. It is not an industrial disease."

Mark shook his head. "Dr Coffey from the Innisfail hospital said he was pretty sure they are all Weil's cases. He has a theory that it's caused by rats urinating on the cane and burning will kill the bacteria causing it."

Cilento frowned and rolled his eyes at the man across the table.

The Secretary looked at his watch. "Thank you, doctor. By your leave, Mr President, we need to get on. Item three on the agenda is important." He looked up at Mark. "Thank you for your time Mr Anders, you can find your own way out."

“Hang on.” Mark wasn’t finished and he wasn’t going to be shoved out by this arrogant fool.

The President sighed. “What do you want from us, Mr Anders?”

“I want you to take this seriously. Men are dying and you have a responsibility to them.” He glanced at the CSR executive, who was gazing out the window as if bored with proceedings.

The President said, “Until we know what’s causing the problem, there is little we can do.”

Mark took a deep breath and the thumping in his chest slowed. “You can allow the cane to be burnt before we harvest it.”

The CSR executive was still gazing out the window, but he interjected. “If we did agree to burning there would have to be a penalty. Burnt cane has a reduced sugar content.”

Mark hit back. “Not by much so long as you harvest and mill it immediately. The Mossman cutters do it and they don’t pay a penalty.”

The executive looked down at his manicured fingernails. “The Mossman cutters don’t work for CSR mills. A penalty would have to be in the region of at least a shilling a ton. Go and ask your members if they will accept that.”

“Good day Mr Anders,” the Secretary said. “Mr President, item three on the agenda.”

Mark looked around at the men’s faces but none of them would look at him. What could he do without making a complete fool of himself? He walked out.

Outside, the broad open streets of Ingham baked in the tropical sun. He rolled his shoulders to release the tension. That was a disaster. He'd blown his chance. Perhaps he hadn't been clear, hadn't emphasised the urgency of his case, or explained the men's concerns. He needed a beer. He strode around the block towards the Italian Club and thumped up the steps to the club house.

Jack was inside sitting with Frank, Con and Luigi. They looked up as Mark came in.

Frank got up. "You look done in, mate."

"I don't think I did any good." Mark sat down and rubbed his temples.

Frank handed him a beer.

Mark took the beer gratefully and said, "They're talking about one shilling a ton penalty if the cutters burn the cane."

Jack scowled. "Cheap bastards. They've been hankering to reduce wages for years to compete with the international markets where workers have little better than slave conditions, and here they see their chance. It's a retreat to last century's slave labour tactics, but instead of shanghaied Kanakas they'll enslave the working class. Well, they won't get away with it. Drink up, and you can tell us what happened when everyone's here."

Mark walked over to the door with his beer and stood on the top step. Outside, men in ones and twos and small groups moved towards the old iron shed next door. The shed was called the Embassy Palace and was mostly used for dances, weddings and other social events but today it was a meeting hall. More men rounded the corner and strolled along the pathway

next to the road, greeting each other, talking in various European dialects. They joined the groups waiting outside. A group of women arrived and went into the hall.

A familiar car approached. Mark turned back to Frank. "Did you invite the union?"

Frank jumped up and raced to the door. "No! He needn't think he's coming. He does nothing but undermine the cause."

Frank, Luigi and Con clattered down the steps to confront the organiser. Jack and Mark stayed in the club, watching from the doorway.

Mark took a long swig of his beer.

Jack said, "This might be entertaining."

The organiser's Scottish brogue carried to where they stood at the top of the stairs. "Carmagnola," he shouted. "You can't hold this meeting. It's not authorised."

Frank made a rude gesture. "Fuck off chum, this is a private meeting."

The organiser's tone changed to a wheedle. "Och, come along then Frankie. I'm your rep."

"You! I don't think so. We've been asking you blokes for a meeting for 18 bloody years, but you just ignore us. Anyway, you overcharge for membership and then cut off our voting rights, so we can't vote – what's the point. Now we organise and meet without you. No fees. Everyone votes, even the men's wives, but not you. You're not invited."

The organiser tried to push past Frank, to appeal to the others. “Come on now Luigi, Costante, see some sense. Just wait ’till tomorrow. I’ll arrange a meeting at Halifax Mill, and we can discuss this properly.”

Jack called out, “They don’t understand your foreign accent, Harry. Try speaking Italian.”

Frank laughed, but the union organiser’s face turned red, and he shouted, “Away and boil your head Jack Henry. You’re a disgrace, calling yourself a white man.”

Jack grinned at Mark. “Should we join the meeting?”

Mark finished his beer and he and Jack went down the steps and across to the hall to join the others. When all the men and women were in the hall, Mark closed the doors and stood next to Jack.

Frank stepped on to a raised dais. The room fell silent, broken only by breathing and the odd scraping chair.

Then Frank thrust his clenched fist into the air. “Resistere!”

A forest of fists thrust towards the roof trusses and with a roar the crowd finished off the rest of Italy’s anti-Fascist slogan, “Rivoluzione!”

Frank called on Mark to provide an update.

Mark made his way to the front of the hall. He didn’t know many of the people in Ingham, so he began by introducing himself. First in English and then in Italian explaining where his family were from and to whom he was related. This was important information for

the men and women to trust him. It took a while longer to explain what had happened at the Cane Growers meeting, but he thought it was worth it, because quite a few of the newer immigrants didn't understand English that well. It was better to take his time and make sure they all understood that the company was going to try and screw them to the wall.

By six o'clock that evening the Ingham mills had voted to strike along with their cutters, but Mark was worried. Not all the men had been in the hall and the strike wasn't sanctioned by the union. If they didn't have everyone, then they may as well have no one, because those who didn't agree would just go to work tomorrow. He voiced his concern to Jack and Frank.

Frank shrugged. "Easy, we'll pay them a visit. We'll split up. Con, you take the Macknade area, we'll take Victoria and Luigi see if you can round up any outliers in town."

Mark and Frank squeezed into Jack's truck and took off under Frank's direction. Two hours later, Frank said he thought they had reached out to all the men. Mark noticed some had needed a bit more persuasion than others, but all had agreed. They drove back and dropped Frank off at the Italian club. Then he and Jack set off back to Innisfail.

Mark felt worn out. It had been a long day and he'd eaten nothing since breakfast. His eyes drooped and he rested his head against the cab door.

Jack said, "Now, what do you think they're up to?"

Mark opened his eyes. "Who?"

"Them." Jack nodded at a truck that had turned off the main road and was racing towards Halifax. The tray was loaded with men.

Jack turned off the main road to follow them and Mark said, “Who are they? Come on, Jack, what’s going on?”

“I don’t know but I reckon, nothing good.”

The truck sped ahead, leaving Mark and Jack behind in its dust. The road turned east hugging the Herbert River for a while. Across the river Mark could see the mill. It was in darkness, cane trucks lined up like crouched river monsters, waited for the mill to start in the morning. But the mills would lie idle tomorrow. The cane would sit for days, losing all its sugar content. It’d be ruined.

They rounded a bend in the road and drove towards Halifax. A police car blocked the road ahead.

“Damn!” Jack slowed the vehicle to a stop.

One of the officers walked towards the truck.

“Where are you heading?” The officer stooped to peer into the interior of the cab.

“What’s up?” Jack asked. “Hey, is that James Toohill?”

The officer pulled in his chin. “Don’t be daft man, what would the Inspector be doing out here manning a roadblock?”

“Well, it’s dark, mate, but give Jim my best when you see him.”

“Friend of yours, is he? What name shall I say?”

“Jack Henry.”

“Ah, one of the Henry boys from Cardwell?”

Jack didn't disillusion him, just said, “We go back a long way.”

The police officer relaxed. “We had word the Black Hand are up to no good. Something's going down tonight. Who's your passenger?”

“Mark Anders from out Herberton way. Tin miner.”

It was a prevarication. Jack wasn't related to the Henry farming family or at least not within a generation or two. He'd been born in New South Wales and while Mark had been in tin mining, he wasn't now.

The officer said, “You're a long way from home.”

Mark replied, “Just visiting.”

“Staying in Halifax?”

Jack intervened. “Look mate, we're trying to catch up to a mob of blokes we saw driving a truck. Did they come through here?”

“You're the first and I've been here for an hour.”

“I reckon that mob we were chasing may be your culprits. They looked like they were up to no good. But if you're on to it, we'll head on back to Ingham and leave it to you. Maybe you should check some of the side roads.” Jack turned the truck around and headed back the way they'd come.

When they rounded the bend and came abreast of the mill, they saw the fires. Men were running through the night with burning torches, setting fire to the loaded cane trucks. Flames leaped high, sparks shooting off like fireworks.

Jack pulled up and got out of the truck. Mark joined him. They stood staring across the river as the flames lit up the night.

Mark said, "Do you suppose it's Frank's blokes or is it really just criminals?"

Jack shook his head. "No idea, but Frank's men are all Anarcho-syndicalists and don't take kindly to any form of authority. So, who knows? It could be them, or it could be the Black Hand as the police seem to think although that seems less than likely. It might just as well be the Fascists trying to discredit us. They know the cane will not get crushed. Burning it and then blaming the strikers is good propaganda against the cause. Come on, that copper will be along any minute. We'd better get out of here before we're arrested. I hope the fires don't spread into the paddocks. That would have the growers frothing at the mouth."

It was almost dawn by the time Jack dropped Mark off at the barracks near Goondi. Mark trod the few steps up to the veranda as silently as he could so as not to awaken the others. He was worn ragged and flopped on to his bunk fully clothed.

It was good that the men had voted to strike. He agreed with Frank that the mills didn't care if a few Italians died – so what! No one cared about the Italian-Australian workers. In fact, in the newspapers they weren't even Australians. In the worst papers like *Smith's Weekly*, they were foreign dago scum. At best they were foreign workers but never Australians, even though some were born in the country, and some had become naturalised. Many who hadn't the papers

or the English, lived in fear of deportation back to Fascist Italy. These were people like Bert and Frank, who'd fled Italy fearing imprisonment, torture and even death.

It wasn't right. Mark had thought he could reason with these people and he still believed he could; after all no matter what their beliefs, you couldn't argue with the fact that men were dying. Even so, the Ingham men might have gone too far. Frank was hot-headed, and if it was his men who'd overturned cane trucks and set the fires, it would be bad publicity. The cane didn't matter. It was useless anyway or would be in a day or two, but the capitalists just wouldn't tolerate crime against private property. That would put them all in jail.

Yet, the men were fearful of the rats' disease and their powerlessness to do anything about it made them angry. Hell, he was angry. But while Frank craved revolution, and Jack planned it, they would need more men and greater resources to even contemplate it. Far better to use persuasion and the ballot box to make change. If he could get to know the Growers better, he was sure he could convince them that fairness and justice paid off. Besides, revolution wasn't what Mark wanted. It was just a dream, something people talked about to relieve their anger. If history showed anything, it showed revolutions were bloody and unhappy events where the poor and weak suffered most. It was better to try reasoning with the company. He was convinced they'd make more headway through negotiations. Striking was a bargaining chip but there was a long way to go before they could claim victory, if any of them survived that long.

5.

Beatrice was in a state of indecision. She sat in the morning room staring out the window. The only sounds came from the house as it creaked and cracked when the sun came out from a cloud. Only she and her father were home because her uncle and aunt were attending mass at the Catholic cathedral in Innisfail. Her father was a good Protestant and had declined their invitation to attend so Beatrice felt she needn't go either, since she wasn't a Catholic – although neither was she a good Protestant. She wouldn't acknowledge that to her father, who took her piety for granted.

Should she go to the swimming enclosure? An image of him smiling at her made her stomach churn and all week she had obsessed over whether she should go and meet him. Now she wasn't sure whether he'd even asked her to go. Perhaps she imagined the whole thing – heard only what she wanted to hear. Could she really go and meet a complete stranger just because when he smiled, her tummy got a dose of the collywobblers? Was it even safe?

But any man who drew pictures in a school exercise book couldn't be bad, surely. He had a strong and honest face, and his drawing had intrigued her. What harm could it do to make friends? She didn't know anyone in the town except the people she'd met at the Ambulance Ball, and the people Howard introduced her to last week, but they were all so stuffy. Besides, given her father's position and Howard's interest, who would dare bring her harm?

Perhaps she should stay home and harass her father for details of the Ingham strike. If she wrote a piece on that, the paper might print it. Of course, her father wouldn't approve but then he never approved of anything she did. Besides, what excuse could she make for going out?

Arthur shook out and then refolded the broadsheet he was reading, and a headline caught Beatrice's attention. *Home Secretary outlines plans for a gigantic campaign.*

"What are you reading about, Daddy?"

He lowered the paper and looked over the top of his glasses at her. "It's just business stuff, nothing for you to worry about, my dear."

She ignored his warning, seeing that further down the page a line said, *Government Has Cabled for Special Serum from London.*

"Is that about the disease killing the men in Ingham?"

He sighed and put down the paper. "My word, Beatrice. This is not a suitable subject."

"But Daddy, I heard Uncle George saying Weil's disease has no cure."

"I am not yet convinced that it is Weil's, as they claim. Don't you have something else to do?"

Beatrice stood up. "Well actually, some of the girls I met at the Ambulance Ball asked me to go along to the cricket club and try my hand. They have a ladies' club here, apparently."

Arthur wiggled his eyebrows. "Ah, very good, you run along then."

"I won't be back for lunch." She held her breath. "And I might be a little late this afternoon." A pulse in her neck thudded at her deception, and she realised it was becoming a habit. But Arthur was already re-engrossed in the newspaper and merely made a noise that Beatrice decided was an approval.

Half-an-hour later she arrived at the bathing enclosure and leaned her bicycle against a coconut palm. A few families picnicked on the grass but no one she knew. Disappointment flooded through her and then relief. She would sit in the shade, think about the article she might write, and jot down some ideas to research at the library tomorrow when it opened.

She gathered her towel, a notebook, and her reticule from the basket on the handlebars, and walked over to a tree under which she spread the towel. She leaned her back against the trunk and opened the notebook, staring into the distance wondering how she might begin. She scrawled across the top of the page, *Death in the Cane!* That would be headline grabbing, but it was a bit of a cliché.

“Hello.”

The voice behind her caused her to start. She looked up at the man she’d met the week before, Mark. She hadn’t imagined him, and he was looking down at her with an inquiring expression on his face.

Her heart hammered in her throat, and she blushed, dropping her gaze. “Hello,” she said in reply. Her voice came out as a weird squeak.

“I hoped you’d be here.” He dropped to the ground beside her and said, “What’re you writing?”

She shut the notebook, embarrassed at showing him its contents. An unfathomable emotion in his eyes made her breath flutter.

She said, “It’s nothing, just a project I’m working on.”

He looked away towards the river. “What’s the project?”

“It’s a story I’m trying to write for the newspaper, but I need an angle and I have lots of research to do before I can write it.”

For a minute she wondered why she felt obliged to answer a complete stranger’s questions as if he was entitled to ask.

“Are you a journalist?”

“Oh no. I wish I were, but no. I am just trying to get a story in the paper, that’s all. Like a cub reporter, but one that no one will employ because I’m a girl. I’m just practicing writing copy and if I’m lucky and Mr Groom at the *Johnstone River Advocate* publishes it, people will take me more seriously.” She shrugged. “Anyway, it fills in time.”

His smile seemed to envelop her, and her stomach dissolved into a skidding mercury ball.

“So, what have you found?” he asked.

He was staring at her mouth.

“Pardon?” She pressed her lips together.

“Have you found out anything for your project?” He glanced at the book. “Death in the Cane?”

She blushed and shook her head. “You saw!”

“Yes. Sorry. I wasn’t trying to pry. Tell me about it – your article.”

“Well, I haven’t done much research yet.” She paused. “I learned a bit from talking to your friend Doctor Manzoni in the library.”

“What did he tell you?”

He leaned back, his gaze directed towards the river’s swirling waters, his expression shuttered. Why was he asking her? Wasn’t the doctor his friend?

“He didn’t really tell me about the cane, more about the people who came to work here.”

His face held a speculative look and without thinking she said, “He told me many of the people here have experienced terrible brutality from Mr Mussolini’s government and had to leave Italy. He said it happened to him too and if he hadn’t left, he would have been imprisoned, like some of his friends and colleagues.” She paused as a thought struck her, and a frown creased her forehead. “But my father says they were arrested for causing social unrest and that Mr Mussolini has a strict law-and-order agenda for the country, which is why Italy has managed to come out of the Depression quicker than Australia. So, while times are hard, perhaps we all need to make sacrifices.”

He leaned forward, his eyes like stones. “You can’t believe that?”

She dropped her eyelashes and plucked at the towel at her side. “I’m not sure what to believe.”

His tone softened. “So, do you live in Innisfail?”

“Oh, no, my home’s in Sydney. We’re just visiting.”

He looked around. “Did you come by yourself?”

“I came with my father.” She glanced sideways at him. His closed look seemed to give way to alarm.

“I’d better go then.”

“What?” She stared at him, forgetting her manners. “Why?”

“Your father.” He said, his gaze flicking around the bank.

She smiled, holding her hand to her mouth. “I thought you meant here, to Innisfail.”

His face remained blank; thoughts hidden. In a rush she said, “I mean, I came with my father to Queensland ... from Sydney, you know.”

He exhaled and asked, “Did you come by yourself today?”

“Yes.” She could see him relax, and he looked away. A pulse jumped in his jaw, and she wished she could read his mind.

He cleared his throat. “Are you on holiday?”

“It’s not really a holiday. My father’s here for his firm.” She paused and then said, “For a whole year.” Her voice sounded whiny, and she recovered it quickly. “We’re staying at my uncle’s farm. He’s married to Daddy’s sister.”

Now she felt like she was gabbling and stopped speaking, staring at his hands pushed flat on the grass. They looked strong, sun-browned and scarred but with long fingers like a pianist, and clean nails cut square and close. She had an urge to touch them, feel his palms on her skin.

A sudden image of his hands caressing her caused heat to flare across her shoulders, up her neck and across her face.

She turned her head away trying to regain control, but she had an overpowering urge to lean over and kiss him on his mouth. She suppressed a nervous laugh, but her breath was ragged, and she prayed he wouldn't hear. "You said you would show me your drawing."

Mark ran his hand across his mouth. "Sorry, I didn't bring it."

A police constable stopped nearby, and Beatrice glanced over at him. He seemed to be staring directly at them. What did he want? She said, "Is he a friend of yours?"

Mark shook his head. "Never seen him before."

The constable walked towards them and said, "Are you Mark Anders?"

Mark stood up and walked a little way off. He spoke in a low voice and Beatrice couldn't make out what he said, then he glanced back, his expression apologetic.

After the two men exchanged a few words, Mark returned to Beatrice. "I'm sorry, something's come up. I have to go. Really sorry, but can we do this again?"

"I hope nothing's wrong."

"No. It's fine, just need to clear some things up. Can you meet me next weekend, Sunday?"

She hesitated. "Are you sure everything is all right?"

"Yes, it's fine. Just a problem at work."

“Oh.” She felt easier, work was always interfering with her father’s weekends too.

“Next Sunday, same time. I’ll meet you here and we can go for lunch.”

She nodded.

He turned and hurried off with the constable.

She stared at the river. He was nice but it was so annoying he had to rush off like that. Men were always dashing off to some crisis at work. Surely these things could wait, whatever they were. She wondered where he would take her to lunch: maybe that little café she’d seen in the main street. It was thrilling, an adventure, but in the meantime her day was ruined, and she didn’t want to go back to the farm. Perhaps she should show her face at the cricket club. At least if she did, her lie to her father wasn’t a complete fabrication and it might be nice to get to know the women she’d met at the ball a little better.

Mark followed the constable to the station his breathing becoming erratic. It was just bad luck the bloke had been passing and recognised him, although Mark was relieved the copper had been a bit discrete in front of Beatrice. Mark walked at his side and asked again what it was they wanted with him, but the constable wouldn’t or couldn’t expand, except to say it was something to do with the Ingham strike and the fires at the mill. When they got to the station, he took Mark into an interview room and left him, saying an officer would be along shortly.

Mark sat at the table and forced his racing blood to slow down, but he had a bad feeling. How had the constable recognised him? He didn’t know any coppers, at least not in Innisfail, and it wasn’t as if he was a well-known person in town. He sat in the room for what seemed

like hours and eventually his heart slowed, and his concern changed to anger. He was just contemplating banging on the door to get some attention when Howard Rainer walked through the door.

He sat down opposite Mark, opened a notebook and unscrewed his pen. Then without looking at Mark he said, “Mr Anders, are you a member of the so-called Cosa Nostra?”

“What?”

“I believe it is sometimes referred to as the 'Ndrangheta or Comora but known here by the name the Black Hand.”

“I thought this was about the fires at the Macknade Mill.”

“We already have evidence you started them, but we would like to know, who are your fellow conspirators?”

“Hang on. I didn't start any fires.”

“We have an eyewitness that will put you at the scene of the crime.”

Mark stared at Rainer in disbelief. If he knew Mark's name from the police officer at the roadblock, he would also know Jack's name. Mark wondered whether Jack had been interviewed. Then he remembered Jack saying, never speak to them if they ask anything. Demand that they call in your barrister then either call me or Fred.

Rainer wrote something on his pad then said, “We know your uncle, Guido de Luca is Sicilian. Your mother is also Italian, your father unknown...”

“My father is Eric Anders.”

“Not my information but that’s beside the point. What I want to know is, what is your role within the Black Hand gang?”

Mark couldn’t help himself. “And my uncle’s Calabrian.”

“Same thing.”

Mark shook his head. “The whole thing is ridiculous. The Black Hand are just a bunch of petty thugs. No self-respecting Italian would have a bar of them, other than through fear. Instead of wasting your time chasing phantoms, what are your men doing to protect the victims from these criminals?” He paused, checked Rainer’s expression, then said, “Ah, you know I have nothing to do with them! What are you really after, Rainer?”

“You know my name.”

“It’s just as well, as you didn’t bother to introduce yourself when you came in. You also seemed to know mine, but if you want us to keep talking, you’ll need to wait until my barrister can get here. I think you’ve met Mr Paterson. Otherwise, unless you have any legal reason for detaining me, I’m going home.” Mark stood up and stared Rainer in the eye. He wasn’t sure he’d got away with the bluster, but it seemed maybe he had because Rainer put the cap back on his pen.

It wasn’t until he was back at the barracks that Bert told him that the police had come looking for him, and Billy had told the coppers he’d seen Mark’s truck down at the swimming enclosure. Mark would like to have pushed in the idiot’s face for ruining his afternoon. His brother never did have any sense when it came to choosing his friends, but Billy was just a

goose, and he couldn't really blame him. Beatrice was out of his league anyway and he doubted she'd even turn up next Sunday.

The following Sunday, Beatrice told her father she was going to the cricket club again and cycled off to meet Mark. The wind in her face was exhilarating and gave her the illusion of freedom. She arrived before him and sat in the same spot. He arrived two minutes later and once more apologised for being called away, muttering the problem was something about a cane fire. It sounded dire to her, but he just shrugged it off, so she didn't press him.

They talked for a few minutes, mostly him asking questions about herself and then he said, "Where's your uncle's property?"

She looked around and didn't really have a clue where it was in relation to the town, but she pointed along the road she had come in on. "It's not far along that road, then about a mile passed the hospital." She added, "It's called Sunrise Sugar Estate."

It was as if she'd slapped him.

He said, "I probably should go."

"You just got here." She tilted her head, frowning. "I thought we were going to have some lunch." He was staring at her in a weird way. "Do you know my Uncle's place?"

"Yes." He said the word harshly. "Tomorrow my gang will begin the cut on your uncle's property."

She screwed up her face. "Begin the cut. What does that mean?"

“We’re harvesting your uncle’s cane. I cut cane and you’re a, you’re a ... Who’s your father?” he asked.

“Arthur Langham,” she said.

“I should have known. Sorry, I’ll just go.”

“Please don’t. I don’t understand why you’re so cross.”

He exhaled heavily. “Sorry. I’m not cross, but you and me ... we can’t ... it’s impossible ...” His voice trailed off and he shrugged. “Well, you know.”

“No, I don’t know. You said you were going to take me to lunch. Last week you rushed off and now you’re doing it again.”

He stood up. “Look I’m sorry, but we’re from different worlds.”

She scrambled up to face him, her face flushing as she said, “We’re from the same world! Look!” She pointed, trying to lighten the atmosphere. “You’re there, and I am here.” Her hands went to her hips. “I don’t know why you suddenly think you can’t talk to me.”

Her eyes were on the verge of filling with frustrated tears, and she looked away, wiping her hand across her face.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

She sniffed, a little embarrassed by her outburst. “Nothing. Um. I just thought we could be friends.”

“Friends? You must have lots of friends.”

“I don’t really know anyone here.”

He said, “What about your friend Rainer, the policeman?”

“Oh, he’s just, just ...” She looked up at him. “My family know him, that’s all. He’s not my friend.”

Mark stared at her for a full minute before asking, “Do you still want to have lunch?”

“Yes, of course.”

Beatrice hung back as Mark put her bike on the back of his truck. This was a double dilemma, and maybe she was being completely rash, but she remained silent, mostly because the fear of driving off with a stranger was nothing to the embarrassment of her outburst. Asking him if they could be friends; whatever next? It was so childish, but she had thought he was going to leave her and go off again, and he was the most exciting thing that had happened to her since she’d been here, although she should have behaved with more decorum. Her father would have chastised her for emotional hysteria and unladylike behaviour, and she wasn’t quite sure what had come over her crying like that. But Mark seemed unaffected or at least not horrified and for that she was grateful. Most men she knew would have turned away in embarrassed discomfort.

He helped her into the truck’s cab, and they drove through the town to a part that Beatrice had never before seen. “I thought we were going to a café,” she said as she looked out at the unfamiliar streets and houses.

He glanced across at her and said, “Somewhere much better. You won’t get food this good in any café.”

The road became rougher as they headed out of the centre along Edith Street, and Beatrice clutched her hands. Should she demand to be taken back, but it was too late. They had turned into a side road, and then into a driveway. The sign on the gate said *Guido’s Guest House*.

Mark parked and got out to open her door. Music came to her on the air as she followed him around the two-storey building, holding back as they came to a backyard. A long table was laid for lunch. It occupied the centre of the yard in the shade of passion-vine covered pergolas. Around it, people sat in silence listening to a man playing a mandolin. Beatrice caught her breath at the poignant sound, but she hesitated. This was unexpected.

A woman wearing a headscarf waved and called out in a language that Beatrice didn’t understand. The woman scurried around the table, clutching her apron, saying what sounded to Beatrice like, “Tesoro!” The woman flung her arms around Mark.

Mark hugged her and kissed both her cheeks. “Hello Nonnina.”

The man with the mandolin stopped playing and waved. The others turned and called greetings. A swarthy man, who seemed a little older than Mark, hoisted a child off his lap, handing the baby to the woman in a red sleeveless dress sitting next to him. Her alabaster arms slid around the little body as she turned in their direction. To Beatrice’s astonishment, the woman was Chinese.

The swarthy man picked up two chairs and placed them at the table. Then he strode towards them, hands held out towards Mark, but eyes on Beatrice. “Who’s this you’ve brought to grace our table, young cousin?” He shook Mark’s hand, all the while staring at Beatrice.

The old woman, whom Mark had called Nonnina, scowled at her. The frown drawing parallel lines between her eyes.

Mark’s neck had mottled red under his tan. “This is my friend Beatrice.”

“Bella! Ciao Beatrice.” The man took both her hands and kissed her on one cheek then the other, just as Mark had done to the old woman.

Beatrice stiffened. The man smelled strongly of cigarette smoke, garlic and wine and stood too close, causing her to inch away.

The old woman fired off a string of words, her hands flapping in Beatrice’s direction and Mark said, “Speak English, Nonna. Beatrice doesn’t speak Toscano, and it’s all right.”

Nonna’s eyes narrowed. “Who is the family for Beatrice?”

“Langham,” Mark answered.

The woman looked blank, but Joe whistled as if he knew who her father was.

Joe said, “Come, sit, eat.” He turned and with a wave of his hand said, “This is the family, well some of them. Nonno Giuseppe Rossi.” He indicated the mandolin player. “My father Guido de Luca.” He held his hand towards a man with very shaggy eyebrows, then laughed. “There’s a test afterwards for all the names.” He placed his hand on the woman in the red dress’s shoulder. “My wife Mia, and my son Bao.”

Another woman came out the house holding an enamel pot. “Ah and my Madre, Zarah de Luca,” Joe said.

The woman cried out, “Marchio, I thought you weren’t coming today. We started without you, but you are in time.” She plonked the pot on the table. “Where is your brother? He never comes to visit us.”

Joe said, “Mamma, come and meet Mark’s friend.”

The woman walked towards them, and Mark looked tense but all he said was, “Aunt Zarah, this is my friend, Beatrice.”

The woman wiped her hands on her apron and stared at Beatrice. “She’s beautiful. Too good for you, eh Marchio?”

She glanced behind Beatrice as if searching for someone, but Joe interrupted.

“Mamma, his name’s Mark.”

“Puah! He is Marchio and you; you are Giuseppe like Nonno. What for these names – Mark and Joe.” She fixed her gaze on Beatrice and said sternly, “Are you alone?”

The question confused Beatrice, but Mark shrugged and said something to his aunt.

Zarah frowned and replied rapidly. Her tone sounded scolding.

Beatrice glanced from one to the other, wondering what they were saying, suddenly feeling unsure of her welcome.

Mark replied in the same language and his aunt wagged her finger then slapped his hand. But she turned and smiled at Beatrice saying, “No matter.” She grasped Beatrice’s wrist. “Come, you sit with me and Bianca. We find out what my nephew is doing so I can report to my sister.”

Bianca had an amazing mass of straw-coloured hair. She smiled at Beatrice and opened her mouth to speak, but Aunt Zarah clapped her hands. “Come, some wine! Bianca, more plates and glasses.”

Bianca rolled her eyes at Beatrice, before she walked towards the house.

Mark pulled up a chair next to Beatrice and explained quietly that his aunt was cross with him because Beatrice’s mother wasn’t with her.

“But my mother’s in England,” she said in a low voice, trying to imagine her mother in this gathering. It would never happen, and that gave Beatrice a warm glow of triumph. This was all hers and her family couldn’t take it away.

“Don’t worry about it. It’s just my auntie’s way. She and my grandmother are a bit old-fashioned.”

Beatrice lowered her voice. “What is this place? It said on the gate it’s a guest house.”

“Yes.” Mark looked amused. “My aunt and uncle run this boarding house, mostly for travelling salesmen. My grandparent’s and Mia also help. Joe owns a garage in town. Bianca’s a nurse at the hospital. I don’t know the three blokes at the end of the table. They’re probably staying next door.”

Beatrice asked, "What's next door?"

"That's Jack's place," Mark said. "Well, when he's home, otherwise it's just a place where people meet or stay sometimes. Another couple of blokes share with him, but it's really Jack's place."

She wrinkled her nose in concentration.

He said, "Jack Henry. That bloke you were listening to that night in the street."

"Oh." Her eyes widened, and she glanced nervously at his family, before dropping her voice to a whisper. "The Communist candidate?"

He gave her a wry look. "He's a good bloke. Wait until you meet him. You'll love him. Everyone does." He paused then said, "My aunt and Nonna both reckon he walks on water." He picked up a tumbler and half-filled it with wine, placing it in front of her. He leaned across the table, tore off a hunk of bread, and put it on her plate. "The soup's good. You'll like it."

Nonno Giuseppe picked at his mandolin and the sound sent goose bumps down Beatrice's arms. She watched the people around the table. The three men who Mark said were staying with Jack, look ragged and hungry as they eyed Zarah dishing up soup. They looked so poor and out of place, as if they didn't belong to the family gathering.

She leaned towards Mark. "The men who are staying with Mr Henry, who are they?"

He gazed thoughtfully along the table. "Probably off the rattler. Jack takes in everyone."

Beatrice pursed her mouth, confused by the words. "What does that mean, off the rattler?"

Mark paused and searched her face. “Really? You really don’t know?”

She shook her head, her gaze flitting to Joe who had made a strange sound in his throat.

Mark frowned across the table at his cousin, then said, “Men who have no work sometimes cadge a ride on freight trains, so they can get to the next town to find work. It’s not so bad now, but for a few years it was terrible. If they’re caught, they end up in jail. The comrades in all the towns try to help. Here, they sleep at Jack’s place and my aunt feeds them. My parents do the same at home in Herberton.”

Beatrice peered sideways at the men, wondering at people who would take in homeless beggars and house and feed them. It was like something out of the New Testament. Now she understood what Mark meant by Jack walking on water. She wasn’t sure whether she was shocked, although she should be at such blasphemy, but instead she felt very insular and self-centred. Her life was insignificant and pampered. She felt ashamed and picked up her spoon to cover her confusion and her ignorance.

But she soon forgot herself as the food came out and the family talked. Never in her life had she seen such a variety of food at one sitting nor eaten so much. Never before had she sat down to such a noisy dining table with so much laughter and chatter. Everyone tried to speak in English for her sake, but they often drifted into their own language and then back to English, to the point Beatrice found it difficult to follow any one conversation. Instead, she watched and sipped her wine slowly, wary of its pungent aroma. It tasted of mulberries, but it made her eyes water.

All afternoon Mark translated, put morsels of food on her plate, explaining what each was, using words she had never heard and would not remember, until the afternoon became

hazy. Hours later, she realised it was growing dark, and in sudden panic, she whispered to Mark, "I have to get home. My family will worry."

"Of course." He stood up. "Nonna, Aunt Zarah."

Everyone at the table stopped talking and looked at Mark. Beatrice felt herself quailing at drawing so much attention.

He said, "Please excuse me. I have to take Beatrice home. For her, it's late."

They all stared at Beatrice.

Bianca asked, "Where do you live?"

Beatrice opened her mouth to answer but Mark intervened. "It's not far."

Aunt Zarah hugged Beatrice and said, "Come back and see us again soon." She placed her hand on Beatrice's cheek. "So beautiful. Now kiss Nonna and run home."

Beatrice hesitated, but felt Mark's hand in the small of her back guiding her towards his Nonna, who said in admonishment, "Next time, you bring your Madre."

Twenty minutes later, at the turnoff before the farm, Beatrice said, "Please stop here."

Mark jammed on the breaks and a cloud of dust billowed up covering the truck. Dark cane fields fanned out from either side of the road. The sun had already dipped behind the mountain range, casting the coastal land in shadow, and clouds scurried across the deepening sky.

He took off her bike from the back of the truck and stood with it propped in front of him.

“When will I see you?”

She shook her head.

He said, “Next Saturday afternoon. Do you want to go to the pictures? I’ll meet you outside at 2 o’clock. Will you come?”

“Yes. I’ll try,” she said.

She watched him drive away and then she rode toward the farm. As she peddled down the driveway every window in the house spilled light, keeping the darkness at bay although that wasn’t unusual. Beatrice’s stomach churned with the anticipation of having to lie to her father about being late. Half-a-dozen cars lined the driveway, and she prayed it wasn’t over her lateness. She let herself in the front door but hesitated before walking along the corridor and past her Uncle George’s study. The door was ajar, and she heard her father’s voice.

“Not sure you’re right, old man. The Communist message is becoming increasingly popular, and this will help their cause. Rather than starting a war, I think your job is to regain control over your members. It’s just Ingham now, but already I hear Mourilyan Mill is planning to down tools and then we’ll have a conflagration.”

Another voice said something inaudible, but Uncle George’s raised voice interrupted. “By that time, the Bolsheviks will have taken over the union, lock, stock and barrel.”

She stepped closer and heard her father say, “Never mind all that. We have to stop this now, before it goes further. It’s not just the mills around Ingham. My biggest concern is it spreading. If Mourilyan Mill goes out, there’ll be more. What can you do, Clarrie?”

A voice she didn't recognise said, "Perhaps if the union steps in and takes the lead rather than this stand-off, we can get the men into the Arbitration Court. That way we can regain control."

"What! Encourage the union to support the strike?"

"In a nutshell, yes. While the men have taken matters into their own hands, we have no control. Let the union appear to achieve something, and the men will fall into line."

Aunt Emily came around the corner and Beatrice hurriedly moved away from the door and along the corridor.

"Where have you been, Beatrice? We were worried," Emily scolded.

"Sorry Aunt Emily. I took a shortcut home, but it was the wrong turning." She swallowed and glanced at the floor. "I'm so sorry to worry you, but I'm exhausted. I think I'll have a bath and go to bed." Beatrice didn't want to talk right now. For once she craved solitude, and she felt guilty at all the lies that seemed to slip from her mouth with increasing ease.

Aunt Emily appeared animated in a way Beatrice had not seen her before, her gaze flicking critically across Beatrice's clothing. She said, "My dear, Howard Rainer's here. I've invited him to stay for dinner when the meeting's finished. I thought you'd want to thank him for the beautiful bouquet he sent. Hurry now and change into something pretty."

"I'm not hungry." Beatrice felt trapped. She didn't want to encourage Howard, neither did she think she could fit in another crumb.

“But you missed lunch. You must eat, Beatrice. Are you coming down with something? Perhaps we should call the doctor.”

“I’m fine. Just tired.” Beatrice tried to move past her aunt.

But unusually, Aunt Emily remained assertively blocking the corridor. “No one likes it if you don’t smile, dear.”

Beatrice stopped, surprised. This was her aunt speaking, the one who on most days seemed not of this world. Before thinking she snapped back. “Yes, but nobody respects you if you do.”

The look on her aunt’s face made Beatrice wish she could bite back the words. She smiled brightly. “Sorry Aunt. I’ll change now and be back down in no time.” She reached out and squeezed Emily’s hand, then rushed upstairs to her room.

6.

Mark opened his eyes in the pre-dawn gloom. The barrack's room he shared with Finn was large enough for two beds and an old chest of drawers. The window opening was a square cut into the tin wall to let air flow through the otherwise stifling box. A hinged corrugated iron sheet acted as a window covering, now propped open with a pole. The dying moon cast a feeble light in through the square, lighting up the beetles that struggled to free their feet from Mark's mosquito net.

A loud snore came from Finn's bed across the room and Mark sighed. He'd never get back to sleep now. His mum called snoring *the song of beer* and Finn was the maestro. He raised an arm behind his head as he listened to the mud-chooks screech in the distant forest, knowing he should get up, but he couldn't muster the energy to move. Every muscle in his body ached from the long hours of cutting he had put into the last week to make up for being away so much, and his body was paying. He winced as he shifted to alleviate the prickle from coir wires poking through the thin mattress ticking. But his aching muscles were nothing to the treachery unfolding.

The union had stepped in and taken over the strike once the Ingham blokes showed they were serious. Mark should have known the union was up to no good when they ignored Mourilyan Mill's decision to down tools, although it hadn't seemed to matter because the Arbitration Court agreed to allow the men to burn the rat-infested cane on the word of an inspector, but they stuck to their position on penalties. Mourilyan, Ingham, Macknade, and Victoria Mills went back to work. The men grumbled about the penalty, but all in all, the men

had won and more importantly, they had forced their own union to act in their interests. Mark was jubilant and had gone around the district with Jack, making sure everyone knew the result.

Then came the bad news. The ruling only applied to the Ingham Mills. Mark couldn't believe it. At the union meeting, the organiser shifted his feet but couldn't meet their gaze. That told Mark everything he needed to know as he watched the bloke wipe his hand across his mouth and mutter, "We're working on it." What wasn't he telling them? Mark gazed around, and saw the men wanted to believe the union.

After the meeting he'd gone back to work feeling the heaviness of failure, and blamed himself, going over every detail to understand where he might have been unclear on some point. All the sugar workers were in danger, not just Ingham. But he'd failed them. They had elected him as the militant minority delegate, but he'd done nothing to help the Goondi men. He'd failed them, just as the company had done.

Outside, on the barrack's veranda, someone moved. Most likely it was Bert. He was always first up in the morning. Mark pushed the mosquito net aside. It wasn't yet summer but that didn't deter the mossies. Malaria had been bad the past year and the Cocsec smoke just didn't keep the pests at bay. He stifled a groan as he swung his legs out of the bunk, and sat on the edge staring into the dark, listening to stone-curlews channelling the souls of the dead with their banshee wailing.

A screech from the lever of the hurricane lamp glass interrupted his reverie, and he heard Bert strike a match to light the wick. A creak and thump from the first room meant Danny was up. Another day had begun.

Mark dressed and walked along the veranda in the faltering dark. In the kitchen, Bert shuffled about, laying more kindling on the fire. Mark sat on a bench running the length of a scarred wooden table, watching Bert make breakfast for the gang. He filled the kettle and placed it on top of the stove to boil. Next, he heated frying pans to prepare for slabs of steak and bacon. A porridge pot steamed alongside. Mark's stomach rumbled in anticipation.

Danny ducked his head through the door, his eyes bleary from sleep. "Mornin' Bert, Mark," Danny greeted them as he rubbed his right forearm. A pungent smell of liniment filled the room.

Bert nodded to acknowledge the ganger. Then he cracked eggs into a bowl and beat them with a fork.

Mark shifted over for Danny to sit.

Danny opened a tin of Log Cabin, took out a paper, and stuck it to his moistened lowered lip as he scabbed out a wad of tobacco and ground it between his palms until the leaves were fine. He peeled off the paper from his lip to roll his first cigarette of the day.

On the stove, the kettle whistled, and Bert poured boiling water into an enamel teapot before plonking it down on the table.

Danny lit the rollie, inhaled, coughed, and wiped his mouth on his shoulder. "Sugar," he demanded.

Bert came back, banged the tin on the table, and said, "You'll have it kill you, one way or another."

Danny grinned at Mark as he took a bone-handled knife from the cutlery tin in the middle of the table to prize off the sugar lid. He poured a stream of golden grains into his mug and stirred his tea with the blade of the same knife. His face sobered. "Life kills you anyway. May as well take sweetness where you can find it."

"Ants have the same philosophy," Bert said and stomped back to the stove.

"Big words now. You swallow a dictionary?" Danny brought the rollie to his mouth between finger and thumb and sucked in a lungful of smoke.

Bert slapped steaks into a smoking pan. "Just put the damned lid back on properly."

The smell of frying steaks and then bacon filled the room and mingled with wood smoke from a leaky kitchen flue. Through the open door, Mark could see the sky lightening towards dawn.

Danny noisily slurped his tea and smoked. When he finished his cigarette, he stretched and walked to the door, flicking the glowing butt in an arch. It landed in the dirt beyond the barracks. It was the same ritual every morning. First Danny hitched up his trousers as he glanced at the sky. Then he banged his fist against the iron wall and shouted, "Get up you lazy buggers. The day's nearly over."

Mark heard the groans as the rest of the gang roused themselves. One by one, they filtered into the kitchen to sit along the benches flanking the table, some quiet, with sleep still clinging to them, some stiff, rubbing liniment into sore muscles. All hungry.

"Where's Finn?" Danny asked directing the question at Mark.

Mark shrugged. "He'll be out in a minute."

Bert dished up and still Finn had not appeared. Mark got up and went to their room. He kicked the end of Finn's bed.

"Get up – my breakfast's getting cold."

Finn groaned and turned over. "My head hurts."

"Serves you right. You were blind last night!" Mark scowled at his brother's sweat-soaked hair.

Finn struggled upright and fought off the mossie net, pushing it to one side. "Fucking thing." His mouth pursed, then he frowned. "I don't think it's the beer. I reckon I'm coming down with something. I ache everywhere and I'm freezing, but my legs are on fire. I reckon I've got a fever." He placed his palm on his brow. "How do you tell?"

Mark peered at his face. "You look a bit weird. Your eyes look like they've been boiled in kero. Maybe I should ask Bianca to come round to see you."

At the end of the day, when he returned to the barracks, Mark found a note from Bianca. It said, *I've taken Finn to the hospital, he's very ill. Come as soon as you get home.*

Finn was in a bad way. The doctor thought it was a milder form of Weil's disease. If that was milder, Mark didn't want to see serious. He sent a telegram to his parents. Then he wrote a letter to Beatrice. They had gone to the pictures last weekend, and she had said she wanted to go to the beach. Mark had told her the sea was not like other places and explained about

crocodiles and jelly fish that stung you if you went into the water. She'd just smiled so they arranged to go on the weekend.

But now Finn was sick, he'd have to beg off. He'd asked Bianca to deliver the note. At first she refused, but he wore her down, promising her anything. Eventually, Bianca agreed to drop off a note for him.

Every day after work, Mark went straight to the hospital, hoping Finn might have improved. Finn was in an alcove off the main ward and mostly Mark just sat next to the bed while his brother alternatively ranted with the fever or lay unconscious and limp like a sweat-beaded rag doll, a faint whiff of rotten eggs exuding from the sulphonamide drugs they gave him.

He took in his sketch book to while away the time as he waited. Memories of their childhood filled his mind. Bet you my new ging, you can't hit that hare, the 10-year-old Finn challenged. But shooting a bolting hare was one of Mark's talents, and he coveted Finn's ging. Their dad made it for Finn's 10th birthday. When Mark asked for one, his dad said he was old enough at 11 almost 12 to have a go at making his own. Mark had tried, but it wasn't as good. His dad promised Mark he'd show him, but Mark figured he could just have Finn's ging now.

So, he shot the hare with his dad's old .22 rimfire rifle, the bullet going in just beneath the left shoulder blade. How do you do that? Finn had demanded. Mark had shrugged and explained it like his father had explained it to him. It's about the breathing. Keep your eye on the spot you want to hit then go long and just ahead of the hare, so he'll run into it, keep steady and then pull the trigger between inhaling and exhaling. But Finn, it takes practice, he'd said.

Finn was always restless and on the move. He had no patience for practicing things although he was always game for a new adventure, dragging Mark into situations he would not have volunteered for otherwise.

Mark took the sturdy slingshot that Finn held out, feeling the smooth wood of the Y fit firmly in his hand as he pulled back the rubber sling. Finn had shrugged and picked up the hare to take home to Mum to cook for dinner, preening unashamedly when later she praised his marksmanship.

Mark let his brother take the credit while he placed the slingshot in his drawer. But his ownership didn't last long. The next time he went to get the ging it was gone, and he knew Finn had repossessed it. When Mark complained, Finn just shrugged and had said, Finders keep. Losers weep. The memory caused Mark's eyes to smart. Finn couldn't die. He blinked and ran a hand over his face. His throat felt tight, and his chest constricted. His real dad died of some mysterious disease. Not that he remembered, and he'd always accepted his stepdad as his father, but he couldn't lose Finn as well.

The visitors' bell sounded, and a nurse came in and told him he would have to leave. Mark tore out the sketch of Finn holding the hare and left it on the table next to his brother's bed.

The nurse said, "He'll be all right, you know." She picked up the sketch. "Oh look, I can see it's him when he was a kid." She glanced up at Mark. "You know the doctor says he'll recover. Your brother's strong and healthy and he got here quickly. So long as the disease stays out of his vital organs, he'll get better."

Mark nodded but didn't trust himself to speak.

A few days later, Mark waited on the station platform with his mum, while his dad sorted out their luggage at the guard's van. Mark warmed his back against the sun-blasted ticket office wall, relishing the warmth on his skin. He lifted his face, eyes closed, trying to believe Finn would get better.

The baggage guard shouted, and Mark opened his eyes to see what the noise was about. He saw two boys ducking between the couplings. They dashed across the track and disappeared into the trees at the top of the embankment, fishing rods fashioned from sticks held over their shoulders like rifles.

A loaded trolley heading towards the luggage van clanked across the uneven station platform, cutting off his view of the two kids. The porter pushing the trolley was a squat, swarthy man of middle age, another immigrant, Mark guessed, newly arrived from Sicily. Mark glanced down at the man's shoes and saw his boot stitching had been repaired many times.

A woman scuttled after him, carrying a threadbare carpet bag, leaning to one side as if it was heavy. Mark could tell by her clothing she was local. Her mud-splattered boots and legs indicated an early morning walk along unpaved bush roads. Her corset-pink hat and matching jacket blossomed with starbursts of scrubbed grey mould. Lank blonde hair escaped in tendrils that stuck to the grimed sweat on her neck.

She yelled at the porter to wait, and when he appeared not to hear, she shouted, "Oi you! Dago – your ears painted on? Stop why don't ya!"

His mother sucked in a breath and covered her mouth. Mark straightened. The porter stopped and turned towards the woman in pink, and Mark saw the anger in the white-rimmed flare of the Sicilian's nostrils and the clench of his jaw.

Mark took a step forward, but his mum placed a hand on his wrist, and warned, "Stay out of it, son."

The pink woman marched up and thrust her chin towards the porter's face. People stopped to watch. People who moments before had been talking and laughing together, milling about on the platform saying their goodbyes to passengers, had stopped talking and just stared at the porter. Over by the ticket office a matron in black widow's weeds said loudly, "They should all be deported."

The crowds seemed to move closer together, their disapproval hanging in the air above the platform like a malarial miasma.

Mark felt the anger unfurling from his stomach and strode towards the porter.

The porter glanced across at the station master, and then slumped and muttered an apology to the pink woman. "Chiedo il vostro perdono, signora." He held out his hand for her carpet bag.

Mark stepped between him and the woman. He took the bag from her hand, staring into her pale-fringed, narrowed eyes, and said, "Please, allow me." He grabbed the bag and slung it on to the trolley.

The woman in pink stood staring and slack mouthed.

Mark turned his back on her and said to the porter, “Benevento in Australia, you’re very welcome, mate.” He shook the man’s hand and said, “Non badare all’ignoranza.” Then just loud enough for the pink woman to hear, he translated, “Don’t mind their ignorance.”

The station master was bearing down on them, alarm written across his face, but Mark’s father headed him off by placing the two suitcases he carried into the station master’s path. Then he asked, “Can you tell me how to get to the hospital?”

The station master glanced at the porter but stopped to answer Mark’s dad’s question.

Mark grinned at the porter.

The porter nodded and turned away. His knotted arms reached forward to push the trolley, back muscles tightening to stretch his waistcoat across his shoulders, exposing fraying seams.

Mark hurried towards his dad and picked up the two suitcases, saying to the station master, “No worries mate, I’ll show him.”

Then he walked toward the station exit with his parents following.

His dad was still laughing when they arrived at Mark’s truck, but his mum scolded. “You should have stayed out of it. You can get into trouble.”

Mark shrugged. “Don’t worry Mamma.” Anger gnawed at his stomach, but he knew retaliation wasn’t the way to go. The only way to get these Britishers’ respect was power, and in this place those with power owned land; a lot of land, a situation he would find a way to emulate.

When they arrived at the hospital, Mark's parents stood in the spartan white alcove and gazed at Finn with worry etched in their faces.

His dad looked up and gave Mark a bleak smile, but he looked aged as he sat down by Finn's side and took his hand.

Finn groaned, and his closed eyes flickered and writhed as if live things squirmed under the lids. His arms had a mottled deep maroon rash as if bad blood congealed under the skin.

His mother brushed Finn's sweat soaked hair back and bent to kiss his brow. She had tears in her eyes.

Mark felt his throat constrict and said, "I'll go and find a doctor to talk to you."

At the end of the visitors' hour Mark walked with his parents down the hospital steps. The sun dipped below the mountain range leaving only a dirty orange smudge in its wake. His dad stopped and lit his pipe, striking a match against the rough outside wall. The red phosphorus flared, and his dad sucked twice, sending the sweet smell of Mark's childhood into a thin blue cloud that drifted and spiralled into the air over their heads.

His dad shook out the match and said, "He'll be right. He's a tough lad."

His mother's eyes swam with held-back tears, and his dad put an arm around her shoulders. "He's a survivor, Gina. Remember the last time."

Her face grew grave. "That was your fault, Erik."

Mark's dad shrugged. "Some have to learn the hard way," he said.

His father was right. Finn never learned his lessons easily. When he was 16, their dad had stumbled on a copper lode while out on a prospecting foray. He pegged the claim and took the opportunity to teach his boys about explosives, showing them how to use ammonium nitrate and fuel oil to blast apart rock. At the last-minute Finn, determined to see their handiwork in action, decided he needed a better vantage point.

Finn had got away lightly that time but still ended up in hospital with a burst eardrum from the shock wave, and a cut to his cheek where a rock had bounced up and hit him. The scar on his cheek had faded now and gave him a lopsided smile that women seemed to love.

Mark's parents stayed with his Uncle Guido and Aunt Zarah for 10 days, until they knew Finn was out of danger, but it would be weeks before he could leave the hospital. Every evening while Mark sat by his brother's bedside sketching, he jotted thoughts in the margins of his drawings. Finn was lucky he would recover, but what about the blokes who never did? Or the ones who did and couldn't work again. He wasn't even sure Finn would ever again manage any hard graft. The doctor said it might take months for Finn to recover, and still they had not won any agreement to compensate the men or declare Weil's an industrial disease. What could he do to make the industry listen? Anger squeezed Mark's head like a steel band, and he got up and walked out of the hospital. They had to do something and maybe Jack was right – revolution was the only way to force change.

A month later Finn was discharged, and Mark took him to Aunt Zarah's to recuperate. Then he wrote to Beatrice, apologising for standing her up, and asking her whether she would like to go to Flying Fish Point on the Mandalay ferry. Foolishly he said he'd bring a picnic, but

as the day came closer, he wished he hadn't said the bit about the picnic. What the hell did he know about organising picnics? He asked Bianca to help.

She laughed at him. "I tell you what, I'll make the picnic if you take Finn with you. He needs to get out and get some sun on him. He's driving Mamma crazy."

Mark groaned. "It's supposed to be romantic, not an invalid's outing."

Bianca placed her hands on her hips, her mouth a stubborn line. "Anyway, you can't take a woman like that on a picnic without la dama di compagnia. It would shock your Mamma."

Mark stopped. He didn't think his mother would worry, but Aunt Zarah would. "All right, you come and be Beatrice's chaperone."

"Hah! I must make the picnic, look after your brother, and chaperone your girlfriend. What do I get in exchange?"

"Please Bianca. You'll have my undying gratitude."

"I'll want more than that. But it can wait until you have something worth wanting. Now you have nothing." She grinned at him.

"You're an evil woman," Mark said with relief.

7.

Beatrice hummed with excitement. Mr Groom had published her piece on the October federal election for the seat of Herbert, along with statements of each political perspective. Of course, Mr Martens won the seat for Labor and Mr Lyons, who Mr Henry had called a Fascist, was returned as Prime Minister.

She noticed the paper did not give by-lines, but it didn't matter. The copy was hers, although she had sent it in using a nom de plume, *A View from the Sidelines!* By S. B. Anthony.

Beatrice was a great admirer of the American founder of the National Women's Suffrage Association, but she thought the name obscure enough in Australia to be mistaken as just the name of a journalist – a man of course, but even so, the name wasn't used.

She replaced the paper on the hall table and hugged herself as she gazed at the copy with pleasure. She was dying for her father to read it and she imagined when he did, he'd finally realise that she had grown up and could get a piece published. She wasn't so naïve to think he would have an instant change of heart, but perhaps he might begin to see her in a new light.

Things were starting to go so well. Not only did she have her opinion piece published but Mark's brother was out of hospital and Mark had asked her on a picnic. All she needed was an excuse to get away for the day, and Bianca had provided the very thing.

When she heard her father arrive, Beatrice went into the hall to meet him. "Hello, Daddy."

She held her cheek for his dry peck. Then she drew in a breath and said, "I would like to use my time in a more useful way and thought I might volunteer at the hospital. My friend Bianca ... you remember Bianca the nursing sister? ... well, she is taking some invalids for sun therapy at the seaside and asked if I might be available to help. It's the latest thing in health cures, you know."

Her father said, "So I've read." He picked up the newspaper and walked towards the drawing room. "Let Ida know she can serve tea, will you?"

After tea, Beatrice sat with a book on her lap, Aunt Emily sat embroidering, Uncle George looked through his stamp album and her father read the paper. The room was silent except for the ticking of the grandfather clock out in the hallway.

Then suddenly her father exhaled loudly. "Good grief. Why does Groom publish this tripe?"

"What's that, old boy?" Uncle George said.

"It's obscene ... actually it's seditious."

Beatrice pressed herself into the chair. Was that her article he had read or something else? What had she said that made him so angry?

He handed the paper to Uncle George. "What do you make of that?"

Uncle George read the article and Beatrice held her breath. Then he said, "Bolsheviks have no right to run for the Australian Parliament. Godless heathens. You're right. Spouting equality between men and women and the races is tantamount to inciting insurrection." George

paused and then said, "I know, Arthur, we don't always agree, but I think this is one area where we can work together. You don't live up here, but this menace is getting worse. Personally, I didn't defend the Empire during the war so we could have this kind of carry on. It's time we cleared out these Bolsheviks for good. There are nests of them, and they're multiplying. I shall have a word with Groom about what he prints in his papers, but I'd like you to meet some of my like-minded colleagues."

Beatrice placed her hand against the thrashing pulse in her neck. Thank goodness she hadn't used her own name, but why were they so angry? After all, she had just reported on the campaign and mentioned Mr Henry's speech.

Her father glanced across at her, but she pretended to be absorbed in her book.

Aunt Emily put her embroidery aside and got up. "I shall see how cook is going with dinner."

Her father waited until her aunt left and said, "I'm interested. We'll be here for a while until this mess is sorted out, and I'll need to remain in control of the old tiller a while longer."

"The Cane Growers will be delighted. Perhaps it might be an idea to come along to the Brotherhood meetings. That's where much of the real business takes place."

Beatrice's father sounded surprised. "I thought your church didn't approve."

"Oh, I don't know," George said. "It's different in Australia, not like that Semitic lot of Bolsheviks in Europe."

“Not sure if it is, George. That might just be the Spanish newspaper *Acción Española* talking. I read that same article, but Freemasons around the world are very similar to those here and I’m certain there are no Bolsheviks or Jews anywhere near the Brotherhood, at least not in my neck of the woods.”

George said, “Regardless, here we’re merely a business community supporting market interests for the good of the Empire. The church has nothing to fear. In fact, I told James Duhig not a month ago, it’s people like us belonging to these different groups that protect the church. Our concern is for the purity of the nation, and Christianity’s safety, first and foremost.”

Her father lowered his voice. “It’s Australian security that worries me. If the men demand higher wages or compensation for the disease, we’ll no longer be able to compete with sugar from around the world.”

“We’ll just need to raise tariffs.”

“Higher tariffs aren’t the answer. Look at the Americans: no sooner had they introduced tariffs than it instigated a Cuban uprising. They blamed American tariffs for the Depression. I was to have gone to Cuba next year but who knows what will happen now they have an army sergeant running the place.”

Uncle George closed his stamp album and got up to replace it in a glass cabinet. “The lower classes seem to think they have a right to seize power whenever the mood takes them. Look at the mining region in Spain. I invested heavily in Rio Tinto and with things the way they are, who knows what the Asturias miners will do next. My son Charles said he’d look into it for me, but lord knows what he’ll be able to do against one of these so-called Soviet collectives.”

Her father nodded. "I too..." He paused and shot another glance in Beatrice's direction. "Beatrice dear, can you run along and help your aunt."

Beatrice put her book down and walked out of the room, but as she left, she heard her father say, "I'll need to make a trip to Spain. Much of the investment is Beatrice's..."

Beatrice swung back to the doorway.

Her father glanced at her and said, "Run along then dear."

As she walked away her father said, "Spain's Gil Roble, advocates a response to the Asturias miners in a similar manner to what Chancellor Dollfuss did earlier in the year in Linz and Vienna. I think Australia might learn from such leaders. The one thing we must insure against is that these socialists don't get elected in Australia or gain any more popularity with the common man. Clarrie thinks they're trying to take over the union. I wouldn't be surprised. We'll have to do something to discredit them."

8.

The 1934 season passed into 1935, and the monsoon had not yet arrived when Mark's gang cut out their last field. He still had not found a job to get across the slack, or at least nothing that paid a living wage. He decided to take Finn home and work the tin dredge with their dad for a few months. Finn hadn't fully recovered and wasn't able to do any physical work. Lazing about was driving him, and consequently their Aunt Zarah, crazy. So, going home was most probably the best option.

Javier Cruz had suggested Mark go with him to Brisbane to work in the shoe factory. You're a sure bet: non-smoker, so no lost production time. The fucking capitalists love that. Javier had grimaced, shrugged, and then taken out his tobacco pouch, adding, maybe it's better to pick fruit at Stanthorpe. At least the farmers don't give a damn what a fellow gets up to so long as he does a fair day's work.

Mark had quite liked the idea although he'd never been to Brisbane. In fact, he'd never been outside of the region and Javier's proposition was tempting, but he shook his head. He would have to take Finn home.

Beatrice was going back to Sydney in a week, and Mark had contemplated going too. At least then he might see her, but jobs were still scarce, and he couldn't risk it, not if he wanted to have the money for the farm deposit, and he reckoned he'd found the perfect place, in the foothills up the Palmerston Highway.

On the day before he left Innisfail for his home in Herberton, Mark once again took Beatrice to Flying Fish Point on the Mandalay ferry. He asked Bianca if she would come too,

both as chaperone for Beatrice and to look after Finn, who hadn't let up complaining that Mark was ignoring him since the last time they'd gone to the beach.

When he'd asked Bianca, she'd narrowed her eyes and said, you just want me to make the picnic again.

He'd squinted at her guiltily. Will you? He begged.

She had gazed at him for a full minute before replying. I'm keeping a tally on all these favours. Don't think I'll forget. She walked away singing, I'll be a rich woman soon, and you'll be my slave, but at the door she stopped and swung around. But make sure you choose a day I'm not on duty. I am not swapping shifts again to suit your love life, she said.

The day Mark had chosen arrived, and it was as hot as any he could remember, a rare cloudless day in the middle of the wet season. The sun scorched the sand to blast-furnace heat, and the wind drove desert air across the Great Dividing Range.

At the beach, Mark and Beatrice left Finn, who was still very weak, with Bianca and the picnic under shady trees, and paddled ankle deep in the frothy waves that ran up the sand. Mark refused to go into deeper water for fear of crocodiles and jellyfish and begged Beatrice not to consider it.

Still, she insisted on lying down in her bathing costume in the shallow water. "To get cool," she said, laughing at his worried frown. "You stand guard and watch for Mr How Kee's monsters."

A few months ago, the newspapers had reported that Mr How Kee had seen something he described as a monster when he was out fishing. She said her uncle had speculated it was a

Japanese submarine, spying on Australia. No one else had seen anything, and Beatrice joked that Mr How Kee must have visited the opium den in the Chinese quarter before embarking on the fishing expedition. But Mark had also heard talk that it might be a Japanese submarine scouting the coast. Who knew what it was? Possibly a tree branch, but rumours abounded of an imminent Japanese invasion and Mark believed Mr How Kee had really seen something odd.

Mark stood knee deep and watched her splash in the warm waters. The sunlit shallows reflected in her gleeful eyes and flickered light patterns across her face. It dawned on him that he felt so at ease with her because she seemed to skim across the ocean of life, embracing the wind in her face with the same exuberant abandon as Finn, except hers was softer and more inveigling, whereas Mark turned over and examined every step of the way. What did that say about him? Did he need responsibility to make him feel useful or was he drawn to their spirit of adventure because his was so tempered by reflection?

Her skin soon reddened, so he suggested they take shelter beneath the giant rainforest trees growing beyond the high-water line. They walked further along the beach away from his brother and cousin. Beatrice had brought a small towel, and he laid it down for her to sit on, while he sat on the sand next to her, leaning back on his hands, his legs stretched out.

He talked about inconsequential things to avoid telling her he was leaving the next day. Was this the end? He hoped not. She said she would return with her father for the next season, but would she? After taking up again with her old crowd in Sydney she might change her mind.

He watched the seething sea, its colours graduating from turquoise to a deep and distant purple. On the horizon a ship sailed south, its twin stacks trailing tendrils of grey smoke stark

against the bright sky. Soon, she would be on a deck just like that one, sailing away perhaps for ever. He forced away dark thoughts and gauged the incoming tide as it washed waves up the beach, leaving behind salt spume that spluttered over the multitude of crustacean burrows.

Beatrice inhaled sharply, jerking him from his reverie as she said, "I had an article published about the election. Mostly about Jack's campaign."

"Congratulations," he said but trepidation crawled across his neck. He shook it off and smiled at her. "I wish I'd seen it. How did it go?" She couldn't be aware of how some people reacted to ideas of Communism. Pagans, barbarians, devil worshipers and other worse things he'd been called as if atheism was a dirty word. But he was used to insults. He'd heard them all his life, although mostly at school about his cultural background, but he wished she'd take more care.

She hugged her knees to her chest. "It made my father furious."

Mark frowned. "What did he do?"

Her gaze flickered towards him and away. "Oh, nothing to me. He doesn't know I wrote it. He just ranted at my uncle." She paused, then with another quick sideways glance she asked, "Are you a Communist, Mark?"

He scrutinised her face and then nodded. "Yes."

She folded her legs sideways and turned to face him, her eyes full of curiosity. "Since when?"

He pulled in his own legs and leaned forward. “My Dad’s been a member since the Party started in ’20 so I’ve sort of grown up with it. I was in the Pioneers until I was 14 and then joined the Youth League. I started paying full membership at 18.” He glanced across to gauge her reaction, seeing genuine interest and a lack of guile in her eyes, but still, he felt the need to reassure her. “It was my choice. Mum’s a Catholic though, and she insisted I go to a Catholic school, so I got baptised and confirmed, the works.” He paused and his voice became distant. “Jack complains I’m not committed enough to the cause, but I am committed to equality, I just don’t want a violent revolution. I don’t want to overthrow anyone, but I also don’t think the current system is fair. Besides, the whole liberal capitalist system is like a fairy tale, isn’t it?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, they preach meritocracy and tolerance, particularly for other people’s beliefs, but then use devious means to coerce people into doing what they want. If you don’t do what they want, they make sure you’re either discredited or excluded in some way.” He stopped and relaxed his grip on his knees, sliding out his legs to dig his bare feet into the sand, resting back on his elbows. “Anything that requires coercion or ends up excluding people who hold other beliefs, can’t be good.” He glanced at her and smiled. “Listen to me philosophising. I sound like Bert banging on about the Fascists and the Nazis in Europe.”

“No, please. I want to hear what Communists believe in?”

Political conversations with women was a new experience for Mark and it made him nervous. He toned down the rhetoric. “My dad tells a story that a Russian friend told him about an old mule with a fly on his back. The fly sat there all day, while the mule toiled from sun-up to sun-down and then at the end of the day the fly said, look how hard we worked!”

He gazed at her trying to see beyond the polite curiosity, to gauge whether she was really interested or was humouring him. She was busy piling up sand in an ever-growing mound. The light from the sea reflected in her eyes, and he wondered why she, who had everything, even cared.

The sharp sound of a branch cracking caused both of them to pause and turn towards the noise. Further along the beach a very large black bird, with a blue head and red neck, stepped out of the forest.

Beatrice inhaled and froze. “What’s that?” she whispered.

Mark stood up, but the bird spotted his movement and in terror scrambled back from where it had come, its retreat snapping twigs as it crashed back through the foliage. It was immediately hidden in the shadows.

Mark relaxed and grinned. “It’s a cassowary. Like an emu, but from the forests.”

“Are they dangerous?”

He sat down again. “They can be. I wouldn’t get too close.”

“This place is so strange, sometimes I wonder what country I’m in, or if I even belong.”

He nodded, and then another thought struck him. “Do any of us? Maybe the country’s theirs...” That realisation had niggled all his life, but she interrupted his thoughts.

“Birds don’t own a country.” She shook her head and piled more sand on to her mound.

“Does anyone?” Mark’s mind was still on the cassowary.

But Beatrice had gone back to their previous conversation. “My father is afraid you’ll start a revolution.” She patted the mound as if shaping it.

Mark frowned. “Did he say that?”

“I heard him talking to my uncle. He said the socialists all over the world are causing trouble and he’s afraid there will be bloodshed.” She began to scoop a trench in a circle around the mound of sand.

The mound looked surprisingly like a castle. He said, “You know, revolution doesn’t have to be bloody, it can be democratic. War is the tool of imperialists to expand markets. It’s not our preference. Our goal is to enfranchise all people and redistribute surplus more evenly.”

“Ha! My father will never give up what he’s got, not even for a democratic majority. You will have to fight him if you want to win.”

A smile quivered at his mouth’s corners. “You wouldn’t want us to fight your father, would you?”

Beatrice pursed her lips. “No, I suppose not, but at least you can work somewhere else if my father won’t listen to you, but it’s different for me.”

“It’s not that easy, but you also have the option to walk away.”

She scowled. “But I’ll be poor if I do that ... Oh! Never mind. Pass me that stick by your foot.”

“This one?” He held up a piece of bleached driftwood.

She took it from him and stuck it into her sand mound and sat back. “Do you like my castle?”

He smiled. “Very impressive.”

She pushed it over with her feet. “I used to love building castles when I was a kid, but this one wasn’t very good. You need a bucket to make a good castle.” Then she said, “Is that why Jack said all the different people, like the Italians, and Greeks, and Aborigines and everyone, men, and women, have to work together and support each other?”

The non sequitur threw him. “The problem is that capitalists maintain an unemployed buffer, people who are only too eager to get a shot at a wage, no matter the master. If we don’t all stand together, they’ll find ways to exploit us.”

“Like the mule with the fly.”

He nodded. “All we want is to redress the balance,”

“I can’t imagine my father and uncle doing what you do, labouring in the cane fields.” She lapsed into silence. a frown between her eyes. The sunlight seeping through the leaves dappled her skin with its diffused light, and he felt a surge of something soft and alien wash through him.

“You’d be surprised what’s possible,” he said, letting the sand from her broken castle dribble from his hand. Then he leaned over to blow some grains from her shoulders, concerned that the glow blooming on her skin would soon turn to blisters. How his mouth found hers he didn’t remember, but he pulled away, stuttering a mutilated apology.

Her smile as she gazed up at him caused a rush of emotion so confusing, he had a sudden urge to run. He turned away, blood thrumming in his ears and stared unseeing across the sea. His world narrowed, reduced to an isolated sliver on the wrong side of the gulf that separated them. How on earth had he imagined they could be together?

Her voice broke through his reeling thoughts. “What’s wrong?”

He couldn’t tell her. He wasn’t even sure he knew. This desire was an entirely new sensation, at once a desperation to completely possess, but at the same time, a yearning to merge himself with her, all overshadowed by the certainty of ensuing retribution once her father found out.

Beatrice sat up and touched his forearm. When he didn’t move, she ran her palm up to his shoulder and cupped the back of his neck. It was like the recoil from his dad’s Krag-Jørgensen, and suddenly she was on her back, her mouth under his, soft and opening beneath his lips as he tasted her warm eager slipperiness, and all his tension dissolved into the sublime optimistic promise of her mouth.

“Coo-ee, Mark!”

He heard Bianca’s voice as if from a distance, and reluctantly broke contact with Beatrice’s lips and looked up.

Bianca was walking towards them. “Be more discreet, you two. A family’s just arrived. Now, come and have some lunch. Finn won’t let me read my book; says he’s bored and keeps flicking sand at me.”

Mark swallowed to ease the tightness in his throat as he stood up and dusted the sand off his shorts. He glanced at Beatrice, but she hadn't moved, just lay back languidly, smiling up at Bianca. He held out his hand to pull her up. For a moment, he held her close taking in the smell of her, the softness, the heat from her sunburnt skin, the apple scent of her hair, and he never again wanted to be anywhere else. The distant laughter of children brought him to his senses and reluctantly he released her.

Beatrice bent to pick up her towel, then she linked her arm with Bianca's and strode off down the beach, the frilled skirt of her bathers flipping and dipping with each step.

Mark followed, admiring the certainty of her long stride. He would have to tell her he was leaving tomorrow and do it soon. He shouldn't have kissed her. Their relationship had no future.

Part Two

9.

Maybe he was a fool. His dad reckoned the only way you could join their club was to be born into it. The rest was an illusion, a hoax to keep you under the boot, believing that if you worked hard enough you could make it. The great Australian dream was a fantasy. The victory he had felt so nearly within his grasp, snatched away by a lie. It was one history had seen before, and something to which this land had long borne witness.

It all began at sign-on. Mark had arrived back in Innisfail for the new cutting season. It was early June, invigorating, clear, sunny, and relatively cool by day, with dense fog only spoiling the night. The '35 harvest sign-on took place at the Goondi Mill, and he stood in the queue with Danny and the rest of the gang as they waited for their turn to sign the *Gentleman's Agreement* for a new season. Beneath his feet lay the wounded soil of those who came before, those who always were and always will be, their history now mere shadows: the native and the slave, never given the status of enfranchised men, the great lie of the colonists still exercising its power.

He raised his gaze. Overhead, limp, and empty skins of the night tiger festooned the rafters with their serpently decorations. They had been shed during the comparative peace of a mill rendered silent during the growing season. Mould growing on old bagasse mounds scented the air and weeds sprouted alongside the tram lines. Along the fences, chains of cane beetle shells clung to each other, waving emptily in the breeze. But Mark knew the place would soon be back, a bustling hive of magic that turned a grass stalk into the sweetness that powered the local economy.

He hadn't seen Beatrice since she had left to go back to Sydney. When he'd left at the end of January, she had lost her usual gregarious charm. "Will you write to me?" she'd said with tears in her eyes.

He had rubbed his palm across the back of his neck, not knowing how to handle her tears, not even sure he believed in her continuing steadfastness.

"And send drawings of your home," she demanded.

He had taken both her hands in his, and before he knew what he was really saying, he asked her to go with him. She'd given him a sceptical look, but he couldn't say more. What did he have to offer? She had promised she would come back with her father when he returned in May. Mark thought long and hard about asking her to marry him. If they were to make a go of a life together – if it wasn't empty promises – he'd have to have more to offer her than the life of a cane cutter.

And now he had, and was bursting with the news, which he could hardly wait to tell her. He'd bought a farm up the Palmerston Highway. It was small and covered with jungle, except about 20 acres cleared by the former owner. A dilapidated shed had once served as the family home. It wasn't much, but it was a start. A season or two in the cane and he could put down a small crop of sugar in the clearing, then build a proper house, and clear more land. He would build up and if everything worked out, he would ask her to marry him. Except he didn't know why she would give up her grand life in Sydney to be his wife.

It amazed him when he began to get her letters, almost every other day. He was stunned that she seemed to like him at all, but a relationship couldn't survive if she went back to

Sydney again, and he could only see her on rare occasions. He sighed. He couldn't think of that right now. The queue had shortened, and Danny was next up.

The bloke at the sign-on desk said to Danny, "Wait up, your gang has foreigners. They need to come back tomorrow."

Danny asked, "Why's that, then?"

Mark scrutinised the cane inspector. The man's ginger moustache drooped like a mangy rat tail across his top lip. He was new, and Mark didn't know him.

"Tomorrow's foreign gang sign-on. Today's just for Britishers." He pointed at the folded newspaper under his freckled forearm. It showed an advert for the sign-on, the same one Mark had seen in Herberton a week before.

Mark heard the warning in Danny's words, although his tone was reasonable. "You got mates waiting to join a gang then, have you?"

"As a matter of fact, two local blokes with union tickets are looking for work." The inspector aimed his pencil at two men who stood away to the side of the queue.

"Britishers?" Danny asked and rocked back and forth on the balls of his feet.

"Yeah."

"Locals, you say," Danny said looking at the men. "I don't recognise them."

"Well, from Brisbane anyway."

“So, local Queensland Britishers?” Danny’s big head nodded slowly as if thinking this over. “Ever cut before?”

“No, but they’re keen.”

Danny’s voice dropped to a deep softness. “So, good blokes who cut all last season and did a damn fine job must back off for Britishers who have never cut a day in their lives.” His tone changed, becoming harsh. “But want a crack at it. Soft Brisbane boys!”

“Don’t rattle your dags, chum. It’s the agreement: Britishers first.”

Danny’s face went red. “A fuckin snagger,” he said. “You want the cane cut, or not?”

“Aw, come on chum. Don’t be like that,” the man said.

“Be like what? Be like I want my gang to work with me, not give some soft coves a go only to be left stranded because they can’t hack it after a week. Then what do I do? You’ll leave me in the lurch like last year. The only bloke I could find willing was Mark here.”

“These men won’t let you down. And you can’t have two foreigners in your gang when Britishers are available. You’ve been around long enough to know the rules.”

Danny frowned. “Two foreigners, you say. And who are they?”

The man glanced down at his list. “Anders and Manzoni.”

Mark’s heart sunk. He would have to go back to the tin. He couldn’t go back. And there was Beatrice and the farm. “Hang on...”

Danny put his hand on Mark's arm as he stared at the man. Someone called out, "What's the holdup?"

Danny turned to glare at the men in the queue, and they backed off.

Mark glanced at Bert who looked on with astonishment written across his usually solemn patrician features.

Danny said, "So!" He rose on the balls of his feet again and then settled back. "Mr Anders is a foreigner, is he?"

"That's right mate, according to the Gentleman's Agreement."

"And Mr Manzoni?"

"Yes, I said so, didn't I."

"So, what about Mr Cruz?" Danny looked at Javier and said, "Sorry mate, gotta make a point."

Javier shrugged at Danny but fixed his gaze on the man behind the desk.

"No, Mr Cruz is all right. He's an American and fits into the British category."

"So, what about me then?"

"Don't be daft Danny. You're British."

"You think so? But I'm not, am I? I'm born in Holland."

"Oh, that's all right. Dutch, American, British are the same. All white men."

“So, now you’re telling me that a chum born here, just 100 miles from where we stand, is foreign, but me and Javier, born overseas, are not.”

“Look. I’ve heard of your gang’s reputation and it’s a good one, but I didn’t make this agreement. I just carry out the rules, and Anders and Manzoni are on the list as Italians and will have to come back tomorrow for the foreign cutters’ sign-on.”

“Fuck your sign-on, mate. Goondi’s loss. My gang goes with me.”

“Hang on, don’t lose your hat.” The inspector stood up. “The rest of your chaps are fine but we’ve gotta tighten up.”

“Fuck that. I’ll sign up the gang to Mourilyan Mill. Tell that to the cane growers. The best gang Goondi ever had, and your stupid rules are gonna lose them. Just tell Mr Hudson to shove his sign-on, somewhere the sun don’t shine. Come on, boys. We’re going.”

Mark stepped in, knowing an argument wouldn’t help. “Look Danny, we’re holding up the line.” He pointed at the queue of men, some watching the argument with interest, others trying to ignore it. “Let’s sort this out later. You blokes sign on now, and Bert and I will sort something out tomorrow.”

As he walked away, Mark felt the lead of failure, saw his farm ownership fading. Dad had known, as had Jack. To imagine anything else was his own conceit: a nose pushed against the glass barricades, the little match girl gazing hopefully through the defences put in place by the rich: subtle and corrupting. His dad was right all along, and he was an idiot.

Later that same day, Mark and Bert waited at the Goondi pub while Danny went to the union office to argue their case. Bert paced up and down the veranda, his footfalls an eternal

metronome marking off time. Mark sat on the bench that ran along the outside wall, trying to remember the contours of Beatrice's face, the shape of her nose, her laughing eyes, her generous mouth, alternatively polite and passionate. They had arranged to meet by the river, and he squinted at the sky to see what time it was. He would be late, but perhaps it was foolish even to think of going. He had nothing now to offer and had probably lost the deposit he'd put down on the farm.

Bert stopped pacing and swung around to face Mark. "This is a very strange situation. I'm not sure what to make of it. Fair enough, I must wait until tomorrow, but why you if you're born here?"

Mark shook his head. "Shearing chums. No money in wool at the moment."

Bert pursed his mouth. "I've reflected on this and perhaps for me, it's an opportunity." He paused for a moment. "I'm well qualified, and too old for this job. Zarah has been good to me with the baking job over the last few months and working for Jack on the newsletter translations has been fine. But I need to go back to teaching. To make a career again. What do you think?"

Mark shrugged. "If that's what you want."

Bert said. "I think it is. I will advertise in the newspaper and try for a job as a teacher or tutor somewhere, maybe in Cairns or Townsville, maybe even Brisbane or Melbourne."

"What about the gang?"

“Danny has a good argument for you, but for me, they see me as a foreigner, albeit now I am naturalised as a British subject. You will get in. It was just that man trying to get his friends a job. That’s why he picked on you.”

Danny walked along the road towards them, his shape looming dark against the fading western light. When he came closer, he said, “Good news and bad news. They’ve relented on Mark, but Bert mate, they won’t budge.” He repeated the union’s excuse. “I spoke to the organiser, and he said the cane inspectors have got orders from the mill to tighten up, since the strike in Ingham last year. All the CSR mills are following the agreement to the letter, now. He also told me privately that they’re not keen on employing Party members, which is a problem. The growers think the Communists are trying to take over the union. That’s why your names were on the list.” Danny spat on the ground. “I told him he’d have a problem getting cutters if they excluded Party members, but he already knows that. Anyhow, you’re sorted, but Bert, mate, I could do nothing. You’ll have to come back tomorrow.”

Mark’s relief was tinged with concern for Bert, but Bert placed his hand on Mark’s shoulder and said, “I am happy for you, my friend.” Then he shook Danny by the hand. “Thank you, Danny. You are a good ganger. The best, but my future is not in the cane. I have decided. In the meantime, I continue baking bread for Zarah if she’ll have me, and Jack will be pleased I can continue with the newsletter.”

By the time Mark got to the river, he was late by more than an hour and the place was deserted. It was disappointing, but even if she had come, she couldn’t have waited. He would have to send a message.

His limbs felt heavy as he climbed into his truck and drove to Guido's. He had a job and should be exuberant, but he was worried about Bert. The day he had looked forward to for months left a taste of river mud in his mouth. Despite the ongoing job, he couldn't summon the enthusiasm to join the gang at the pub.

When he walked in through the kitchen door at Guido's Guest House, he saw Beatrice sitting at the table with Bianca and Aunt Zarah, shelling peas and drinking Uncle Guido's lemon liqueur.

"Beatrice ... you're here?"

She jumped up from the table, her cheeks pink. "I waited by the river all afternoon." Her tone was accusing.

Bianca rolled her eyes and said, "Well you might have to wait a bit longer. Jack asked me to tell Mark, he needs to speak with you urgently."

Mark shook his head, grateful but astonished that she had come to the guest house to find him.

Beatrice slid her hand into his, the soft warmth buoying his flagging spirit after the enervating day's events.

She said, "I'll come with you."

They went next door. Jack was sitting with Bert on the veranda. Both men stood when they saw Beatrice.

Jack said, “Mark. Good to see you mate, and Beatrice, you’re back from Sydney. How was it?”

“Lonely. I missed you all.” She smiled at Jack and hugged Bert.

Mark shook the men’s hands. “Bianca said you had news.”

Jack pushed his chair towards Beatrice and then sat down on the doorstep. “Things are hotting up. You missed the meeting in May, and I just wanted to let you know what happened because you’re one of the delegates, re-elected in absentia. Bert was just bringing me up-to-date on today’s troubles.”

Mark squatted on his haunches. “Yep, bad news.”

Jack said, “There’s worse. The company’s trying to get the court ruling from last year’s hearing overthrown. The growers are refusing to burn.” He glanced at Beatrice and ran his palm over his mouth.

“My uncle and father?”

Jack nodded. “Maybe you shouldn’t be here, shouldn’t listen in.”

“No. I want to. I think what my family’s doing is wrong. I want to learn more. Maybe I can help.”

Mark shook his head at Jack, and said, “You can’t go against your family, Beatrice. That’s not right either.”

Jack said, “The good news is that Dr Cotter discovered the bacteria causing the rat’s disease. It’s a particularly bad form of leptospirosis but he’s pretty sure burning cane before harvest will kill most of the problem. Although the company blames me for causing the strike in Ingham last year, we must continue the campaign to allow burning as prevention. They’re pushing to extend the Gentleman’s Agreement, but that’s a ruse to expel Party members from the industry because so many members are immigrants.”

Mark nodded. “Don’t know how they’ll target the British members, but I’m sure they’ll think of something.”

Beatrice scowled and took a breath, feeling torn loyalties even as she said, “It’s worse than that. My father and my uncle were talking about having the Party outlawed.”

The men stared at her.

“How?” Jack asked.

Beatrice shrugged. “While we were in Sydney, I heard Daddy speaking to his friend Mr Menzies about uniting all the non-labour parties to crush, not only Labor, but also any other workers’ parties and unions. Mr Menzies wants the Communist Party banned completely.”

Jack laughed. “He’ll have a hard time getting that across. The labour movement is becoming stronger by the day. But I know Menzies. He’s the bloke who wants to keep unemployment levels up, to keep wages down, so companies can make more profit. When Ted Theodore said the Government could pay for full employment, he and his cronies shot him down in flames, claiming some rot about inflation.”

Mark took Beatrice's hand. He could see the apprehension creased into pleading lines around her eyes. "You need to be careful, Beatrice. It's better if they don't know you have anything to do with this."

Jack said, "Same goes for you, Mark. If Beatrice's father hears you're a Party member involved with taking the fight up to his company, bang go your prospects for his daughter's hand."

Beatrice tilted her head in Mark's direction, her face opening in astonishment. "Were you planning to consult me?"

Mark had a sudden coughing fit. Damn Jack and his big mouth. The bloke was grinning like a gargoyle. He straightened up and leaned on the veranda railing, staring out into the evening gloom as he recovered his breath. But at that moment he knew he would have to choose which path his life might follow.

10.

On the western horizon, squatting amid the Bellenden Ker mountain range, the great bulk of Bartle Frère, the rain mountain, brooded beneath its perennial shroud. Below, the two mighty Johnstone Rivers meandered indifferently across plains split asunder 10 million years before, in a cataclysm only the earth remembered. As far as the eye could see, Badilla sugar cane flowered across the land, acre upon acre topped by feathery fronds dewy in the dawn light.

In a bend of the North Johnstone River, Mark stared at the weedy paddock before him, a worried frown puckering his forehead. The cane was a tangled mess. Cutting it would be fraught with traps, both snakes and rats and even the odd crocodile like the one killed at Stitts farm last year. 15 feet, and a stomach full of chook feathers. They reckoned it took five bullets to kill it.

Mark glanced at the sky brooding above the range. Its forked lightning chased clouds that scuttled ahead of distant columns of falling rain in an orchestra of shadows, light and dark. If the rain came here it would make cutting even harder.

Danny had requested the cane inspector authorise a burn, and this morning an inspector arrived with his shiny knee-high riding boots, solar topee and long gloves protecting him from any possible danger.

He shook his head, scribbled something on his clipboard and said, “Can’t see any problems here.”

Danny cursed and said, “Any man in my gang gets sick, you’ll pay.”

Around the district rumours abounded. The union said they were trying to get the matter before the court, but nothing came of it. The more fearful of the disease the men became, the angrier they got.

Mark had spent the past weeks after work every evening, speaking with the gangs from different barracks and even catching up with the mill hands. Goondi men were loyal union men and hesitated to go against their own, despite their union's apparent inability to gain traction with the cane growers.

He saw Beatrice infrequently but when he was able, they met secretly, usually at Guido's Guest House or at Jack's place. Fear grew in him that, one day, someone would see them together and tell her father.

Beatrice smiled at his caution. "I don't know anyone in Innisfail, except the people at the hospital."

But she did, and more and more people came to recognise the woman who was not only George West's niece, and Arthur Langham's daughter, but was rumoured to be heir to her British grandmother's fortune and related to aristocracy. Mark had asked her about that report in the newspaper, but she had shrugged and said it was all an exaggeration and didn't everyone claim some distant relationship with aristocracy. Mark shook his head. He had no such desire, but Beatrice just laughed and said that was because he didn't have British relatives. It didn't mean any of it was fact. But afterwards she received so many invitations she had less free time than Mark, and Mark swore she spent more time with Bianca at the hospital than with him.

When they did get time together, they discussed plans for the farm, imagining being together freely without hiding from her family. Mark repeatedly wondered at the good fortune

that had brought her into his life. But as the 1935 season's days passed into weeks, the problems intensified and to some extent it was Mark's doing. It was as though his life ran along parallels. On one track was Beatrice, and Mark's desire to be an appropriate suitor. On the other, was his duty to the men. Mark needed to see to their wellbeing, and it was the latter track that set Mark on a collision course with Arthur Langham.

First, Mourilyan Mill downed tools and the mill hands declared the cane black. Weeks passed and the protest spread to the other mills. Tully, South Johnstone and even Hambledon mill near Cairns stopped work. Mark spoke to the marine workers, and the railway workers who agreed to support the strike. After the cane inspector's decision today, Mark thought, he might persuade Goondi cutters and mill hands to go out too.

He at last convinced them that the union would never support them, and the men were risking their lives. Only then did the Goondi men finally agreed to down tools. It was touch and go but the motion carried.

Afterwards, Beatrice told Mark she had heard her father order Mourilyan Mill closed, and the cane stocks transported to Goondi Mill, where a group of farmers had volunteered to operate the mill. She looked at him worriedly and said, her father was so mad he stomped around the house barking out orders, striding up and down the corridor from telephone to study, demanding her uncle George install a telephone extension, as if it was her uncle's fault. More disquieting, her uncle had called upon the Old Guard, and he had gone to Cairns to talk to people.

Mark had heard of the Sydney-based Fascist outfit called the New Guard, but he'd never heard of an Old Guard. He asked Jack what he knew.

Jack looked grim and told Mark they were a secret quasi-military operation sworn to oust Communism, sanctioned by the Bruce Government a few years back. In '32 they plotted a coup to remove Premier Jack Lang in Sydney, but Governor Game beat them to it, sacking Lang instead.

Jack commented that the Old Guard carried on about the Communists wanting to overthrow the government, but it was precisely what they were prepared to do. He said it was funny how those who shouted loudest were those secretly acting themselves. He'd put his hand on Mark's shoulder and told him not to worry they were just dithering old fools left over from the war, who liked playing with guns. Focus on what matters, he had said.

What mattered now was the strike. Despite most of the members voting to down tools and force the industry to allow them to burn, the union refused to countenance the strike. Without union support, relief was not forthcoming, and with no wages the men's commitment was a fragile thing.

Mark helped to organise relief committees. Beatrice wrote dozens of begging letters for Jack's signature, and unions from across Australia sent financial support to the rank-and-file strike fund. Yet, the cutter's own union continued their refusal to support the strikers.

Then, the court summoned all the men to a secret ballot. So that was to be their strategy; divide and conquer. Mark spent days speaking to members, persuading them not to cave into threats, and to remain solid. After all, this was a fight for their lives and all they had to rely on were their mates. This was to be their Waterloo.

On the morning they were to attend the court for the ballot, Mark waited at the southern Innisfail tram stop, opposite the Riverview Hotel. The day dawned warm, the sky cloudless and

a light breeze ruffled the palm trees that lined the river. The water reflected a cerulean sky as it lapped and slapped at the wooden jetty. The sweet smell of sugar lay in a bitter blanket across the town as volunteer labour manned the mill.

Soon men began arriving by the lorry load. Once they were all gathered, more than 1000-strong, they raised their homemade protest banners. One worker had brought along an accordion.

Mark thrust his sign into the air. *Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?*

The men around him laughed and wobbled their own banners.

Then at Mark's signal the accordion player struck up chords for *The Red Flag*. Voices joined in, and in phalanx formation the men marched on Regent Theatre where the magistrate was to take the ballot. With each line of the song Mark's determination grew.

They came to the junction of Rankin and Edith Streets, but the road was blocked. Khaki-clad police, their arms linked, formed a barrier across the road. They had guns at their hips.

Mark swore under his breath. "What the fuck is this now, a war?" But he sent word through the lines. "No violence, obey the law."

They were on the side of right. Their demands were reasonable, their concerns not for profit but for their health and to support invalided men like Finn.

A sergeant shouted at them to surrender their banners, and in silence the men complied. Only then did the khaki cordon move aside. The sergeant confiscated the accordion, glaring at its owner as if daring him to challenge police authority.

No one said a word to the police and Mark felt his chest swell at their discipline. Then the men, freed from their banners, thrust their right fists into the air and in solidarity, marched on.

Mark raised his voice in song. *“Then raise the scarlet standard high,”*

A thousand men’s voices joined in. *“Beneath its folds we’ll live and die!”*

The day was a victory for the workers who had refused to submit to a secret ballot, no matter how much the court threatened to fine them. Afterwards the jubilant men stood about the streets in groups. Those who still had money shouted others a beer. The publicans knew the men would earn again and gave credit.

As the evening drew in, Mark sighed with relief. All had gone as planned without violence. He found Danny, Javier and Bert smoking and drinking beer in the yellow light that spilled from the Queen’s Hotel.

Danny said, “Mate, the bloody union have seriously failed us.”

Mark nodded. “We have an appeal out to the other unions, and other sugar regions have pledged support. Money’s flowing in from across the country, and we have a fundraiser at the Innisfail Park tomorrow night to collect for the families who are doing it tough. If the industry won’t do right by the men, we must step in.”

Danny said, “The bloody rats’ disease is playing two-up with our lives. How’s Finn doing, Mark?”

“He’s lucky, he’ll be all right, but he’ll never do a day’s labour again. He’s all puffed out. Dad’s got him into the tin-buyer’s office, bean counting for a pittance, and he’s not happy.” He rolled his head on his neck and winced, his shoulders stiff from the day’s tensions. “Well, I’m off to get a feed out of my auntie.” He nodded at Bert. “You coming, mate?”

Mark turned away and as he did, he heard shouting. A Chinese shopkeeper ran down the street, waving what looked like a heavily carved walking stick. Mark tried to see what he was running from, but a dray pulled into the road, obscuring his vision. Then Mark saw the child.

A boy, barefoot in britches, clutched something to his chest as he ran. Whatever it was, Mark assumed he had stolen food from the man’s store.

Bert pointed and looked at Mark as if for guidance.

“It’s nothing, mate.” Mark turned to walk in the other direction, wishing the kid luck.

Bert shouted. Mark looked back. The boy dashed on to the road, into the path of the oncoming dray. The shopkeeper stopped, his face registering horror at the impending disaster. The kid dropped his bundle and stooped to retrieve it. Then Mark was running. Time slowed. His vision sharpened. Blood pumped through arteries, fuelling muscles. His feet barely touched the ground as he took the 20-yard run in what seemed like half-a-dozen steps. He grabbed the kid’s dungaree straps in one hand while the other scooped up the parcel.

Streetlights flared in his peripheral vision, and he ducked sideways as the horses reared, their hooves flailing above his head. The drayman swore and sawed on the reins to control the team. The black silhouettes seemed surreal, but Mark dashed past, before the hooves descended, to dump the boy on the pavement outside the shuttered newspaper office.

The shopkeeper walked carefully towards Mark and the boy; his walking stick lowered.

The boy tugged at his clothing, pulling down his shirt to cover his exposed flank where one strap had given way and his dungarees sagged.

“Now look at what you gone and done,” he said, his face crumpled with concern at his ripped clothing. His pale hair and lashes were almost luminescent in the streetlight.

Mark noticed the shirt still bore traces of a flour company logo. He knew that for some families this was a Depression necessity, when flour bags were all the material a family could afford. The kid looked up at Mark, and even in the poor light Mark could see the ravages of hunger in his face.

The boy said, “Please mister, can I have my dog?”

Mark looked down with surprise at the squirming bundle in his arms, realising for the first time it was a puppy and a live one at that.

The shopkeeper’s face changed from wary to angry. “Not yours. You’re a thief!” He glowered at Mark. “That boy stole the dog.”

Mark shifted the puppy into the crook of one arm. “How much?”

The shopkeeper tilted his head to one side.

The kid’s eyes were intelligent and sharp, his face defiant. “He was gonna cook it, mister.”

Mark laughed in disbelief and glanced down at the boy to see whether he was joking.

The shopkeeper was indignant. "I buy that one for guarding shop."

Mark said, "Buy another one."

"Five shilling," the shopkeeper said.

"One," Mark said.

The kid said, "Mister, e's a bitser, ain't worth a bob."

Mark ignored the boy and reached into his pocket. "One shilling or forget it."

The shopkeeper shrugged and held up three fingers.

Mark flicked him a florin. "Sorry mate, it's all I have."

The man walked away grumbling.

The kid stretched out his hands, but Mark said, "I bought it. It must belong to me."

"Oi, I stole it." The kid was indignant.

"Yes, you did. Funny that." Mark paused, gazing at the child. "How will you feed it?"

The boy's stare challenged Mark with its scorn. "Rats, chum. Dog's a good ratter." He said the words as if Mark was a bit slow-witted. "He's an earner."

"Where's your father?"

The kid screwed up his face and stared at Mark. Then he said, "E's dead. Rat's disease got him. I hate the blighters. That dog can flush 'em out so I can kill 'em, with my ging." He pulled it out of his pocket with pride. "My dad made it."

“Your dad was a cutter?” Mark asked.

“Yep, Johnno Johannsson. Did you know him?”

Mark shook his head. “Nope. Sorry. What’s your name?”

“Orville,” the kid said.

“How do you do, Orville?” He gazed speculatively at the boy, wondering whether this was the son of the man whose place Mark had taken in the gang last year, the Johnno who Finn had found running naked down the streets. He held out his hand. “I’m Mark Anders. Your dad was one of us, so he’s entitled to relief. Tell your mother to come to Guido’s Guest House and ask for me.” Then he handed the puppy to the boy. The kid grabbed it and ran down the road and disappeared into an alleyway.

Mark walked back across the road to Bert, wondering what the hell he could do for the boy. He had to do something; the kid was starving. He wished he could think as creatively of an earner, other than killing himself in the cane. If the boy’s dad was dead the family had no chance. They’d been left to manage on the proceeds a 10-year-old boy could make from a stolen puppy.

Anger surged through him. Weil’s must be made an industrial disease and the families looked after. He’d talk to Jack about what they could do for the Johannsson family.

“You nearly got yourself killed by the horses, comrade,” Bert said as Mark joined him.

Mark looked at Bert in surprise. “It’s nothing. Kid’s an odd one though. Clever little bugger.”

Just at that moment a man in a double-breasted grey oxford jacket, striped trousers, and a Homburg on his head, walked down the steps from the bank building. He swung an ivory-handled walking cane, his patent leather shoes gleaming as the cuffs of his trousers flew back and forth, polishing off the dust as soon as it landed on the shiny black surface.

“Young man,” he hailed Mark. “I saw what you did, saving that child. Commendable.”

Mark stopped. “Thank you, sir, but it was nothing.” His brain thrashed for the right words. “Mr Langham?”

“You know my name?”

“Yes sir. I know your daughter.”

Langham peered at Mark in the dim streetlight. “You look familiar. Have we met?”

Mark didn’t think it was a good idea to remind Langham of where they’d met, so he ignored the question. “I’m Mark Anders sir. Miss Langham volunteers at the hospital where my cousin Bianca works.”

“Ha! Very good. Yes. Bianca, blonde hair. I’ve met her. And what do you do, Mr Anders?”

Mark glanced at his feet and hesitated. Then he looked Langham in the eye and said, “I have a farm up the Palmerston, Mr Langham.”

“A farming man, jolly good. Cane?”

“Not yet sir, but I plan to have a crop in next year.”

“Well, good luck then and good evening to you.” Langham held up his cane for his driver to bring up his car.

Mark stepped closer. “Mr Langham, sir. I was wondering if I might call on Miss Langham one day?”

Langham frowned. “Your intention?”

Mark thought quickly. “I admire her writing sir. I am an artist, and she said she would like to see some of my drawing in exchange for my reading her poetry. I could accompany my cousin when she next visits.”

“A farmer and an artist. Well, I suppose it can do no harm. I’ll let her know you inquired.”

Mark said, “Thank you sir.” He held his breath until Langham stepped into his car and was driven away.

Bert had hung back while Mark spoke to Langham, now he walked up to Mark and said, “Are you sure you know what you’re doing, comrade?”

Mark shook his head, amazed by his good fortune.

11.

Beatrice was on the veranda admiring the garden as it spread out before her. In a little grove to the side lay a pond into which a Grecian-style statue poured water. Behind the pond was a love seat on the back of which sat a currawong. It was a romantic setting and Beatrice wondered who had built it and why. She'd never seen anyone using it other than the currawongs and bush turkeys.

It was just on dusk, and the air seemed suffused with the burnt orange glow of a watercolour painting. A mock-orange shrub, covered with little white flowers, filled the air with its scent. A butterfly, deep emerald and black, zigzagged through the trees. It was larger than her hand. This was the most beautiful place once the immediate sense of strangeness wore off.

A car turned into the driveway. It was Howard. Beatrice pursed her lips. She had been avoiding him, making excuses that she was too busy volunteering at the hospital.

He took the steps to the veranda in a bound and said, "I'm so pleased you're home."

"I wasn't expecting you."

"No. I'm here about your uncle's report of missing cattle."

"Did you find them?"

"Not yet, but rest assured we will."

"I would have thought that was a regular police matter."

“Depends on who stole them and why, but I have my suspicions.”

She led the way to the drawing room. Uncle George was in the process of mixing sundowners for himself and Arthur. “Ha! Howard my boy, drink? Not on duty still?”

Howard looked at his watch. “No, it’s after knock-off time, so thank you, I will.”

“May I have one, Uncle George?”

Her father frowned. “A small glass only, George, with plenty of soda.”

Uncle George handed her a whisky and soda and said, “I’ve ordered a new vehicle, an American Cadillac. They have all sorts of safety features apparently, so I thought I should give them a try. It should be here any day. When it arrives, your aunt can use the Bentley, and you might make use of her little Morris rather than gadding about on the bicycle. Arthur tells me you’re likely to be here a while given all the disturbances. I understand you are volunteering at the hospital. Jolly good show. A motorcar will help.”

Howard glanced at Beatrice. “Your uncle’s very generous.”

She looked down and frowned, wondering whether Aunt Emily was to have some say, but she hid her irritation, with a smile. “Thank you, Uncle George. With the rain, a bicycle can be very trying, but won’t Aunt Emily mind?”

Uncle George looked astonished. “I can’t for the life of me imagine why she should.”

Beatrice took the whisky and walked over to the French windows.

Howard remained with her father and uncle. He said, “The Cane Grower’s position seems to be holding.”

Uncle George nodded. “This business does no one any credit. The sooner the men realise how much we all lose by their actions, the better. They seem to give little consideration to the pain and suffering they are causing to the hard-working farmers, and the town’s economy.”

The electric light flickered, browned, flared, and then steadied.

A scampering sound followed by scraping in the ceiling caused the men to look up.

Howard asked, “Do you have rats?”

Uncle George shook his head. “I wouldn’t put it past the Communists to cut the power. It’s the subversive sort of behaviour they’ve seen in Austria recently.” He paused. “Howard, we must know what the government is doing about it. This Bolshevik business can’t go unchecked. I guarantee this strike is a prelude to full-blown insurrection. Part of Stalin’s globalist plot?”

Howard took a long drink of his whisky before he said, “What can we do? The Party is not outlawed. All my men can do is monitor the situation unless one of them breaks the law.”

They break the law of decency by breathing. “Uncle George grimaced. “It’s time we banned the blighters.”

Beatrice’s father walked over to the humidor, took out a cigar and snipped off the end. “The political will is lacking. Too many sympathisers. Would you like a cigar, Howard?”

“Thank you,” Howard said, “but what’s to sympathise? Inspector Toohill at Ingham is convinced the Black Hand is behind all the trouble.”

Beatrice’s uncle said, “I spoke to the Cane Growers, and some of them think it’s merely an industrial sulk by disgruntled illiterates who are angling for easier work for the same money. Burnt cane is so much easier to harvest. What do they care if the sugar content is lower, and the industry loses profits?”

“I think they have a more sinister motive,” her father said. “I spoke to Clarrie today, and he thinks it’s the Communists trying to take over the union at the direction of their headquarters in Sydney. He said they’re attempting to undermine union prestige and have hoodwinked the workers into following them. Unless we stop it, I think you’re right, George. This could lead to revolution. That’s the Communist agenda and smaller issues have triggered worse abroad.”

Howard smiled at her father. “If it hadn’t been your brilliant idea of summoning the men to a meeting with secret ballots, they might have intimidated more men into this strike.”

Beatrice cringed at his efforts to ingratiate himself. He was sickening. She’d thought he’d come to see her but perhaps she was just an excuse to get close to her father and uncle.

“Not my idea, the magistrate’s, but a good one all the same.” Her father shook his head. “The money the company’s losing with the mills shut is beginning to hurt.”

Her uncle said, “I spoke to Bill McKinnon from the chamber today. The businesses in town are complaining. No one’s spending and tourism has hit rock bottom. It’s hurting the

local economy. I can try to rally the Black Shirts to help harvest the crop, but we must organise and arm ourselves in case of insurrection.”

Beatrice rolled her eyes. They were discussing the strike as if it was a prelude to a revolution rather than a protest by men who had good reason to complain. She took a rather large gulp of her whisky, and said, “Wouldn’t it be better to speak with the men and try to compromise?”

Her father looked at her with astonishment contorting his features, and then he frowned. “I don’t think you should involve yourself, Beatrice.”

“The strike can’t last much longer. Police are arriving from across the state as we speak.” Howard interjected in what seemed like a gallant but misguided attempt to divert her father. She wished he wouldn’t, but it was too late. The conversation moved on.

Her father sighed. “I hope you’re right, Howard. The company has already arranged volunteer crews from New South Wales. The strike can’t last much longer. Numbers of men without work are desperate, even if the strikers aren’t. They’ll soon be begging for their jobs back.”

Howard raised one eyebrow and said, “Surely, sir, you won’t take them back.”

Her uncle nodded. “Quite right, my boy. The sooner such troublemakers find it impossible to get work in these parts the sooner they’ll go back to where they came from, preferably Italy. They should all be deported. Let Mussolini deal with them.”

Howard glanced across at Beatrice. “Not all the strikers are Italian. Many are other foreigners, and many are Britishers.”

Her father said, “We must re-employ most, but I understand their ring-leaders are being monitored by your men, Howard. The ones you mark will not be re-employed, not anywhere in the industry.”

Beatrice stared at her father. “But surely ...”

Howard interjected again. “I have one in my sights already.” He smiled at Beatrice and then spoke to her father. “He’s a friend of the Communist leader, and an active leader in the Party and in this strike. All I need is a bit more evidence and I’ll have him.”

Beatrice wanted to shout a protest. She had to get away and warn Mark, but she remained silent. If they had any inkling she knew any of the strikers, let alone their leaders, she’d be packed off back to Sydney.

“Good grief. Well, he must be the first to go.” Her uncle began to pace. “Howard, we cannot have Communists all over the town. I am sworn to protect Australia from this menace. They should be outlawed, banned from coming into the country. Lyons must take decisive action. Howard my boy, any help you need—just ask.”

Beatrice gulped the remains of her whisky, just as her Aunt Emily arrived.

“I’m so sorry to be late. Hello Howard, it’s lovely to see you again.” She sank down into a chair as if exhausted.

Beatrice peered at her face and took a step closer. “Are you all right, Aunt?”

“I’m fine, dear.” But she didn’t look fine. Her face was pale, and her eyes were bright and glassy. “I just had rather a fright. George dear, we really must do something about the rats. A giant white tail just ran across the scullery floor.”

Her uncle said, “Yes, yes. The council are dealing with it, but really the white tail is a native. If we were living in India you’d have to cope with tigers, my dear. The odd rodent is hardly worth troubling about. A drink is what you need.” He turned to make her one. “Can I replenish any other glasses?”

Howard sidled up to Beatrice’s father and said, “Sir, José Paronella is hosting a special event to celebrate opening the Park gardens and theatre to the public. I wonder if I might have your permission to take Beatrice for a spot of dinner?”

12.

From early morning until late at night, Mark threw himself into helping the strike cause, distributing leaflets, talking to the men at the unemployment camp near Mourilyan Mill, listening to their fears, suspicions, anger, and frustration, quashing rumours, persuading men not to scab.

He talked to some sympathetic farmers, many of whom had relatives cutting and were concerned for them. Their wives pressed vegetables and eggs on Mark, and one farmer gave him a whole slaughtered bullock--meat for the men.

By the end of his day, Mark's head was full of suggestions and the tray of his truck was full of gifted supplies.

Mark dropped off the supplies at the strike camp where Bert had organised the other gang cooks and set up a makeshift kitchen. Then he went to Guido's, hoping to find Beatrice, but he was disappointed. He stayed the night in the little makeshift bedroom Aunt Zarah had made up for him at the end of the veranda.

The next morning, he got up and went in search of coffee. Uncle Guido and Jack lingered in the pergola's shade, a coffee pot between them. Mark thought he had never seen Jack look so grim as he listened to Guido talking about the local Fascista.

Jack said, "The bastards are forming scab gangs, local Black Shirts and some from further afield. A bunch of them arrived from Babinda this morning, and more scabs are being recruited from across the state, even as far as New South Wales."

Mark knew of the Fascist club. Who didn't? But he wouldn't have believed they would do such a thing as betray their fellow workers. He lifted the pot, poured coffee into a spare cup, and sat down. His brow furrowed. This was serious.

"Three of your gang have chucked in the towel."

Mark stared at Jack. "Are you serious? Who? Billy will be one for sure, and I guess Lance and Keith. What about Javier?"

"No, Javier's joined us." Jack paused, a smile playing at the edge of his mouth. "He told me that if the union is siding with the bosses on this, what's the point in being a union man, so he signed up." Jack shook his head. "An Anarchist joining the Party! Will wonders never cease?" His half smile turned into a full grin and then became serious again. "But you'll need to sort out your gang first. Then you can round up some help to man the picket lines at Goondi."

Mark gulped down his coffee and stood up. "Sure, I'll head on back to the barracks now. Have to pick up some clean clothes anyway."

Half an hour later, Mark drove along the rutted bush track towards the barracks. When he arrived, he saw a truck parked outside. In front of it was a police van. Three police officers were wrestling with someone. As Mark got closer, he saw the struggling man was Danny. He had his arms stretched out, his massive frame pushing against the van door in resistance.

"What the hell?" Mark got out of his truck.

Danny shouted, "This is illegal. You can't force us out."

One of the officers brought his truncheon down on Danny's fingers, another kicked Danny behind the knees. They pushed him into the van and slammed the door.

Mark stepped closer, his pulse rate accelerating. "What's going on?"

A constable told him to move along.

"Hey! I live here."

"Not anymore you don't. This barracks has been reallocated to a new gang." The constable pointed to six men standing next to the truck, suitcases at their feet. Mark hadn't noticed them. He'd been too distracted by Danny's arrest. Some of the scabs at least looked uncomfortable but others smirked.

Bewildered, Mark said, "Bull! This is our barracks."

A muffled shout came from the van. "Tell Jack, the bastards are turfing us out, giving it to scabs and those treacherous turncoats inside."

The constable used his truncheon to bang on the side of the van. "Quiet in there."

An officer turned to Mark. "Clear out, chum, or you'll be joining your mate in a cell."

"What's he done?" Mark asked in as mild a voice as he could muster.

"Threatening an officer of the law." The police officer turned back to his men. "Clear the area."

A constable stepped closer to Mark. "You heard the sergeant, clear off."

“I need to pick up my things,” Mark said. He didn’t want to antagonise armed police but if he could get inside, he might at least talk some reason into the others.

“There’s nothing of yours here.” The sergeant walked over with his hand on the sidearm he wore on his belt.

Mark hadn’t seen the police wearing arms until this strike and they looked like they were itching to use them, so he maintained his calm exterior. “I need my stuff.”

The man thrust his chin forward. “I said clear off, or you’ll be my next arrest.”

Half an hour later Mark found Javier with a group of men at the Goondi pub and leaned against the bar next to him.

“Ho ho, Mark, where you been?” Javier said. “You missed all the fun on the picket this morning. Some of these Mourilyan boys were almost arrested for standing in the middle of the road, trying to stop the trucks carrying the scabs.”

“They’ve arrested Danny.” Mark’s voice was flat.

“What for?” Javier stood up.

“And they’ve kicked us out of the barracks. ‘Cept for some fucking traitorous leeches.”

“Who?” Javier downed his beer.

“Mackay, Bannerman and Hewitt of course.”

“You’re kidding – the bums.”

“I can think of better descriptions for that kind of scab,” Mark said and pulled himself together. The incident with Danny had left him shaken. “Jack wants us to recruit for the picket lines.”

“No need. They’re arriving in droves. Hey boys!” Javier turned to the other men. “Time to head back. The bastards have kicked us out of our homes. Now, we need to show ’em we mean business.”

The men looked at each other and shrugged. Mark waited for the questions, but none came. Instead, they downed their beers, put on their hats, and turned to leave the pub with Javier in the lead. “Sort out Danny, Mark. No one will get through the pickets today.”

Mark left the bar and drove to each one of the pubs, speaking to the men, telling them about their evictions, recruiting for the pickets and then he drove to Tully looking for Jack to tell him about Danny’s arrest.

Jack rang Fred Paterson and the Party’s barrister said he’d take care of it.

By the time Mark had finished for the day, the sun had already dropped behind the mountains leaving a blood red smear across the sky. On a whim, he drove to his farm. May as well keep occupied doing something useful while his world was imploding around him. At least he had somewhere to live. It was more than the other men had. For some the barracks was their only home. Where would they go?

The strike dragged on, week after week. Men lived wild in the forests and on the beaches. They built humpies from branches and leaves to keep out the rain. Mark found them living in squalor without sanitation, and in horror he went in search of Jack and some Party funds. The

men just needed organising and together they set about building a strike camp near the unemployment camp. Bert had the communal kitchens going well and Mark organised men to dig latrines, built wash areas and a camp barracks. They added a cooperative to dispense supplies for the families.

To keep despair at bay, wives, daughters, grandmothers, and friends banded together to organise entertainment. Beatrice joined in, despite Mark's misgivings. On Saturday they went to an afternoon dance at the Mourilyan Italian Progressive Club. The club was a large community-built structure with a balcony overlooking the street.

When they walked in the gramophone was scratching out, *You're Driving me Crazy*. Men and women swirled clockwise around the hall, some gracefully, some with halting steps. Partner-less men stood around the walls, waiting their turn.

Mark couldn't dance. His mother had tried to teach him but when dancing lessons came up, Mark always found a way to be out fishing. Now, he wished he'd paid attention as he stood, arms hanging by his side, watching Bert lead Bianca effortlessly around the floor.

Javier asked Mark if he minded if Beatrice danced with him.

"Mate, you'll have to ask her, not me."

Javier bowed to Beatrice. "May I have the pleasure?" He held out his hand like some toff.

Beatrice smiled and took it without a glance in Mark's direction. The two of them sailed out on to the dance floor.

Mark noticed the way Javier pronounced his name differently when speaking to Beatrice. They all anglicised their names for Australian consumption, but why? In an effort to be accepted but what a joke that was. It would never happen.

He leaned against the wall and folded his arms. The only men who seemed able to dance easily were the older Italian men and a few younger ones like Javier. Most of the Australians stumbled around the floor counting steps and watching their partners' feet, carefully avoiding stomping on delicate toes as the diminutive women piloted them around the floor.

The men, leaning against the walls, waited with a mixture of impatience and nervous humour as they commented on their comrades' technique. A young Yugoslavian mill-hand held an elderly Italian widow in a black dress carefully as if she might break. Grey tendrils escaped the woman's headscarf, and her eyes sparkled like small black diamonds in a face as crumpled as petrified wood. Frowning, she pushed and pulled the mill-hand around the floor.

One of the other waiting men called out, "You're supposed to be dancing chum, not marching."

Mark heard the woman say, "Ignore them, they're jealous you dance with such a beautiful woman."

The Yugoslavian looked startled, and she threw her head back laughing then pushed him away. "Go find a young woman and show her how you can dance. I teach this one." She dragged Mark on to the dance floor. "Let's see how you march then, young Inglese."

He spoke to her in Italian. "Not British, Nonna."

"So, who is your family?"

She plied him with questions, and he tried to respond while he watched her feet. When she had enough information to place him and his family, she spoke of the righteousness of the strike. Her voice held approval and her benediction lifted his burden. The weight of the strike, the lack of wages, the fear of not being able to feed the men, provide for the women and kids, worrying about what was to come, fury at the company and his worry over Danny all sapped his energy.

Concentrating on dancing helped push the dread to the back of his mind. In here, the strike seemed so far away, no one seemed worried, and everyone was included in the party mood.

A commotion at the entrance interrupted Mark's concentration. He turned his head and saw a group of South Johnstone workers followed by a mob from Tully, with their wives and kids in tow. Cheers went up as they came through the doors. Maybe he worried needlessly. They were all in this because they believed it was worthwhile.

When he felt he had mastered the steps, he said, "I want to ask that woman to dance." He nodded towards Beatrice.

The woman sniffed. "I'm not beautiful enough for you?"

Mark gazed at her for a moment. "You are too beautiful for me. You need to find a handsome man. A rich one." He bowed and kissed her hand.

Her laugh was deep and throaty, and her black eyes shone with humour. She marched up to Beatrice and tapped her on the shoulder. Then she whisked Javier away leaving Beatrice standing alone.

Mark stepped into the void. "I can't dance," he said. "Maybe you can teach me."

She smiled. "Dancing's easy, look. Slow." She took a step backwards, and he followed. She took another step back. "Slow, now quick, quick, and ... slow."

The gramophone screeched as someone changed the record. Everyone stopped dancing and Mark gazed around as he held Beatrice loosely around the waist. The hall was packed with people chatting, laughing and happy. He glanced down at her and smiled, a rush of energy surging through his muscles. The gramophone played the introduction to a rousing march and voices rose in unity.

Stand up all victims of oppression, For the tyrants fear your might,

Let racist ignorance be ended, For respect makes empires fall,

Mark loved those words most in the song. He glanced at Beatrice.

So, comrades come rally, For this is the time and place.

She nudged him, and he raised his voice to join in.

The international ideal, Unites the human race.

He slid his arm around Beatrice's shoulder, and she moved closer to his side as he sang.

Let no one build walls to divide us, Walls of hatred nor walls of stone.

Mark's shoulders straightened. Buoyed by his comrades he lifted his chin. They could do this. It was right. To hell with the capitalist exploiters. They could really do this, and Beatrice would join them.

But Beatrice couldn't. She had another life to lead, and it was one from which Mark was excluded. After the dance he could only stand by as she left to go home and change for the party she was to attend with Howard that night. She said she didn't want to go, didn't have a choice, but Mark felt the weight of brooding prescience as he watched Beatrice ride her bicycle along the dusty road towards Sunrise Estate. Rainer had an entry into Beatrice's world that he would never have.

By the time Mark pulled into Guido's driveway the sun had dropped behind the mountain range. As he got out of the truck, Jack called over the fence.

"Come over when you're ready."

Mark went inside to tell Zarah he would be next door and then went through the gap in the fence. Inside Jack's place, men and women crowded the main room and spilled out on to the veranda. Javier arrived and joined Mark. Others sauntered in, many who had been dancing at the Italian Progressive Club just an hour earlier.

Mark leaned against the wall as Jack addressed the members. After the meeting, the remaining few sat on the veranda going over events. Jack sat on a wooden chair, his legs stretched out across the floor, his fingers interlaced across his chest. Mark could see he was worried.

Jack took a breath and spoke in his slow drawl. "We could lose this one." He glanced at Mark. "But don't worry, we will win eventually. If not this time, the next. No struggle was ever easy, and it's been going on forever, but if we don't keep hammering, the problems will never get any better."

“What can they do without workers?” Mark shrugged.

Javier said angrily. “The trouble is some of the workers don’t understand that we all need to stick together. If it wasn’t for those bastard scabs ...”

Jack interrupted. “Scabs are a curse but who can blame them for their ignorance. The bosses have honey in their voices and cash in their hands when they want to persuade, and for the unemployed it’s scab or starve. What they don’t realise is the scab today is the oppressed of tomorrow, and they will come to rue the day. Already some scabs from Ingham last year have joined us in this fight. Look at young Barlow over Tully way. A scab last year because of ignorance and necessity. A scab, not by intent but by falling victim to the lies peddled by the company. But now his eyes are opened all right. Our job is not to condemn those with nothing, but to bring them to our side by showing them the truth of their oppression.”

Jack stopped speaking, but they all knew his way and waited until he had gathered his thoughts.

“I was the same once, until the Party set me straight.” Several members gasped and murmured, but Jack merely smiled and held up his hand. “Hear me out. Six, maybe seven years ago now, to my eternal shame, I voted against employing immigrants along with the rest of the union members.” He glanced around at the group of solemn faces. “You remember when South Johnstone went out?”

Some nodded, but it was before Mark’s time, so he listened with interest.

Jack took a breath and then said, “The bosses, and some union men, tell you lies and if you don’t know any different you believe those lies. They said the immigrants were stealing

our jobs and I foolishly believed it. I was ignorant then, just like those who believe their lies now, but the Party put me straight. I got an education. I read at night in my bunk, with a candle balanced in a saucer resting on my chest.” He grinned. “Ruined my eyes but it was worth it. I read not only Marx and Engels but Aristotle, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Locke, and Rousseau. Reading opened my mind, but the capitalists are oblivious to the liberalist air they breathe. They are so immersed in the capitalist beliefs they can’t see any other way. It’s not immigrants who steal our jobs but greed for profit.” He took out his handkerchief and blew his nose. Then he said, “The bosses divide us, set us up against each other, black against white, men against women, nationals against immigrants, natives against settlers, employed against unemployed, even Catholics against Protestants and that way they get to stay on top. But one day we’ll be ready to stand together, which is what they fear most. When that day comes, we will seize our chance and the rules will change. The workers, no matter their stripe, will make those rules.”

He looked around the group, the silence only broken by the cry of a distant nightjar. Jack’s voice lifted. “Comrades, no struggle was ever easy but win or lose the future owes a debt to the efforts we make now. For the kind of society we want for the future, depends on what we fight for today. If we lose the battle now, we must work harder to win the hearts and minds of the workers, so we live to try another day. The system is unjust and must be changed for the good of all society, not just the rich.”

It’s true, Mark thought, although he’d never heard Jack open up like that before and he hunted for words of support. “It’s not the individuals at fault,” he said. “They’re just trying to make a crust to keep body and soul together. It’s the system and the men who maintain it. They use workers. Exploit them, like Jack said, just so they can make a profit. They don’t care who

lives or who starves, so long as they make money. It's capitalist greed: that's the enemy of the people." An image of Beatrice's father flashed into his mind. He pushed it away, agitated, as he stood up. It was time the workers took power into their own hands. "Jack's right. Those bastards are only rich because of the men who work for them. Stop working for them, and we're all equal."

Javier interrupted. "Buddy, that's easier said than done."

Mark reflected on the fate of workers. He had a farm now. He had the means to walk away once he had a cane crop to harvest, but most of these men had nothing more than what they earned from a six-month season in the cane. Good pay if you could get a job in the slack, but if not, that six months' wages had to cover 12 and you were doomed if you had a family to support.

Mark took a deep breath and then said the words he'd always tried to avoid. "It's time to abolish the wage system and take over production for everyone's benefit, not just the few. Wages are never the true value of our work, and any profit taken by the bosses from what we have made by the sweat of our labour, is theft."

The system was stacked against them, but even so he'd always wanted to be a part of it. Now he realised he had to make a choice. At school, despite his leaning towards his dad's brand of socialism, the nuns had taught him to admire the British Empire's ingenuity. He saw its dominions colouring the atlas in pink and felt a sense of pride in belonging. Yet, it was capitalism that brought that wealth, but only to some. The rest were plunged into poverty.

Then he was shown how mistaken he was to believe that he belonged. He won the senior scholarship and became a target of resentful retribution. He was the dago upstart who thought

he was British, and they soon showed him he wasn't, and would never be, one of them. In a way he should be thankful, for the school bullies taught him to fight for what he believed in. He learned the lessons quickly and well.

Now, all he could see was that Empire-pink as the gaping maw of the greatest of all bullies, gobbling up the world with a voracious hunger that consumed humanity and could never be sated. That was when he made the decision to beat them at their own game. He began buying tin shares with every penny he earned, on weekends, on holidays and when he left school with his senior certificate, he worked on the dredge. His dad hadn't liked it, but Mark knew that if he was to change anything in this country, he needed power. Then the economy imploded but it was a temporary setback, and it didn't deter him from his dreams.

At times despondence had undermined his determination and he had felt torn between wanting to belong and wanting to destroy ... until he met Beatrice. Then he just wanted to belong, but they could never make it in this world the way it was. Her father wouldn't allow it and anyway, a life like hers couldn't transition to a cane cutter's wife, even a cane cutter with his own crop and a wad of useless tin shares. How long before he could afford to keep her in comfort, if ever? She wouldn't know how to live. Her happiness would wither and die like a starved plant. Maybe it was nature. Maybe what she had told him her uncle had said was right, and the classes couldn't mix.

He glanced across at Bert, and his own thoughts faded as he noticed his agitation.
“What's on your mind, mate?”

Bert took a breath. “Perhaps this is my destiny.” He looked at Jack. “I can teach the philosophers at the Party classes on Sundays if that is permissible. I teach Marx and Engels

now, but we can broaden that to show all the other ways of seeing the world, including the liberal capitalist way. It is important for people to see and understand the ideology they breathe.”

Jack nodded, but Mark felt a surge of exhilaration. “I’ll be there.” He glanced at the others.

Javier said, “Philosophy!” He shook his head and then shrugged. “Can we do it over a beer?”

Two cars pulled up on the road outside and Mark got up to go and tell them they were too late and had missed the meeting. Then he saw the vehicles had police markings. “Hey Jack, are we expecting trouble?”

Jack joined Mark at the top of the steps. He told everyone to remain calm then turned to one of the women. “Can you try and get Fred on the phone. His number’s on my desk.”

Howard Rainer opened the gate and walked up the pathway, followed by three police officers.

“Evening Rainer, welcome to the meeting but you’re a tad late. We were just finishing,” Jack said.

“Perhaps it’s not a good idea to rile him.” Mark said under his breath.

Howard opened a notebook, stared at it for a minute then said, “Marchio Alessandro Anders.” He paused. Then he asked, “Is this your name?”

Mark frowned. “You know it is!”

Jack said, “Alessandro! Give me a moment.”

Mark shot back, “And you reckon Clyde is any better?”

Rainer glowered. “You won’t think it’s funny down at the station.”

“I don’t imagine he’ll be joining you at the station,” Jack said.

“That’s where you are wrong. I have a warrant for his arrest for cattle duffing.”

“Cattle duffing!” Mark raised his eyebrows. That’s the last thing he’d imagine they’d try to pin on him.

Rainer’s chest expanded. “We have the evidence at the station.” Rainer stepped aside for the police officers to handcuff Mark.

13.

The Spanish castle at Paronella Park was lit up like a fairy tale. In the foreground fountains played, and in the background Mena Creek tumbled over a cliff in a silvery veil of water. The creek lay south of Innisfail and was named for the training camp of the First Australian Imperial Force heading for Gallipoli in the Great War. Its headwaters gathered in the highlands, fell over escarpments to the foothills and rushed through valleys and over cane paddocks to pour out its granular toil of washed red silt into Stewart Creek.

The night was mild and clear, the sky lit by the glowing extravagance of the Milky Way. Despite her earlier misgivings, Beatrice felt a surge of pleasure and wished only that she could have been there with Mark. She walked into the northern wonderland with her gloved hand resting lightly on Howard's arm. He'd been late and was very apologetic, saying he'd been held up by the arrest of a member of a criminal gang. She wondered if she was supposed to be impressed.

On a dais in the castle gardens a lone guitarist played *Spanish Romance*, its haunting chords filling the evening air with magic. Fireflies flitted beneath trees. The branches held aloft glowing Chinese lanterns. People in evening dress strolled in the gardens or stood chatting on the veranda outside the new picture theatre. Waiters moved between the guests with trays of champagne and canapes.

Howard beamed. "I doubt you thought we had anything quite so sophisticated in the north."

Beatrice shook her head. "It's enchanting. I had no idea."

He patted her hand and said, “Come, I want to introduce you to some friends.”

Beatrice’s heels sank into the soft grass as they walked towards a group of dignitaries clustered on the veranda. After greetings and formalities were done, Howard handed her a glass of champagne.

His eyes caught hers as he lifted his glass. “Salud!” He turned towards their host. “That’s what the Spanish say, isn’t it, José?”

She raised her glass and took a sip, gazing out into the magical gardens.

A man stepped up to her side and said quietly, “He built all this for love, you know.”

Beatrice had already forgotten his name although they had just been introduced. She racked her memory. “Mr Riley?”

He smiled. “Bill, please, Miss Langham. I have the honour of knowing your good father.”

She recalled her father mentioning a Riley in relation to the industrial strike and inclined her head in acknowledgment. “Who built this for love?”

“José.” He nodded towards their host. “He built it for Margarita’s sister, Matilda.”

Beatrice frowned and glanced across at José and Margarita. “Isn’t Margarita his wife?”

“Hmm, we do not often get our first choice.” Riley glanced regretfully at his wife who had collared Howard. It looked like Mrs Riley was complaining about something.

Beatrice took another sip of her wine, and then said in a low voice, "Then I should have no one."

A gong reverberated through the moist evening air. "May I?" Riley said holding out his arm to Beatrice. "I think we are summoned for dinner."

As they walked into the dining room, Beatrice said, "Daddy mentioned you are involved in the court proceedings in the cutter's dispute."

He glanced at her sharply. "Surely that is of no interest to you?"

"On the contrary, anything that affects my father's business is of interest."

The magistrate's face coloured, and his voice rose. "In my opinion there is a great deal too much energy given to the braying of donkeys. These militants believe in the froth and bubble of their doctrine more than they do in honest work." He shook his head. "They can deny the truth but the trouble mongers who preach the gospel of this strike cannot make the worker prosperous. It's high time that sensible men paid heed to the facts." He paused as if remembering where they were. "Here we are, my dear, you may wish to sit next to my wife." And with that, the magistrate dismissed her.

Beatrice stifled the urge to laugh as she sat down next to his wife. Was she one of the braying donkeys? These people would never accept Mark. Their bigotry would never allow them to see his goodness. Could she defy them. Did she have the courage?

A man across the table from her said, "Miss Langham, I had the honour of meeting your father."

Her shoulders slumped. Was every meeting to begin with how people knew her father? The man was dressed in the usual formal dinner jacket and bow tie. He was unremarkable except for his eyes. They seemed to flash with what seemed like anger from behind his thick horn-rimmed glasses.

He said, "Although I am sure he would not say the same thing about me. I think my words were rather heated and I might have phrased my concerns better, but I think the release of *Bufo marinus* as a biological control for the cane beetle is a mistake. It will be the next cacti invasion, similar to what happened with the rabbits, and it won't work."

Beatrice had no idea what he was talking about, and opened her mouth to ask, but Mrs Riley interrupted.

"Really Doctor! This is not the place and Miss Langham is not the one you should approach. Your passion for your beliefs is commendable but needs to be channelled more appropriately perhaps."

The doctor scowled. "They are not beliefs, Mrs Riley. My hypothesis will bear out as evidence accumulates. But my apologies, Miss Langham, I did not mean to assault you with science."

Beatrice glanced from Mrs Riley to the doctor, but smiled at him tentatively, shrugging her shoulders in temporary defeat in the face of protocol. The story could wait, but she admired his forthrightness. Could she ever stand up for her beliefs in the face of such relentless censure? She shuddered at having to confront such judgement as she saw directed towards the doctor, in Mrs Riley's eyes.

Mrs Riley leaned in closer and spoke, sotto voce behind her fan, “Scientists! Enthusiastic but impractical people with their prophesies of doom.” She folded her fan and paused a moment before saying in a more normal voice, “Negativity is so damaging to the economy, don’t you think?”

Beatrice said nothing, keeping her eyes firmly fixed on the table in front of her, wishing she had the courage to defy Mrs Riley and interrogate the man. Later, Beatrice asked Howard what he knew about the release of a beetle-eating toad, but he said he hadn’t heard anything about it.

The next day she confronted her father, wanting to know the truth.

But all he said was. “It’s done. We will see whether it’s a mistake or not. Something must be done to prevent the damage to the cane. It is costing the mills and the farmers. What would you have us do, ignore the problem and let the beetles destroy the industry?”

She remembered the scientist’s angry eyes. “What will happen if it doesn’t work?”

“My word Beatrice! Haven’t you something else to occupy your time?”

She lapsed again into silence, wanting to rail at her father, hating him for it, but recognising her refuge and knowing she was to blame. If only she could find an acceptable way to assert herself without her father accusing her of sounding like a harpy. Surely, there must be a way without feeling like she was to blame.

Thirteen miles to the north of Paronella Park, Mark sat in a remand cell. The place stank of vomit and stale sweat. The constable said he was lucky it was a quiet night, only the drunk next door to worry him. The man in the next cell groaned. Mark couldn't see him because the cells were side by side. He waited until the constable left and then he called, "Are you all right in there."

"Mark, is that you mate?"

"Danny! We were worried about you. Jack rang Patto and he's gonna get you out of here."

Mark waited in silence, then Danny groaned. "Mark my eyes hurt. The light."

Mark stood up and walked to the bars. "What's wrong with your eyes. Did they do something?" Silence. "Danny, speak to me."

Danny groaned again.

Mark shouted for the constable, but no one came. He looked around the cell for something to make a noise but could see nothing. He yelled and tried to shake the cell bars, but they didn't budge. He yelled louder until his voice cracked.

The constable came back. "What's all this racket about. You looking for another charge then?"

"The man in there is sick. He needs help."

“You must think I came in with the tide. He’s drunk, vomited all over the place. Call me from my dinner again and you’ll be charged with disorderly conduct.” The constable slammed the door shut.”

Mark yelled and beat the bars, but to no avail.

Danny groaned again.

Mark called out, “Danny what’s up with you.”

“My head.” Then Danny started shouting. “Fire! Fire!”

Mark sniffed the air but could not smell smoke. “Where’s the fire, Danny?”

Danny began laughing. “Heads. You bastards! I won. Look—It’s King George.”

Mark stared at the wall between his cell and Danny’s. “What the hell...”

There was a thump and then silence. Time passed and Mark could get nothing more.

Then Danny said, “Its fucking freezing in here.”

“No mate its warm. I reckon you must have a fever. Try to get some sleep.”

Again, there was silence and for a while Mark was alone with his own thoughts.

Eventually he lay down on the hard bench and wondered how long it would be before Fred might get them out. What was wrong with Danny? How was he to defend against a charge of cattle duffing? What possessed Rainer to charge him with such an outlandish crime? It was pointless worrying; he could do nothing. Head-on confrontations with these bastards didn’t work. They held all the trump cards and used their system against you, backed up by flunkies

like Rainer. The whole system needed a clean out. Mark's blood began thrumming in his ears, and he breathed deeply through his nose to force calm. Anger wouldn't help him or Danny. He needed to think but his mind was like damp powder, wouldn't fire. He just hoped Jack was able to contact Fred and figure a way out of this mess.

"Danny, are you awake mate?" Danny didn't answer, so Mark rolled over and tried to sleep.

He awoke the next morning when someone came in with breakfast. He was a small, gnarled man with mahogany skin, white hair and sickly-looking yellow corneas. The man clutched a tray with two tin mugs and two bowls. He pushed a mug through a small opening.

Mark said, "Thanks. Can you tell me how the bloke in there is doing?" He nodded his head towards Danny.

The man shook his head and pushed a plate of porridge through the same space. Then he stepped over to Danny's cell and crouched to place the mug and plate on the floor inside the cell, before scuttling out and locking the door.

"Hey!" Mark yelled, but he was too late. "Danny, Danny, Wake up."

A groan and Danny said, "What?"

"Are you all right mate?"

Danny groaned again, "My fucking legs are killing me."

"Your legs?" Mark shook his head. "Can you get up and eat breakfast? You might feel better."

“Just sleep.”

“Righty-oh.” Mark took a sip of the tea, milky and sweet but cold. He pulled a face and looked at the grey mess that he assumed was porridge, wondering if he could hold out until lunch. He took a mouthful and swallowed it with the sweet tea, tasting the burnt bottom of the pot that had flavoured the porridge. It was sustenance, but one mouthful was enough, lucky Danny didn’t want any.

Mark sat on the bench on which he’d slept and watched the light from a high window track across the wall opposite him. Hours passed while Danny slept, and Mark fretted about his powerlessness to help. Eventually he heard a key in the lock. This time Rainer came in with a constable behind him.

Mark jumped up. “Rainer, I never thought I’d be glad to see you, but Danny’s sick. You have to get him to the hospital.”

Rainer glanced into Danny’s cell and then turned to the duty constable. “Why hasn’t anyone attended to this man?”

“Sorry, sir. I’ve just come on duty.”

What’s wrong with him?

The duty officer looked at the book he held. “The previous officer said he was drunk, sir.”

Mark said, “He’s not drunk, he’s got a fever.”

Rainer stood looking at Danny for a moment. “Christ, this place stinks!”

The constable looked into Danny's cell and said, "Sorry sir the prisoner seems to have vomited. I'll get someone on to it."

Rainer said, "You'd better call for an ambulance, and you can let this one out." He turned on his heel and left.

Mark didn't stop to find out why he was being released. As soon as his cell door was unlocked, he raced out and looked in at Danny. He was lying curled up on the bench, his face to the wall. Vomit was splattered across the floor, but Danny wasn't moving. He yelled at the constable, "You heard Rainer, get an ambulance."

The constable pulled in his chin and said, "Who are you ordering around. You'd better get out of here before I lock you up again."

Mark waited in the street outside until the ambulance came. Just as it pulled up, a boy walked up to stand beside Mark, his dog at his side. He was dressed in britches with a homemade flour bag shirt. His feet were bare, but his eyes were alert and shone between pale lashes.

"Orville, how are you doing?"

"Good. Mum said to say thanks. Mr Henry helped her get a job at the big See Poy's store."

Mark nodded. The See Poy's are good people. The ambulance officers brought Danny out on a stretcher.

"What's wrong with him?" the boy asked.

Mark shook his head. "He's ill."

Danny began thrashing about and shouting that he was King George, and the heads could prove it.

Mark took a step towards the ambulance but stopped as Orville said, "My dad looked like that when they took him away. I reckon it's the rat's disease."

It was what Mark feared. He said, "Orville can you find Jack Henry or Bert Manzoni. Tell them I've gone to the hospital with Danny."

Orville nodded and raced off with his dog as the ambulance doors closed. Mark would have to follow on foot. His truck was still at his Uncle Guido's place.

14.

The day was already hot. Great fat biting flies hovered greedily over any small piece of bare flesh. They were worse in the sunlight and Beatrice kept to the shade as she walked around what appeared to be a deserted camp. Eventually, she found Bert and Mark dismantling the camp kitchen. The men silently packed supplies into wooden boxes as Beatrice approached.

Mark greeted her but his eyes told her something was wrong. She craved to have his arms around her, reassuring and comforting, but he didn't touch her. "Is everything all right?"

Mark shook his head and went back to packing pots into another box.

Bert glanced at Mark and then said, "Good morning, Beatrice. I'm afraid the strike is over." Bert shrugged and turned back to his task of loading boxes on the back of Mark's truck. He said, "We lost. Tully's still holding out, but the rest are back."

Beatrice glanced from one to the other of the men. "Are you still out?" She reached out to touch Mark but flinched and dropped her hand when she saw his anger.

He turned away and hammered the lid onto the box he had packed. "Sort of." His voice sounded strangled.

She flapped her hand to keep the flies at bay. "What do you mean?"

"Later, all right. I just need to get this done." Mark walked towards the shed that had acted as a makeshift dining room.

Beatrice watched him go and then turned to Bert. "Is there something else?"

Bert leaned against the tailgate. He took out a tobacco pouch and rolled a cigarette. As he exhaled, he said, "They killed Danny."

Beatrice's hand flew to her mouth. She had only met Danny once, but she knew how Mark revered his ganger. "What happened?"

Bert sucked on his rollie, blew out smoke, and said, "Mark was with him in the cells, accused of stealing your uncle's cattle."

Beatrice sucked in a breath. "But my uncle's cattle were found. No one stole them."

Rainer raided the camp here. We were roasting a beast one of the farmer's gave Mark. He jumped to conclusions and locked Mark up for the night."

Beatrice stared at Bert in horror. While she was sipping champagne, Mark was in a prison cell and it was Howard's doing. "That's treacherous."

"He found Danny in the cells, but he was too late to do anything. Danny died soon after they got him to the hospital. Mark blames himself." He nodded after Mark. "He's grieving. I told him there was nothing he could have done, but he says he should have tried harder."

Beatrice followed Mark to the shed. "Mark, I'm sorry. Sorry for Danny." She clutched her reticule to her stomach.

His eyes were shard-hard with unshed tears. "The rat's disease got him, just like it will get us all in the end." He walked into the shed.

Beatrice's eyes smarted.

Bert called to her. "Let him be. He needs time."

She swung back to Bert. "If the strike's over, why isn't Mark back at work?"

"The union won't have him back. They say he was one of the ringleaders, so he's victimised. But it's not just that."

"What is it?" Beatrice felt the pulse in her neck thrashing, and she took a deep breath. This wasn't about her need now, but his.

"Revenge." He shrugged. "That policeman friend of yours has Mark in his sights." Bert gazed at her blandly. "Mark said I shouldn't mention it. But you should know. He's just looking for something to charge him with, something that will stick." He took another puff of his cigarette and threw it away. Then he stood upright. "You should go. Leave Mark alone now or both of you will find trouble. You cannot be seen here, or even speaking to him."

Beatrice's eyes filled with tears. "What does Howard know; what can he do?"

Bert shrugged. "I don't know. Bianca's nursing colleague has a brother who is a policeman, and he told her that he'd heard Rainer was coming for Mark."

Beatrice shook her head. She didn't believe Howard could do anything even though she recalled him saying he had one of the strike leaders in his sights. It was bravado to impress her father. Mark hadn't committed any crime, and Howard didn't know anything about her involvement with Mark or he would have said something. She had met Bianca's friend and could see she had competition. Beatrice shrugged off the warning, imagining Bianca's friend was just jealous, but she also realised the seriousness of the situation Bert and Mark were both in. "Now both of you have no work. What will you do?"

“Mark and I will go into business. I will bake bread, and cakes and make cheeses, hams and sausages and he will grow the food. We have a plan for a providore.”

“What’s that?”

“A grocery store, but we will stock Italian food.”

“But I thought you wanted to teach?”

Bert pursed his lips. “No one wants an Italian academic, it seems.”

She watched Bert follow Mark into the shed. Tiny flies landed on her moist tear ducts, and she flapped them away.

Mark came out with another box and dropped it on to the tray of the truck. “Look, sorry, I’m a bit busy, but we’re just about finished. We have to get this done before the police come and confiscate it.” He nodded toward the little Morris Minor she had parked under the trees. “Whose car?”

“It’s my aunt’s. She has another car, so she lent it to me. Now I can go anywhere, anytime.” She smiled tentatively.

“How was dinner with Rainer?”

Beatrice screwed up her nose. “That’s not fair.” She gazed at Mark for seconds. There was something distant and remote in the way he spoke to her, like a fading apparition in a dream.

15.

Even in summer the stream was cold, and Mark was hot after his morning labour. The clear waters swirled around his shoulders as he swam across the small pool formed by a bend in the creek. Occasionally, his knees brushed underwater debris, but he was pretty certain crocs didn't come this far upstream. All the same, he had watched the pool every day since he had been here and seen nothing but fish, grunter, and jungle perch, along with a few turtles, a platypus, and an eel.

His farm was mostly forested, with only 20 acres cleared by its previous owner before his accident. Mark had bought the place from the widow, who had moved back to family in Adelaide with her children. He'd got it for a good price, although he tried not to think of the other bloke's misfortune as his luck. That was the thin end of the wedge.

A further 45 acres covered in jungle backed into the foothills of the range west of Innisfail. The uncleared forest also made the land affordable. He would start small. That was all he could do until he made some money from a crop. Good timber would also bring in cash. In any case, a small scale would give him time to learn, and he wouldn't risk too much by starting with more than he could handle by himself. It would be a long time before he could employ help, if ever. It would take years to clear the forest by hand and it might be many more before he could afford any mechanical means to help, but it didn't matter. He had the rest of his life to worry about it. At least the land would provide him with food and shelter if nothing else. The little shop he and Bert had set up was already doing well, so farming wasn't urgent.

Across the stream from where he swam, thick jungle descended to the creek's water line. Occasionally he spotted a large cassowary plying its way along forest corridors. He kept his

distance, wouldn't go in that scrub unless he had a compass and an axe, even a cane knife and perhaps the rifle, although in such density the rifle would be almost useless.

Once he thought he saw a man watching him. Afterward, a rancid smell lingered so he couldn't be sure of what he'd seen. He'd found an old broilga nest near a swampy place downstream so perhaps it was a bird. It was said that the old tribes still walked through these forests, moving from the escarpment to the sea depending on the seasons. The bags of flour and sugar he left out on a rock disappeared, replaced by two dead bush turkeys. How they found their way through that dense jungle amazed him.

His mother had once said they know because they are the souls of this land. Mark floated on his back staring at the sky, remembering his dad's response. No, Gina, he'd said, they are men and women like us, just with less power.

A couple of months earlier, Mark had gone with Jack to meet some of the local tribespeople, who lived in a camp just north of the town along with some of the remaining South Sea Islanders, who had managed to evade deportation in 1908. Before the White Australia policy, the Islanders had harvested the cane under a policy of indentured labour. Mark thought he and his comrades were badly off but at least they weren't abducted from their homes and brought into slavery like these poor people. Now scarcely any jobs were available for them outside of serving some white master, and their conditions were dire, houses made from whatever they could find. But they too were organising, although they had less to bargain with than the cane cutters.

The Aboriginal people were even worse off, mostly pushed into reserves, but one or two, on good behaviour bonds, were allowed to live outside the reserves. He'd met one old man,

with snow white hair, who said his name was Yamani after the rainbow. He told the most enthralling stories and Mark had gone back every week since. Most of his people, the Waṛibara, were gone, killed by the Guwuy; ghosts that brought opium, sickness, and bullets. He told Mark the tale of Christie Palmerston, who with his Kanaka servants had slaughtered his grandparents and most of Yamani's tribe when they came down the river from the mountains.

On one occasion he told Mark that the first human child on these shores was drawn from a human thigh. Mark asked whether the child had not been made from dirt or drawn from a rib. Yamani had stared at Mark as though he'd lost his mind. After that Mark decided he needed to learn the Dyrbal language. He figured that with language came a better understanding and he was certain the language held subtleties ungraspable in English. When he had suggested it, Yamani merely shrugged. Later Bert told him creation myths all over the world shared parallels, but Mark thought there was more to it. He began to visit Yamani at least once a week for language lessons.

Then one day Mark arrived at the camp, but Yamani had gone. No one knew where, although they speculated he had been picked up by the police and incarcerated in one of the reserves.

Mark had stomped off in search of Jack. They had to do something. But what? He'd felt as helpless as he'd once felt as a child when the police rounded up the Aborigines and put them in reserves.

It was around that time that Mark had overheard his mother telling his dad a story about a murderer called McKenzie. He remembered that his dad had shrugged off his mother's concern and said, we don't know if the story's true. His mum was adamant and said that a man called

McKenzie had killed all the men, women and children on the island and stolen their land. She called it a sin against God. Apparently his mum had heard the story from Mrs Vasiliev, a neighbour, who had a cousin who worked on the pearl boats in the gulf.

His dad argued that if it was true it wasn't a sin against God because that let men off, answerable only to some mythical being. Instead, he insisted it was a crime against humanity, by men and it should be punished now, not left to some troll hag to condemn. But it seemed McKenzie went unpunished.

After he had heard the conversation, Mark worried they were all in danger from McKenzie? It played on his mind until, when he was about 9 or 10, he finally asked his dad whether they should leave to be safe from McKenzie.

He closed his eyes as he floated on his back in the water. McKenzie was never a danger to them, only to the Aboriginal people. Mark was very glad they hadn't had to leave, but then he began to realise that living here came at a cost. His father told him the cost must be repaid, and it was up to them to make amends. But that required changing the system and any form of power to change the system seemed like a pipe dream. It would have been different if the company hadn't prohibited him from growing and selling cane to the mill. He could have made money quickly with a sugar crop in this capitalist system, and that would be the start of power. But the bastards were punishing him by refusing him a cane quota.

Bianca's friend at the hospital warned that in time they would drive Mark out of the region. He had no solutions. All he could do was focus on what he had control over and leave the rest to what Bert called Fortuna. He turned his mind to the plan he had devised for his

house. So far, it was two rooms of iron and wood with a small veranda overlooking the creek. Nothing grand but serviceable, and it would grow.

A picture of Beatrice's uncle's house flashed into his mind. It would never be that grand. How could he ask her to share a life in a shack with no running water, no electricity, a fire out the back for cooking, a dunny secluded behind a grove of trees, no bathroom and none of the comforts she was used to? What had he been thinking, even dreaming they could be together? He was mad. His bravado had been the idealism of youth. He rolled on to his stomach and swam back to the bank. When he'd first met her, she'd said all she wanted was to be friends. The rest was his fantasy and he'd thought it had become hers too. Who was he fooling?

Mark collected the eggs and then fed the pigs. The sow was nearing her time and soon would have piglets. The beans and tomatoes he had planted were sprouting. They'd need trellises to climb on, if only he could keep the bush turkeys from scratching them into a heap. He'd fenced off the vegetables to keep out the goats, but he hadn't counted on forest animals. He would need to figure out how to solve that problem.

The house held little by way of furniture, a wooden table with two kitchen chairs, a meat-safe and a bed. Mark had made the table, meat-safe and bed frame himself, but the chairs Zarah had given him, along with a mattress and some bedding. It wasn't much, but he didn't need more at the moment. All he did in the house was sleep, anyway.

He broke off some of Bert's ciabatta and spread it with goat cheese. Then he went out to the veranda and sat on the top step to eat. While he chewed, he gazed at the river, thinking about what job he should tackle after lunch. Just as he bit into the last mouthful, he heard a car. Perhaps it was Bert, but he should be at the shop on a Friday. Although Mark wasn't entirely

certain about the day as it was so easy to lose track. He got up and walked through to the back of the house.

Across a sloping paddock, where Mark had planted rows of fruit tree cuttings, Beatrice picked her way along the avenue between the lime and lemon saplings. Mark drew in a breath and ran his hand across his chest. He hadn't expected her to find him. Instead, he'd let time elapse, thinking she would soon forget him, and he'd convinced himself that was for the best.

But now as he watched her pick her way down the slope, squinting against the sunlight, red mud clinging to her beige Oxfords, a surge of joy flooded through him.

He said, "I wasn't expecting you. How did you find the place?"

She held up a piece of paper. "Bert drew me a map. I was worried." She frowned and glanced inquiringly at him, but he didn't want to get into a discussion about his weeks of silence.

"Come in," he said, jerking his head towards the house. "I'll show you around." He turned and walked back inside. Beatrice followed but stopped at the door.

Mark glanced at her. "What?"

She looked down at her muddy shoes. "I don't want to bring mud into your house."

He stared at her for a second and then laughed. "You think a bit of mud is a problem. Come in."

She bent and took off her shoes and then stepped into the room in her white ankle socks. “Oh,” she gazed around at the tiny space, the rough-hewn walls, the table, and chairs. “What’s through here?”

The bed was rumpled and looked as though someone had just got out of it. In one corner hung two white cotton shirts and two pairs of moleskin trousers. Below was a shelf with other folded khaki clothes, a couple of pairs of fraying shorts and two shirts. Piled on the floor were books.

She bent to examine the titles, reading each aloud: “*The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists*, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, *Ten Days That Shook the World*, *Introduction to Philosophy*.”

She pulled a face, then picked a pamphlet off another pile, her eyes scanning the page. “You have terrible taste in literature.” She wrinkled her nose. “Is there a kitchen?”

“Outside.” He realised he knew very little about her, and she him. Yet, there was so much to know.

“Where? Can I see it?” She stepped over to the window.

He waved his hand to encompass the outside. “Sure, look around, it’s wherever you want it to be.” He wanted her to see the unvarnished truth of his life and wasn’t going to promise anything. Perhaps she would come to see how impossible it all was.

She ran her fingers across the rectangular window frames and pressed her fingertips against the wire mesh covering.

He couldn't afford glass yet and the wire kept the bigger bats, birds, and snakes at bay.

"There's a lot of skill here," she said as her fingers ran along the polished wood sill. "I have no useful skills. I sometimes worry that if another war came and civilisation was lost, I would not survive, but you would."

"What?" Mark peered into her face to see whether she was serious. "Of course, you would survive or as well as anyone can in war." What he didn't say was that the rich do better at surviving than the poor in any circumstances, civilised or not.

"No. I don't think so. I don't know how to do anything useful. All I know is a bit of English literature. Not the kind you read, but English novels like Jane Austen or the Brontes', although I recently read Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and really liked that."

He gazed at her for a moment then realising he should say something, he said, "Every group needs its storytellers, it's what makes a society."

She turned to stare out the window opening. "But my family are all equally incapable of doing anything for themselves and they wouldn't be interested in my stories. Uncle George gives instructions to Immanuel, his overseer and then reads the newspapers. Or he goes to the Returned Soldiers' rooms to drink whisky and read the newspapers or play billiards. He goes to the races and stud farms to look for new horses to breed, but he has never in his entire life lifted a finger to make anything or to grow food other than cash crops like sugar. If it wasn't for his money he wouldn't know how to survive. Daddy's no better."

It was as though she spoke to herself. He watched her perplexed, not knowing what else to say.

She shook her head and said, “Your house is amazing. I didn’t know you were so accomplished at making things.”

And then with what seemed to Mark like a complete non sequitur, she said, “I spoke to Bianca about nursing ...”

He nodded. “That’s a useful skill.”

“Yes, but I’m not sure I have the stomach for it although I spoke to Daddy, and he’s agreed I can give it a try when we come back.”

Mark frowned. “When are you leaving?”

Beatrice pulled a face and took his hand. “We’re going to Europe to bring Mummy home, but I am here now. Let’s not be miserable, please.”

She stepped out on to the veranda and gazed toward the creek. “Oh, Mark it’s beautiful.”

He followed her out, still trying to get his head around all she had said and was surprised by her enthusiasm. “The house?”

She grinned at him. “Well, the house is all right. It’s very well built, I think. Not that I know about things like that, but I can learn. And it’s dry. It’s a bit smaller than I’m used to.” She wrinkled her nose. “But enough for two people I suppose although it’s a bit basic. Never mind, the rest will come.” She exhaled. “But the view’s perfect. Can we go down to the stream? Do you swim in it? What about the farm? Can I see that also? I’ll put on my shoes.”

She ducked back into the house and walked to the back door where she retrieved her shoes. She carried them back to the veranda and sat on the steps to put them on, gazing at the river and the forest beyond as she tied the laces.

For several seconds he stared at her, trying to fathom her meaning, and then he started laughing. He laughed until he had to sit on the step next to her. It released all the tension from the past months and now he had started he couldn't stop.

The laughter turned in on itself and Danny's death reared up in ambush, pushing him back into a pit of anger at the company's callousness towards his ganger's death, and their refusal to allow Mark back in his gang. He put his forehead on his crossed arms to hide the tears in his eyes. He sat in silence with only the echoes of his laughter howling around his head. Beatrice would think he'd gone crazy. He lifted his head and ran his forearm across his eyes.

She took his face in her hands and kissed him. For long seconds he remained frozen, then she slid her hands from his face to his chest and around his waist. Her mouth was soft against his, her smell familiar and warm and his resolve tumbled. To hell with it, and he gave in to the pressure of her lips. His arms surrounded her and the void in his gut closed. Then he was kissing her with a desperate ferocity, unable to bear the thought of letting her go.

She leaned back slowly until she lay on the veranda floor and her hands ran down his spine, tracing the muscles in his back, down to his shorts, her fingers slipping beneath his waistband.

He stopped kissing her and raised his head to look into her eyes. "I spoke to your father."

“What!” She sat up; her face screwed up in alarm.

“I asked him if I could call on you with Bianca. I just haven’t had time to organise anything since.”

“He didn’t say anything.”

“Perhaps he was busy. We’ve all been a bit busy, but he thinks I’m just a farmer interested in reading your poetry.” He smiled at her. “And now I am – just a farmer that is.”

“So, you’re not interested in my poetry?” She teased.

The next day, buoyant with enthusiasm, Beatrice drove Emily’s car to Mark’s farm with only the occasional jerk and shudder. She was really getting the hang of driving now. She wore her oldest clothes and a straw hat.

Mark laughed when she told him. “They’ll be ruined.”

“It doesn’t matter, they’re old.”

He insisted on giving her a pair of his shorts and a shirt but had to hunt out a bit of rope to hold them up. The legs flapped about her thighs and covered her knees. He rolled back the shirtsleeves, and she tucked the shirrtail into the shorts.

“I’ll drown,” she said, laughing up at him.

Mark showed her how to clean and size eggs for the little shop Bert ran in the town.

She helped him feed the pigs, and watched as he milked the lactating goats, and then at her insistence, he left her weeding the vegetable garden, while he began to fence the top paddock. By the time he called a halt for lunch, she wasn't sure it had been a very good idea. She was hot and sore. Her arms, thighs and back ached with the unaccustomed labour. Her hands were raw and cut from pulling weeds and her nails broken. She looked at her hands ruefully. "I should have brought gloves."

She followed Mark down to the pool at the bend of the creek where he sluiced his hands and splashed water on his face. Beatrice groaned as she squatted next to him; every bit of her body hurt. He looked at her, his face furrowed, but she merely smiled and toppled sideways into the water, stretching out her arms and legs to keep afloat in the soothing current that smelled like tea leaves.

Mark stood up grinning, took off his boots and shirt, and slid into the pool. He untied her laces and pulled off her shoes, chucking them to the bank, followed by her socks.

"It's hard work."

She felt his hands under her back, keeping her afloat. "Not for you though and you've done twice, no five times, as much as I have. Sorry, I'm not much help."

"You'll get used to it." He looked stricken and hastened to add, "I mean, that's if you want to."

"Of course, I want to, but I need proper clothes. Nothing I have is any use." She pouted. "Are you certain I'll get used to it. I didn't know I had so many muscles that could hurt in my body."

He leaned over and kissed her wet mouth and she curled towards him, wrapping her legs around his waist. They stayed in the water motionless, mouths locked together as sticks and leaves swirled and eddied around them.

Eventually Mark broke off and said, "Come, you need to get out of those wet clothes."

At the bank, he helped her out and picked up her shoes and socks. They squelched back to the house dripping water. He gave her a small threadbare towel to dry herself and left her alone.

Beatrice stripped off and wrapped the towel around her. Mark came back in through the door and without looking at her, picked up her wet things, and walked out to hang them on the veranda. She followed, watching as he hung up the shorts and shirt and even her underwear. She was embarrassed as he hung up her knickers and brassiere, but he seemed unconcerned.

He turned to look at her. "You'll want to put on your dress," he said.

Rebellion ran through her, and she raised her arms. The towel slipped. She wriggled, and it fell to the floor.

He stared, and Beatrice felt her face growing hot. What was she thinking? He'd think her brazen. She bent to pick up the towel, wondering at the madness that possessed her.

"You're beautiful."

She looked into his face and saw the emotion she longed to see. The towel remained where she dropped it. Her eyes never left his face, as his hands rested gently on her hips, palms

rough and calloused, searing into her skin. She gazed into his eyes, tawny and uncertain, but beneath, something unfathomable, ephemeral.

“What?”

He shook his head, a small slight jerk sideways. “You should go inside and dress, or we might do something you will come to regret.”

Was he rejecting her? She stood still. His hands remained on her hips. Time froze as damp breezes played across her skin making tiny goosebumps. She watched the wind ruffling through his hair, whipping it against his forehead. Behind him, clouds raced across the purpling sky, casting moving shadows across the paddocks.

He broke the spell as he glanced at the sky. “Looks like rain.” The edge of his wet shorts touched her naked thigh.

She shivered. “You should take off your wet clothes.”

“Sorry.” He dropped his hands from her hips and took a step back.

The space between them grew into a vast and impenetrable chasm and she wished she’d said nothing.

A fat droplet of rain hit the dirt pathway next to the veranda steps. Dust sputtered in a tiny volcanic eruption followed by another and another. The smell of rain and damp dust filled her senses.

“Come, you’re cold.” He picked up the towel and held it out to her as if she’d dropped it by accident.

“No! I want to run naked in the rain.” She walked down the steps and turned to him. “Are you coming?”

He unbuckled his shorts and dropped them to the floor. “Come back.”

She stared at his nakedness and neither of them moved.

Rain pelted down, drumming on the tin roof, stinging Beatrice’s bare flesh and she ran back up the steps on to the veranda to stand within touching distance. He closed the gap, his hands sliding around her waist as he pulled her towards him. Her cold skin squished against his warmth. A roaring sounded in her ears, dulling the rattling rain. The world faded, except the feel of his skin, the shape of his mouth, the smell of tea leaves from the river water dripping from his hair. Time slowed and then stopped moving to become one with the shape of their bodies. Teeth so close to her lips, she touched them with her tongue and a bubbling frenzy coursed through her veins.

He murmured into her mouth, “Are you sure?”

She nodded. He took her hand and led her into the house, into his room. She lay on the bed as if in a dream and felt his body crushing hers.

Later, Beatrice opened her eyes, seeing long shadows outside the window. The whole afternoon had disappeared. She sat up looking for her petticoat, skirt, and blouse. Mark went out to the line and came back with her underwear, and socks, stained red with mud.

“They’re not dry.” He said as he tossed her fine white lawn knickers and little pointy cupped brassiere on to the bed. “Your shoes are still wet, so I left them on the veranda.”

She blushed and looked away from her underwear, muttering, “They’ll be dry by the time I get home.” Then she said, “We didn’t get all the work done.”

He grinned. “It’s not going anywhere, and we have the rest of our lives.” He took her in his arms. “I won’t always be poor, Beatrice. One day I will have enough and then we can be married.”

“Don’t spoil it, Mark.”

“Why? I’ll speak to your father.”

“No!” She softened her voice. “No, Mark he can’t know about us. He’ll ... you don’t know him ...”

“He’ll see reason. I have land. I have a partnership in a shop. I won’t always have no money.”

“It’s not that.”

“What is it then?” His eyes darkened. “Because my family are not British?”

She shook her head.

Mark said, “I’m a British subject, born here. I want you to meet my parents. Your father will understand if he meets my father.”

Beatrice said, “Not yet, oh God. I don’t know ... please let’s just leave it for a while before you do anything. I’m scared he’ll do something terrible.”

Mark’s face was grim. “What can he do?”

“Please, Mark.”

“Beatrice, doesn’t what we did mean something?”

“Yes.” She could feel her eyes prickling and she sniffed. “Mark I want to, but I’m afraid.”

“Of what?”

“You don’t know my father.” She stared at him silently.

“But we have to tell him at some point.”

“Yes, but if I am nursing, I will be in the nursing quarters. It’ll be easier. Then, so long as I am independent and earning my own money, he won’t have any say in what I do, or who I see.”

16.

Christmas passed, and the New Year ushered in 1936. In January Mark saw Jack off on the tram to Mourilyan Harbour, from where he took a ship to the Torres Strait without fanfare. Aside from a few members, including Mark and Bert, hardly anyone knew he had gone. Then came news of the Torres Strait strike.

The Communist Party weekly newspaper headlines called the Islanders' treatment *Terrorism against Aborigines* and said that the Islanders were pressing for actual payment for their labour rather than credit in the Government-sponsored stores of the Aborigines Industries Board. It was nothing more than slavery, and the Party's 9th District couldn't stand by and see their fellow workers oppressed without doing something. Jack called on the members to donate financial support for their comrades while they were on strike.

During February, the rain came in torrents, gushing off Mark's roof, filling the dam to overflowing, eroding, and overflowing the creek's banks. The farm was on relatively high ground, so the run-off was rapid, but the creek swelled and swallowed up the slope of land below his house. For a while, he worried it would actually swamp him, but the flood stopped yards below where the new house stood. Water inundated his vegetable garden, but the animals were all right and that was what worried him most. It rained so hard that he had little to do other than to look after their welfare.

While the rain fell, Mark sanded back a large slab of rainforest timber he had selected to make a writing desk for Beatrice. Sweat ran down his sides and he took off his shirt. He checked the sketch he'd made from a magazine picture she'd shown him, and the

measurements he'd chosen to suit her frame. It must be perfect for her when she came back, whenever that might be.

She had been gone for four weeks, leaving by train for Brisbane, from where she told him they were to take an Imperial Airways flight to Cairo. It was the modern thing to do, she had said, but he wasn't so sure. He had never travelled in an aeroplane, and they didn't look safe.

She insisted it was so much better than taking a ship. The aeroplane would only take 11 days, all going well, and they would stop at so many exotic places. She had listed them but Mark either had never heard of them or couldn't remember the names, except for Singapore and Cairo. Her eyes had glistened with the adventure of seeing the great pyramids as well as seeing her mother again.

Mark tried to be happy for her and she promised to write. He hadn't yet received a letter but then he wasn't sure how long it would take mail to arrive. He ran his hand over the wood grain and stared out at the rain, imagining the finished product. A surge of longing swept through him, to see her face, hear her voice again. He put the wood aside along with his thoughts and roused himself to attend to the animals.

The rain persisted and weeks went by with Innisfail cut off by floodwaters. Trains became marooned in the station and the mail didn't arrive. Then the rain cleared, the earth baked, and fat March flies tormented the dairy cows, the goats, and the pigs.

Easter came and went but Mark spent most of his time on the farm, only going into town once a week for the mail and supplies and to the occasional Party or business meeting with Bert. Then towards the end of May, a letter came. Mark waited until he was home before he

read it. He sat on his veranda in the orange glow of late afternoon and ripped open the bulging envelope.

*Excelsior Hotel
Askanischen Platz
Berlin
Germany.*

My Dearest,

I miss you so much although every day has been terribly busy, with sightseeing and travel, I feel quite worn out. I have taken so long to write to you because I am barely left on my own for a minute. Tonight, I begged off with a headache as Daddy and Mummy have gone to a celebration. Its Herr Hitler's birthday, and everywhere we travel through Berlin, we see great red banners, and flags flown in his honour. Berlin also gets ready for the Olympic Games and no expense is spared, even though ordinary German people are struggling to survive. There is something rotten in that, I think.

Oh, and tell Bert that when we were in Rome, I saw Mr Mussolini in a parade celebrating his success against poor King Selassie of Abyssinia. The man is really very excitable (Mussolini that is) and quite ridiculous as he stood in his car all puffed up. He reminded me of your rooster crowing on the fence post.

We were supposed to go to Spain in March but as you will have heard, a Popular Front government was elected, and rumblings of trouble have created headlines in the newspapers ever since. I particularly paid attention to the Spanish elections because I knew you would be thrilled to hear they have a socialist government by democratic vote. Daddy says he will go by himself to Madrid for he has some business interests to sort out, but he says it is not safe for me

and Mummy. Although I think he exaggerates because I heard that Barcelona will hold an alternative to the Berlin Olympic games, as a protest against Herr Hitler's new Germany.

We go to Paris next, and I will get to see the famous Eiffel Tower. Then back home to London to see how grandfather is coping without us. I am sure he is very pleased to have his house back to himself. He is planning to retire from the Ministry soon, so perhaps he will miss us.

Then it's back to Sydney. Mummy refuses to fly so we must take a ship home through the Suez Canal, which she says glows at night like multitudes of phosphorescent fairies. I looked it up in the library and the glow comes from minute plankton-like creatures disturbed by the ship's wake, like King Neptune's fireflies.

I didn't tell you that in Cairo I rode on a camel when we went to see the pyramids. It was ever so scary, and the beast smelled worse than your goats. My camel had a great fat lolling tongue that seemed to turn upside down in his mouth. The pyramids are amazing, rising up in pagan worship of the sun, which reflects off the surface leaving mysterious shadows to soften and disguise the edges of their massive flanks.

The trip along the Nile was lovely although a little tedious with so many English people on board. They ignored the sights to play bridge and drink gallons of gin. They are also terrific snobs and called Daddy a colonial behind his back as if this was somehow disparaging.

I did like the Cairo bazaars and the children who clutch your hand and drag you into their grandfather's shops, trying to persuade you to buy, buy, buy, so much stuff and all so exotic. I can't begin to describe it: the smells, spices and dare I say, the sewers. Dear me, I

have so much to tell you, but it will have to wait until I see you in November. I can hardly wait. It seems so far away.

Yours forever B.

Mark stared at the letter in his hands trying to see the world through her eyes. She had seen and done so much it was overwhelming. How could she want to come back here with his smelly goats? He smiled at the thought of her riding on a camel, but he was torn between fear and longing. He needed to make more money so he could give her that kind of life. It was impossible. She should just forget him, but he didn't want that either. He was ready to do anything but not lose her. His life wouldn't be worth living without her.

Could the farm make enough? He had no idea. The bakery and providore were doing well. At a business meeting back in March, Bert had suggested they buy one of the new espresso machines for making coffee. They would sell a cup of coffee and a slice of cake to the office workers and civil servants. They can sit outside at café tables on the pavement, Bert said.

Zarah had interrupted the discussion with her usual scornful expression. Boh! They won't sit outside, not them. Anyway, they all drink tea or that filtered cows' piss they call coffee.

But Bert had argued saying more and more Britishers had developed a taste for coffee taken in the European way.

To prevent an argument from Zarah, Uncle Guido sent Mark next door to bring Jack over for his opinion about whether Britishers would drink espresso.

Jack had settled the argument saying, well, you know how much I like the stuff, and I heard espresso is all the rage in Melbourne and Sydney, why not Innisfail?

So, it was agreed, and the machine ordered. By May the little shop had become too small for the crush of people who frequented the place and Bert was now looking for larger premises.

Mark refocused on the letter in his hand. At least the business side of his life was panning out, thanks to Bert's good business sense. He went inside to the writing bureau. It gleamed with beeswax, and he ran his palm over the smooth brown and golden grain of the Queensland maple. He pushed a panel back and opened the secret drawer he had hidden inside the bureau where he now laid the letter. Then he went out to milk the dairy herd.

17.

The November evening breeze was damp after an earlier rainstorm, and Beatrice pulled her silk shawl around her shoulders as she walked among the guests. Vehicles filled Sunrise's long circular driveway, and tiny bats flittered in and out from under the house eaves. Beatrice inhaled the mock-orange blossom scent, glad to be back once more.

Groups of people stood around in their finest. Men sweated in dinner jackets as women preened in silk or chiffon georgette, their perfumes merging with the scent of garden flowers. Politicians strolled along pathways; their heads bent as they listened to barons of industry complain about the economy.

She found her father and mother standing with Aunt Emily and Howard. Her mother's face had the startled look of an indignant rooster as she said, "Did you know that our own government is planning to provide some form of Christmas cheer to the jobless this year? When did it become government's role to interfere in charity? It's that kind of lackadaisical attitude that confuses the masses and encourages brazen behaviour." She paused and then added, "Just like that dreadful American woman."

Her mother Lady Madelaine, the only daughter of Lord Alfred Denton, was bemoaning the King's adoration of Mrs Wallis Simpson. Beatrice felt an affinity with the poor woman. Love should never be frowned upon. She stared thoughtfully across the garden, wondering why people were expected to pair only with those like themselves. Surely that wasn't necessary or even good for the world.

The sun slipped behind the range, casting long shadows across the land, and Chinese lanterns flickered in the trees linked by long loops of red and green crepe paper. A large Christmas tree stood in pride of place in the centre of the lawn and glittered with silvery baubles and pretend snow--so jolly, but did it really have any relevance to anything? Love was so much more important. Beatrice's cheeks still glowed with memories of her reunion with Mark two days before. She longed to go back to the farm instead of listening to her mother going on about the BBC's Emitron machine, a modern way of watching the radio in pictures in one's own home.

Her mother called her, "Beatrice dear, run along and see where your uncle might have got to with my martini." She turned back to Aunt Emily. "One should really keep champagne for dinner, don't you think?"

Beatrice felt sorry for her aunt under the onslaught of her mother's snobbery.

Her aunt's cheeks grew pink as she looked into her glass of champagne. "I don't know. What's wrong with champagne before dinner?"

Her mother rolled her eyes at Beatrice's father who was standing next to Howard.

Her father frowned. "Apparently, champagne with dinner is de rigueur with Her Majesty, Queen Mary."

Beatrice turned away, wishing her mother wasn't so mean. She walked up the steps to the veranda as her Uncle George came out of the house with a martini in hand. She followed him back to the group. Her father and Howard had moved a few paces away and were deep in

conversation and, after her uncle handed the martini to her mother, he stepped over to join the other men.

He said, "Gentlemen, raise your glasses to a quick victory."

The men raised their glasses and her father said, "I've heard word that Germany and Italy have recognised the Nationalist government under General Franco, and his troops have Madrid under siege."

Her uncle pressed his lips together. "Thank the good Lord. Our investments are saved, and it won't be long now before the Antichrist heathen are chased into the sea. May they rot in hell for their treatment of the church and her servants!" He paused, then raised his glass once again. "To the annihilation of Communism and the continuing prosperity of Rio Tinto."

The men raised their glasses. "Annihilation of Communism," they murmured.

Howard said, "There's still the small matter of Russia."

Her father rubbed his chin. "In my opinion, Spain is just the beginning. Germany will see to Russia; you mark my words."

Her uncle waved his cigar in the air. "Said the same thing myself. The scourge must be wiped out everywhere and Australia can no longer tolerate it. Something must be done to outlaw all Communist sympathies."

"Hear, hear." Howard raised his glass.

Her father clinked his glass against Howard's glass. "I must say I was impressed with Germany when we visited."

Beatrice took a step back into the shadows as two other women joined her mother and Aunt Emily. She wanted to hear more of the men's conversation.

Just then Howard said, "I do like the idea of a corporate state."

Beatrice took a step towards them. How could they think Mussolini's corporate state or Nazi Germany were good things? Didn't they know what was happening in Europe?

Before she could say anything Howard said, "Excuse me, gentlemen," and stepped towards her. "Can I refresh your drink, Beatrice?" He took her empty glass.

Beatrice walked with him toward the house. "What were you and Daddy discussing?"

"Oh, nothing to bother your pretty head over."

She bit back fury and looked down at her feet.

Howard said, "Some friends are having a small soiree tomorrow night. Would you do me the honour of accompanying me?"

Beatrice shook her head, glad to have an excuse. "I have arranged to go along to a fundraising event and lecture tomorrow."

"Ah well, another evening perhaps. It's so good to see you back, my dear. I have missed you. Your father says you have enrolled to begin nursing training at the hospital in Innisfail."

Beatrice nodded.

"I was a little surprised, although of course delighted. I take it there is something keeping you here, rather than going back to Sydney?"

He looked sly and Beatrice sighed. It was her Uncle George who had hit on the idea that she wanted to stay here because of Howard and Beatrice hadn't corrected him. But the omission had turned into a lie, from which she could find no escape.

18.

Mark sat on the top step of the veranda of Innisfail's Communist Party headquarters. Bert sat next to him, smoking a thin cheroot. Music drifted from somewhere across the neighbourhood where a party was obviously under way.

The tobacco smoke from Bert's cigar made Mark think of his dad. A twinge of nostalgia took him by surprise. He should go home for a visit. The last time he'd seen his family was when he took Finn home. He'd take Beatrice to meet his mum and dad and let them know this was the woman he was going to marry.

On the veranda and in the garden, men and women chatted, some leaning against tree trunks, others perched on whatever seating they found. The night was cool after the rain, but it brought out a dusk raid of mosquitoes from the creek nearby. Mark slapped the back of his neck as Jack came out of the house and sat on the step next to him.

"Mate, I need a favour," Jack said.

Mark nodded.

"Jean Devanny asked if we can take around the hat after the film, for the Spanish Relief effort."

"I read her book."

Jack grimaced. "That bloody thing."

"You came out all right. What was it she called you? A big man, brown as a Māori." He laughed.

But Jack wasn't amused.

"Bad business, this war in Spain," Bert said.

Mark could see Jack was relieved at the change in subject.

Jack nodded. "It's only the beginning unless we can do something to stop it. The Fascists are gaining the upper hand and Australia looks like it will be lock-step with Britain again."

"I heard Ernie's volunteered to join the Republican Army." Mark didn't know what to think about that. War! Someone he knew was going to fight in a war. It seemed so far removed from anything real, something belonging only to Dad and Bert's generation, a distant irrational thing that old people talked about.

Jack nodded. "He's determined, can't dissuade him."

Mark said, "Do you think we should go, Jack? The people ..."

Bert interrupted. "War's no good." He turned to face Mark. "You are too young to remember." He paused, then his voice pensive, he said, "Like you once I held hope. I was 17 years old and believed fervently in the rational man. I saw how reason had brought the machine, epitomising an optimism for a future never before seen by the world." He paused and frowned, and his voice raced. "But man is not rational, and his greed brings war; in his hands the machine turns to beast of slaughter, striking out life from humanity like a plague." He took a breath and wagged his finger side to side. "Now, we must retrieve the social man, to focus on the collective endeavour of humanity. Not as a return to the superstitions of the past, not in a quest for the purely rational, but to make the future a better place for all humankind, without killing." He stopped speaking and stared into the night.

Mark was surprised at Bert's impassioned speech. He knew Bert had driven ambulances during the war, somewhere up near Italy's Austrian border. The Battle of Caporetto alone saw 11,000 Italians killed, and Bert was vehemently opposed to any form of war. Mark wasn't satisfied. This was different. "But it's democracy, isn't it? The Spanish people voted for Azaña. Then a bunch of generals come along with an army and say the people are wrong, we should kill them. Imagine if that happened here. We'd want help, but no one seems to give a shit about that."

Bert glanced at Mark as if he hadn't understood. "No one wins except the capitalists who make the armaments. It's not Australia's war. You should stay right here, Mark. You have a business and Beatrice to worry about."

Jack intervened. "I think each man can do only what he thinks is right. And it's a fight against Fascism so it's a good fight. But I reckon if Spain can persuade Stalin to step in, they'll be right."

Mark wasn't ready to concede. "Defending a democracy of the people against the designs of imperialism is always a good fight. The position of governments like Australia is bull. That bastard in Canberra secretly supports the imperialist insurgents."

Bert glanced at Jack and in a modified tone he said, "This makes you angry, Mark, but you must think with your brain not with your heart."

"Hell! It makes me angry with both." A rush of energy ran up Mark's spine, but he could see he was causing Bert some concern. He composed his face into blandness as he stared into the shadowy yard, but inside the anger grew.

Jack said with his usual mild calm, “A few blokes are thinking of going along with Ernesto, but we need money and passports. It’s not easy. The government won’t sanction Australians taking part in the war. The Movement against War and Fascism has raised money to send nurses and an ambulance, but we need more. You can contribute just as well by fundraising.” He hesitated then asked, “What about your friend Beatrice, will she help?”

“No! Leave her out of it.” Mark stood up. He was agitated by the whole notion of the war. It was senseless. A fight for power to prop up what to him seemed like a feudal system of another age, against workers who just wanted the freedom everyone expects along with a bit of peace and prosperity. “Why can’t people just live and let live?”

Jack gave Bert an exaggerated eye roll. “There he goes again with his liberal slogans. Poor bloke has no idea how deeply indoctrinated he is.”

“What the hell are you talking about? I’m as committed as any of you...”

A car pulled up in front of the building. Mark recognised the Morris Minor and his throat tightened. Beatrice had made it after all. He didn’t think she would. He had seen her only once since she had got back from the trip to Europe. He walked down the stairs and out the gate to the roadside as Beatrice opened the car door.

Mark took her hands and pulled her into his embrace. Then he kissed her, ignoring the whistles and comments from the garden. “I didn’t think you would come.” His voice was gruff with emotion. “Are you sure you should be here?”

A car’s headlights lit up the road and fell on Mark and Beatrice. Mark stood back but held on to her hand. The high beam made her squint.

“They think I am at the hospital for a lecture.” She sighed. “In a few months, I’ll be of age, then I can do what I like.”

“What will that be, then?” he asked.

She looked up and saw Jack, tall and silhouetted among the crowd on the veranda. “Oh, I don’t know. I might run away with a handsome Communist.”

Mark followed her gaze and said, “Well, I wouldn’t blame you.”

She screwed up her eyes at him, and he laughed. “Come on, let’s get inside.”

She said, “I can’t stay long but I wanted to hear Jean speak. I read her book. Which one of the characters do you think was you?”

“None of them, thank goodness.”

She narrowed her eyes and looked sideways at him as if trying to see something that wasn’t there. “I think you must have been the handsome Benton.”

Mark dropped her hand and took a step back.

She laughed, saying, “On the other hand, that’s not possible, Benton could dance.” She grabbed his hand and leaned in to kiss him again.

The car down the road switched off its headlights, leaving the pathway to the house dimly lit as they walked hand in hand towards the steps leading up to the crowded veranda.

A little while later Jack called everyone inside. The meeting was to start with a short film. In the reception room, a film projector commanded centre stage. Men and women crowded in and sat around on the floor.

Jack fiddled with the projector. "Lights out, please."

He set the film in motion, his large and capable cane-cutter hands winding the film methodically from reel to spool. Black-and-white images of a city shuddered across the screen, followed by what looked like a city park.

"The Casa de Campo," Jack said, "where our brave comrades routed the Fascist. This is Madrid under siege. Just three weeks ago 20,000 rebel troops supported by Mussolini and Hitler's thugs attacked the people of Madrid." The film panned out to focus on a white-grey sky with small black dots that grew larger. "The planes you see are the Nationalist insurgents, supported by the German Condor Legion and Mussolini's so-called *Corpo Truppe Volontarie*, except they're not volunteers at all, but regulars."

The erratic pictures showed bombs falling like lazy slugs through the grainy air. Then a woman, terror etched in her eyes clutching a screaming child, ran down a cobbled street, already fragmented by bomb craters. The building behind her was in flames; a building beside her, crushed. Walls had splintered into what appeared like stacked matchsticks, exposing the gaping wounds of family living rooms.

Jack said, "Never in the history of the world has such an atrocity been perpetrated. Air bombing of civilians. It's unconscionable. Twelve thousand badly equipped civilian men with little or no experience, defending a legitimately elected government against the onslaught of their own rebel army. And the world turns a blind eye."

From the back of the room Javier Cruz stood up. Tears wet his cheeks. He raised his fist and shouted, “No pasarán!” Then he collapsed back to his seat on the floor.

Jack looked at Javier with compassion and said, “No indeed comrade, they shall not pass for hope arrives. Look!” The film showed men marching in formation along a boulevard, crowds either side cheering them on. Jack said, “The International Brigade arrives. The city lives to fight another day as together our brave comrades from across all nations arrive to drive off the invaders.”

The room rang with relief as men and women cheered.

The film reel fluttered to an end, and Jack said, “Lights, please.” The lights were switched on and for a moment silence settled on the group as they digested what they had seen.

Mark gazed around at the sombre people in the room, seeing the shared horror echoed in their faces. He squeezed Beatrice’s arm as she wiped her eyes.

Jack surveyed the members and said, “The International Brigades are our comrades, volunteers from Germany, France, Britain, Russia, America and many other places, and soon they will have Australians joining them.”

Two men at the back of the room stood up and bowed and the group clapped, their faces sombre.

Javier stood up again and said, “I will go too. I am Spanish American and have obligations. My mother’s family is still in España, my cousins, my grandparents all live in the Basque country.”

Jack nodded but his face was grim. “Good for you, mate, but you don’t need to go and fight. There are other ways to support the Spanish people. Besides, if you want to go over there, we’ll need Party approval now you’re a member. It’s not a problem ... just a formality, but the Spanish need more. While the rebels have all the support they need from Hitler and Mussolini, the Spanish government is cut off by British sanctions. The Spanish Republic is unable to buy supplies or weapons to fight off the rebels. They need provisions, arms, ambulances, nurses and drivers, just as much as the International Brigade needs fighters.”

He nodded to Mark, who stood up and moved around the room with a collection box.

Jack said, “The hat will be coming around. Dig deep. This is a tragedy, a terrible forerunner for the next world war if the Fascists are not stopped. Spain is Hitler’s testing ground, and the capitalist world will not lift a finger. It is down to us, comrades. We must do all we can to help our brothers and sisters in Spain.”

The next morning Beatrice entered the breakfast room, her mind still hazy with the imagery from her nightmare. The vision of the woman’s terrorised face, as she ran from the falling bombs clutching her baby, had plagued her sleep.

She wanted to help, but how? She had no money of her own. Not until she inherited Grandmother’s legacy, but that wouldn’t happen until she was 25 or until she married. Either way, she would not have control over the money, which would either be in trust managed by an appointed executor, probably father, or a future husband would manage it. Neither choice made Beatrice happy, which was why she wanted to earn her own money.

Arthur sat in the dining room alone, reading the paper. He folded the broadsheet as she sat at the table. "How are you feeling today, my dear? You look a bit peaky. You were very late home from the hospital last night."

"The lecture went on a bit, I'm afraid, and I stayed on to talk to some of the nursing sisters afterwards."

He nodded. "All set for the nurses' quarters today, then? Your mother and I will miss you. But your commitment to a worthy career is a credit to any young woman."

Beatrice glanced at him in surprise. He'd never before said anything good about women having careers and positively frothed at the mouth when she said she wanted to be a journalist.

He looked nostalgic for a moment. "I recall the wonderful Red Cross nurses during the war. They were an inspiration to the nation."

Oh, now she saw it. He imagined his daughter a heroine of national pride, feminine and respected, something about which he could boast. She wasn't sure she even wanted to be a nurse. It was a means to an end, that was all. "When do you and Mummy leave, Daddy?"

"We'll travel up to Cairns today and board ship this evening." He sighed. "I do wish I could persuade your mother to fly. It would be so much quicker to take a flight from the new service out of Mundoo aerodrome. Now is there anything you need, my dear?"

Beatrice cringed. "Well, Daddy I will need a bit more money."

He frowned. "What's happened to your allowance?"

She smiled. "I spent it all. Things are so expensive here." She hoped he wouldn't correct her, having no idea whether things in Innisfail were any more expensive than anywhere else, but last night she had tipped the whole contents of her purse into Mark's collection.

"I suppose I could raise your allowance a little. You will have more expenses throughout your training and certainly the wage you will earn is trifling."

She covered resentment with her most winning smile. "Thank you, Daddy." She leaned over and took a slice of toast from the rack.

As Beatrice spread marmalade on her toast, Arthur Langham went back to reading his newspaper. Outside a car signalled its arrival with the scunch of gravel on the driveway.

A few minutes later, Ida came into the breakfast room with fresh tea. She placed the pot in front of Beatrice and bobbed her usual curtsy. Then she said, "Sir, Mr Howard is here to see you."

"See me?" Her father looked surprised. Then he relaxed, and a broad smile lit up his face. "Ah ha. Here to ask the question before I leave, I suppose." He winked at Beatrice.

Beatrice had a mouth full of toast but shook her head. It was too late. Arthur was already walking out the door.

She chewed the mouthful, gulping tea to wash it down. Then she stared out the window, the knife in her hand, absently and repeatedly stabbing the table. What if her father was right and Howard was really going to ask permission to marry her? His timing was appalling, just as her parents were about to leave. How could she put him off, without creating a scene that would have her father and mother change their minds about letting her stay?

She threw down the knife, and raced upstairs to her bedroom, wanting to flee but having no idea where to go. She began pulling clothes from her wardrobe and piling them on the bed. She pulled the bell cord to call Ida to bring up her trunk. How packing for the nurses' quarters would help her escape Howard, she didn't know, but she had to do something.

Half an hour later, Beatrice heard Howard's car start up and she edged over to the window to peer out at the departing vehicle. The pulse in her neck thudded. Thank goodness she hadn't been summoned down to meet him, or even have him confront her with a proposal.

A knock on her door brought her back to the task at hand. That would be Ida with her trunk.

Beatrice called, "Come in."

Ida opened the door and bobbed. "Miss Beatrice. Mr Langham would like you to go down to Mr George's study."

Beatrice frowned. "Is my trunk coming, Ida?"

"Yes, Miss Beatrice. I asked Immanuel to collect it from the storeroom in the stables. He will bring it."

Beatrice went down to her uncle's study expecting to hear that Howard had formally declared his interest. She had already made up her mind to use the nursing training as her priority for the moment.

When she entered the study, her father stood by the tabletop humidior looking grim and her mother sat nonchalantly in a leather armchair. A shaft of sunlight fell through the tall

double-sash window lighting the air above her mother's head, but she seemed oblivious to her surroundings, examining the backs of her hands. That was a bad sign. She always inspected her hands when she wanted to pretend Beatrice was all Arthur's responsibility.

"Good morning Mummy. You wanted to see me, Father?"

Arthur cleared his throat. "You are to pack this instant ..."

"Yes, I have asked Ida for my trunk to be brought ..."

"You are not staying. You will leave with your mother and I today."

Beatrice opened her mouth to speak but he held up his hand.

"No more excuses. You have betrayed the family's trust in you."

The pulse in Beatrice's throat started up again and her breathing became erratic. "What have I done?"

"I will not discuss it further. You can thank providence for Howard's discretion. He brought this disgrace to our attention before the scandal involved your uncle and aunt. He is a good man, and I am sorry he will be a loss to our family, but I understand we cannot expect him to pursue any further contact with you. I am just indebted to him for preventing public gossip about your wilful and perhaps, even treasonous, behaviour."

This must be to do with Mark but how could Howard know anything. They had been so careful not to be seen together in public. "But Daddy ..."

“No further discussion. Ida will pack. You must be changed for travel, and ready to leave within the hour.”

She had never seen her father this cold and determined. It was like she had become the enemy. Then it hit Beatrice. The car lights blinding her outside Jack’s place. Her aunt’s car parked outside. Oh, how foolish she had been. Of course, Howard would know where the Communist Party headquarters were. It never occurred to her that anyone she knew would be in that part of town. She was in more trouble than she had realised.

Beatrice didn’t have much time. She ran upstairs and scrawled a letter to Mark then called Ida to post it as soon as they had left.

19.

Mark tied the wire to the last post and stood back to survey the fence line. Then he picked up his tools and walked back to the house. Dusk sent long shadows across months of hard work. Fenced paddocks, animal sheds, and shelters, an orchard, vine trellises and crop rows of corn, beans, tomatoes and other vegetables, changes created incrementally day-by-day through constant 14-hour labour and careful planning. But he saw none of it, as his mind shredded and teased out his worries about Beatrice. He hadn't heard from her for days. Could he call her at the house?

At the back door Mark saw Bert walking down the slope toward him.

“Mate, I didn't expect to see you today.”

“A letter came for you at the shop. I thought it might be urgent.”

Mark frowned and took the letter from Bert's outstretched hand. It was from Beatrice.

He walked into the house and slit open the envelope with a kitchen knife.

Bert sat at the table. “Is she all right?”

Mark scanned the few lines quickly. Then he scanned them again. He laid the letter on the table. “She's gone.” He felt his shoulders sag as if all his strength had deserted him. “They sailed on the *Manunda* three days ago. Rainer saw us together at Jack's and told her father.”

Bert shrugged. “You really love her?”

Mark nodded.

“Then, you go and get her back.”

Mark stared at him. Of course, why hadn't he understood that immediately. “I don't know where she's gone.”

“You ask her Aunty. Wait until the husband is out and go to the house.”

“I'm not going near the place, Bert. I'll be arrested.”

“For what reason can they arrest you?”

Mark sighed and said, “Having a good reason has never stopped them before.”

He'd have to take the chance and go to the house if he wanted to find out where Beatrice was. So, on the following Wednesday, he drove out to Sunrise Estate and parked in a grove of trees. He waited and watched for a good 20 minutes before he built up the courage to walk up the driveway.

As he strode towards the house, he felt as though a large target was painted on his back, or perhaps eyes watched him from the trees. He was being fanciful. This was the end of the road and unless traffic was destined for Sunrise or the cane paddocks beyond, no one would come, but still the hair on his neck prickled.

Clouds scurried in from the coast, drowning the coastal world in shadows as Mark paused at the front veranda, waiting in case someone challenged his right to be there. Then he walked up the steps. Two enormous, studded doors confronted him, but he boldly approached and knocked hard. Then he noticed a bell and pulled the cord.

He waited, with the sawing of cicadas filling the air. A dog over at the stables set up a frenzy of barking. He hoped it was tied up. He banged on the door, but no one answered. It was as if the place was unoccupied. Then the door opened and a Melanesian woman in a starched white uniform stood in the opening.

Mark said, "I'm looking for Mrs West. Is she in?"

The maid shook her head. "Missus is in Townsville."

Mark's heart sank. "Is Mr West here?"

Ida shook her head.

"In Townsville?" Mark asked.

Ida nodded.

"Do you know when they'll be back?"

"They are home tonight."

"All right. I'll come back tomorrow." He turned away and then swung back as the maid was closing the door.

"Wait, please."

The maid peered out.

"Do you know where the Langham's have gone?"

The maid nodded. "Sydney."

Of course, they had gone home. "Thank you." He held out his hand. "I'm Mark Anders, a friend of Miss Langham."

The maid looked astonished but touched his hand briefly with limp fingers as if he was somehow untouchable. Then she stepped inside and closed the door.

Later that same day, Emily West walked up the steps to her front door where Ida was waiting. She was tired after the journey and all she wanted was a cup of tea and a sandwich and then early to bed. Of course, George had other ideas, merely dropping her off before saying he would be at the club until late and not to wait up for him.

Perhaps she was foolish punishing herself. George was the adulterer. Sometimes she fantasised about telling all their friends, but she knew she never would. He wasn't the only one who needed to maintain their position in society, and anyway she suspected his colleagues were doing the same thing. But to let out such a well-known secret as George's affairs would create a dreadful scandal and her brother wouldn't support her. He'd told her as much before he left to go back to Sydney.

It's what men do Emily, get used to it, Arthur had said when she confided in him. He added that disgracing her family in this neck of the woods would affect his business dealings, and his career and he warned her against telling anyone; his tone threatening when he asked if she was quite clear about her duty.

Abundantly! Gloss over the cracks. Make as if everything is perfect. Forget happiness. It's not the lot of women. She remembered her own mother telling her that romantic love was an illusion.

It was wonderful when her brother and niece had arrived. She had never really got along with Arthur, but Beatrice brought a new joy into the house and George behaved himself when Arthur was around. She sighed and took off her hat, tidying her hair in the hall mirror.

Ida took the hat from her and said, "Mrs West. Yesterday a man, Mr Mark Anders, came looking for Miss Beatrice."

Emily sighed. She was too tired to deal with this. "Tell Mr West tomorrow, Ida. I'll take tea in the drawing room now."

Perhaps she would have been happier if she tried to ignore George's infidelity, involved herself with the community, the dances, shows and fetes, the morning teas and country women's groups. She had so loved the gaiety. Perhaps she should taper off the pills a little but not tonight. She was just too exhausted. She reached out for her Bayer's heroin bottle. Just a small one with a cup of tea to relax a little.

Night had fallen by the time Emily roused herself to go to bed. She took her embroidery off her lap, abandoned when she had dozed off, and placed it on the occasional table. Ida had switched on the lights and left Emily's dinner and a glass of milk in the warmer, but Emily didn't want food. She would have the warm milk and then bed.

In her bedroom she took another two pills, just to help her sleep, and stood at the window sipping her milk, watching Ida walk away, the Tilley lantern swinging in her hand. Emily's

mind was clouded, and her hands shook as she raised the glass to her mouth. Her gaze fixed on the small point of light made by the swinging lantern in the dark shadows outside.

Ida Littlewood had finished work for the day, her last duty to leave the Missus's supper and a glass of warmed milk. Now, she walked along the path away from the big house towards the little wood, head down and singing quietly to herself. The "Little Wood" was a name given to the patch of forest separating the West's home from the servants' quarters, the name adopted by Ida's family a generation ago.

As Ida walked home, she reflected on her job. She'd told her parents it was like the Missus had Kuru, the brain disease. Initially, Ida had shied away from looking after Mrs West when she took her pills and Mr George was away, but the boss said the sickness wasn't catchy, just made her crazy. In the end, Ida did as she was told.

The family all worked for the Wests. Her mother cooked and rarely left the kitchen, so she saw little, but when Ida complained of Mrs West's crazy behaviour when she took the pills, her mother said it was better not to question the ways of white people. Her mother and father sometimes discussed what they should do about the pills with the pastor but in the end their livelihood, their home and everything else, was the boss's grace to give or take away.

They all remembered it was boss George's father who had allowed them to stay on the farm when the others were sent away in 1908, back to islands they had never known, to live with people they had never met, even though it was their ancestral homelands. Now, they knew to whom they must give allegiance and boss George was the biggest of the Big Men in the region.

Ida hurried towards the path that led through the forest. She was already late for church. This was an important decision for the family to make as it meant the marriage of her oldest brother. The pastor was waiting for the conference.

Ahead of her something moved. Ida caught her breath as she approached the bend in the path. She tried to slow her pounding heart. This wood was still a testament to what the West's were capable of doing, and what was unseen defied understanding. She walked on with caution. Despite her self-talk, apprehension increased as she approached the bend where Grandfather remained, unreconciled with his life's abrupt end.

Her uncle told her that even the dead remembered, and that Grandfather would still feel the choking fury of his final betrayal by boss George's father, boss William, who had accused him of the young girl's murder. Her uncle said boss William had killed her to cover the rape, and then blamed Grandfather. They had strung him up, legs kicking and face purpling until his breath was gone.

Fear flooded through Ida, and she whispered those words of protection from malevolent spirits that her mother had taught her as a child. She would not be afraid. She passed the tree every day and knew no ghost inhabited it. But now, scarcely breathing, she walked into the wood's shadow.

The pastor had told her it wasn't her grandfather but other demons that lurked to prey on the godless. She didn't know what to believe and thought maybe only live ghosts existed, like the Missus who had a sickness of the head. She hurried around the bend and the kauri pine suddenly loomed before her, shadowy in the dim light. She held the lantern high and stared at the branch that still bore the rigid scars from 50-year-old rope chaff.

A whoosh of wind lifted Ida's skirt as it rushed along the path towards the great house. A flash of light rippled across the trunk of Grandfather's tree. Ida screamed and dropped the Tilley lamp, smashing the glass and the flame went out, casting the wood in darkness. She fled back the way she had come. When she reached the back yard of the house she paused, unsure of what she had seen. Then she saw the flames licking at the eaves of the big house.

Ida ran to the back door screaming for Mrs West.

The following morning broke with the sun's misty yellow orb carving through a blood red sky. Lazy air currents carried smoke tendrils like silver-grey souls away from the smouldering ruins, creating a dirty grey pall over the old plantation home. Firemen rolled up their hoses and stashed them on the fire wagon, weary now the inferno was out, and only the cold relics of tragedy remained.

George West sat slumped on the cupid seat next to the pond. Emily sat next to him, still in her nightgown, weeping into her hands. George had rolled up his shirtsleeves to his elbows, collar askew, a jacket folded across his lap, grime along his jawline. Sweat stained his shirt, spreading out from his armpits and down his spine.

He had arrived home from the club to find the house ablaze and his wife in the garden in a heroin-induced confusion. He suspected her of setting the place alight but could get no sense from her. At least the stables were spared. Now, he placed his arm around her and squeezed a warning as he saw Howard Rainer pull up behind the line of police cars.

George watched Howard pause for a moment to survey the scene before him. He looked to be a tall man, but it was an illusion along with his air of studied authority. Behind him, vehicles filled the long circular driveway. Mock-orange blossoms scented the air, creating a sickly-sweet cocktail as their perfume merged with the aftermath of the fire.

A light breeze blew across the water falling from the stone maiden's vase into the pond. It sent up a fine mist that fused with residual smoke. In nearby branches, butcher birds warbled to each other and cocked their heads to eye the activity below. As Howard approached, cockatoos screeched and flew away, a mocking white cloud.

"How did this happen?" he asked.

George lurched towards him and grabbed his arm. "It was them ... Communists. I told you they would create insurrection. This is the start."

Howard raised a sceptical eyebrow.

George insisted. "Ida said someone by the name of Mark Anders was here. Said he wanted Beatrice's address in Sydney. Find him and you'll have the culprit."

Ida fidgeted, her hands in her apron pockets fingering the now useless house keys. Her dark eyes rolled away from George's gaze, and it dawned on him: no one ever paid any attention to the servants. Perhaps that was the problem. If Anders was here talking to Ida, perhaps all the servants were Communists, and no one had known. They had to go. The lot of them.

George sat down on the cupid seat and for a moment teetered on the brink, but he held himself back. This was not the time to give in. No one should know his wife had started the fire.

20.

Bert drove Mark to the railway station. By the time they arrived the sun was already high, the day muggy and tropical, one of those days before the summer storms arrive when everything struggles to breathe. Potted begonias hung limp in their hanging baskets as Mark bought his ticket and turned away, eyes cast down, his breathing shallow as if the heat closed his throat.

Steam billowed from the train's boilers, enveloping him in its sulphury folds. He scanned the platform. His narrowed gaze sweeping north to south across the crowd, looking for a sign of the distinctive khaki uniform of the Queensland police among the throng of dark-suited men and their pastel wives.

Mark had on one of Bert's hats and it was a band of steel crushing his head. He pulled it lower on his forehead, and moved unobtrusively through the crowds, his breathing easing as he made his way toward where Bert waited with his kitbag.

He took the battered kitbag from Bert's grasp and threw it into the carriage vestibule just as the train's boilers wheezed their intention to be on their way. Then he turned back and held out his hand.

Bert's eyes creased with worry. He was jacketless, having given it to Mark along with his new hat, and he said, "Buona fortuna e buon viaggio, amico mio – Good luck and safe journey, my friend."

It was Bianca's friend who had warned Mark to leave. At first he hadn't believed her, but he'd made plans to go to Sydney, anyway. Now he hoped he could get away before they

arrested him. He ran his palm across the back of his neck, still not believing such injustice was possible.

Thunder rumbled in the distance and from habit he looked towards the western horizon. The distant rain-mountain usually dominated the range but from the platform only towering cumulus cloud above the shrouded summit was visible, indicating an imminent downpour. Mark hoped his animals would be all right.

“You’ll take care of the farm?”

Bert nodded.

Mark realised he was running away. Unless he could clear his name, he might never again gaze upon that mountain massive. Suddenly it seemed precious, something of beauty to which he had never paid attention other than to forecast weather. This was home. This was where he thought he belonged, but he was being evicted as surely as if they had bodily thrown him out.

He tried to fix the image in his mind, recalling the view from his farm. The clear depth of sky beyond the gathering storm clouds, the rust-red volcanic soil, the undulating landscape of cane, broken by the dark gullies of remnant jungle, all fading away into the distant blue mountain shadows. Perhaps he should stay and tough it out. He crossed his arms, running damp calloused palms down his jacket sleeves as he tried to soothe the prickling fear rising under his skin.

The train huffed and wheezed as it built up steam. A metallic tang of grease leaking from its steaming bogies mingled with a faint whiff of rotten eggs drifting in from a nearby creek.

To the north, sweet steam billowed from the Goondi Mill, sending white clouds rolling across the town. Everything was as it should be, except it wasn't.

He placed his foot on the rung, grabbed the rail, and swung onto the train, shouldering his kitbag to walk into the half-full carriage. He placed his bag on a luggage rack just as the train jolted, pistons protesting. The whistle shrieked on a shunt of steam and Mark dropped on to an empty bench next to the window and stared out to the platform as if a last-minute reprieve might appear. Lightening sheeted across the slate sky, and he imagined the void yawning before him.

The guard, standing on the steps of the luggage van, blew his whistle. Wheels sighed and carriages clanked, jerking against their couplings. Tardy passengers scrambled aboard to find their seats as the train lurched forward.

Mark watched Bert walk away towards the platform exit, shoulders hunched, head bowed. He had on his old Fedora, having given Mark his good one. Now he pulled the brim down low on his forehead. He didn't want to be recognised either. Mark hoped he'd be all right, but it was him they were after. Arson was seen as a terrible crime. Bubbling panic rose from his gut, and he forced it down, reminding himself he was innocent, although that didn't matter to some.

The train gathered speed, revealing countryside dominated by the great hulk of Bartle Frère. East of the town, the river waters raged on through remnant jungle and cane paddocks, to empty into the Coral Sea at Flying Fish Point. That was where he had first kissed Beatrice, lying back on that small towel to keep the sand from her hair. But already the train was rattling

over the bridge crossing the South Johnstone River, away from everything he had built just for her.

Mark needed advice or a miracle. Bert thought Fred Paterson might provide one but at least Mark could be sure he would help, so long as he reached Townsville before the police got to him. He leaned his head against the window frame as the train rushed through newly ploughed cane paddocks, the sky brooding above the range. He had been deluded by the idea that life was somehow his to control.

While he was in Townsville, he stayed at the Party office in Flinders Street where he saw Fred and told him the whole sorry tale. Fred made some enquires and advised Mark of an impending inquest, but the coppers didn't want to see Mark Anders back in the region, ever. At least an arrest warrant hadn't been issued, not yet, but Fred warned him against going home for a while. If he returned, he could expect no fair dealings, not with enemies like Rainer. Mark was certain it was Rainer's revenge after seeing him with Beatrice.

Fred's advice was to get to Brisbane and keep low until the results of the inquest were known. Mark would be better off in a city where no one knew him, although Mark did know people. Javier and Jack were both in Brisbane.

After he'd seen Fred he travelled on to Brisbane. The bustle of the place surprised him: cars and lorries, horses and carts, motor bikes and trams, busses, bicycles and so many people. The train pulled into the station and throngs moved back and forth along the platform, reminding him of the currawongs wheeling above the forest at home. The train slowed to a clanking rest and passengers waved out windows or stood up and pulled luggage off racks in

readiness, but Mark remained slumped in his seat. He was in no hurry to get off the train and move into the unknown.

An hour later, when Mark entered the shared house, Javier was on the back veranda reading a paper. Without looking up he said, "Sixty thousand of those Fascist bastards are helping Mola, boots on the ground, tanks and planes and what else ..."

Mark dropped his kitbag to the floor. "You'll need to be a bit more specific, mate?"

Javier looked up. "Mark, it's you? Thought it was Jack. How the hell are you?" He looked at Mark's bag and jutted his chin at a rusted iron bed frame at the end of the veranda. "That's free and not as comfortable as it looks."

"Thanks." Mark took his kitbag over to the bed and sat down. The springs sagged and squealed in protest. "Sixty thousand what?"

Javier looked puzzled and then his face cleared. "Oh yeah. Nazis." He paused. "The war in Spain, you know. My cousin has come over here to raise money." He drew a deep breath and blurted. "No one helps the poor beggars except Stalin. I never thought I'd say it, but that bastard's come good for once." He hit his open palm with his fist. "He's not sending troops though, just some guns." Then he cocked his head. "Although France sent weapons too."

"Javier, mate, I don't know what you're talking about."

Javier took a breath. "Which bit?"

"All of it."

Javier frowned but spoke more carefully. “Germany and Italy are sending troops, weapons, tanks, ships and planes, helping General Mola, bombing cities ... civilians, Mark!” He glared, and his voice became excited again, racing over the words. “Civilians, and against an elected government, no less! And no one lifts a bloody finger ... says, no proof. All just horseshit! I’m going back to Spain with my cousin?” He said with a rush, staring at Mark as if in challenge.

“I know mate. I was there when you told us.”

Javier said. “Are you coming? This is not just a Spanish problem. This is an international problem. We have to stop these Fascists. This war is just the beginning and if we don’t stop it now, we’re all doomed. Here,” he chucked a pamphlet at Mark, “read about it. There’s a fundraising rally tonight.”

That night, the house filled with people who had come to hear from the Movement against War and Fascism and support the Spanish Relief Fund. When the meeting began Javier stood up. “Comrades.” He held up his hands and the crowded room became silent. “My cousin, Carmen Rodoreda from my mother’s side of the family, has come here tonight to speak about Spain. She’s from Bilbao and is here in Australia to raise awareness about Spain’s terrorist invaders, and she wants to share her experiences with you.”

A woman with short bobbed black hair stood up and bowed. She wore trousers and a workman’s shirt tucked into a belt too large for her tiny waist. The heavy work boots on her feet clomped on the floorboards as she crossed the room.

The outfit looked strange on such a tiny person, like a child dressed in her father's clothes. Mark had a flashback to Beatrice dressed in his clothes on the farm and felt a pain in his chest. He took a breath and focused.

Carmen said, "Please excuse a minute." She unrolled a poster-sized photograph from a tube and pinned it to a board propped up against the wall. The large grainy black-and-white photo showed dead women and children lying in rubble-strewn streets, bombed by planes flying overhead. Mark could see the Nationalist crosses on the wings in the photo.

She turned to her audience and in heavily accented English said, "This is Madrid. I took this photo myself. Look hard. If you accept this can happen in Spain, you will accept it here in Australia." She pointed at the photograph. "Here are innocent women and children who lie dead in the streets of Madrid and other places, killed just a few weeks ago by the Nationalist killing machine. They drop bombs indiscriminately, on the defenceless citizens of democratic España, invaded by our own traitors led by Generalissimo Mola and Generalissimo Franco. The Nazis, and Mussolini's Fascists, support them."

Mark thought she was going to spit on the floor, but she placed her hands on her hips, arms akimbo and stared down the room. He was mesmerised.

She took a breath. "If we do not stop this atrocity, the next world war has already begun, and Spain is the starter gun." She was silent again. Then her voice changed and became desperate. "Please, please, I beg, help the Spanish people. In my home, children starve. All over España, people are dying from bombs, they are dying from bullets, they are tortured and many also die from starvation. Please, I know your government and your bishops say this is not your war. Australians must stay to defend Australia. But if this is not stopped in Spain, it will

be your war next. Please do not believe this is not your fight, for it is every working man and woman's fight. It is my fight, and I will take up a gun again when I get home. Papa already fights for the people's democracy with the Basque army, as do my brothers, uncles, and cousins. It is a fight against great evil."

She stopped speaking and looked around the room. It was silent, not a movement, not a sound, as people stared at the black-and-white photograph. No one looked at her except Mark. Then his gaze went from person to person, willing someone to say something. The silence stretched out until he could stand it no longer.

"What do you want from us?" he asked.

For a moment, she didn't look at him, but then she turned, and he felt skewered by some mysterious dark power. "We need money, guns, supplies, men and women to fight, drivers to run blockades, medicine, doctors, nurses. We need support from your government and the British." She paused. Then with a shrug, she said simply, "We need what you can give."

She stared at him, unblinking black eyes, fathomless. Mark couldn't drag his eyes away.

Javier broke the spell. "Okay, you good people. I have a collection coming around." He pointed to a man leaning against the wall who stood up and walked around the room with a tin can.

The photo remained, day after day. No one took it down. Mark walked past it every morning and stopped to stare. The child in the middle of the picture looked like a rag doll, flung down, broken, and abandoned. It was her who got to him most. The other dead in the street seemed unreal somehow but that one small body got to him, making him angrier and

angrier at the atrocity, done in the name of what? Some bastard, who thought he knew better, who thought he should run the country in preference to the elected government. Why? What was the point of all this killing? He didn't get it.

He shook his head and left the house, going to the station to buy his ticket for Sydney.

21.

Beatrice paced back and forth in her cabin, rage at her parents incandescent to the point she could barely breathe. First her father, now her mother. It was more than she could bare and still days, perhaps weeks before she could get another letter in the post. She pulled her cardigan closer. Since leaving the Suez, the weather had become dull and was getting colder as the ship approached the Gibraltar Straits. Mark wouldn't know what had happened to her. She couldn't imagine what he thought, but it wasn't as though she had left of her own free will.

In Sydney, Christmas had been awful. Her father wasn't speaking to her but still managed to keep a tight rein on her movements. Beatrice had asked the housekeeper to post a letter but instead she delivered it into the hands of Beatrice's father. When he confronted her, she at first felt guilty, then it hit her that she had nothing to feel guilt over. For the first time in her life, she defied him, shouting that he had broken the law by intercepting her mail.

But all her rage succeeded in doing was having him decide she and her mother would go back to England immediately. Her father was to leave on a business trip to America, before he went on to the inaugural sugar conference in London. He would meet them in London when he finished his business, then he had booked their passages, ensuring Beatrice hadn't a moment of privacy before she boarded ship.

Now, she had discovered her mother had intercepted the letter she had left with the ship's purser to post onward when they docked at Perth. Beatrice came across the letter when her mother asked her to fetch her shawl and the resulting argument must have been heard across all the first-class cabins on their deck. Beatrice had completely lost her temper and now felt quite embarrassed about it, but she wasn't sorry. As soon as they were in London, she'd get away

somehow and send a telegram. Her mother couldn't watch her every second of the day. A sick child was on board and Beatrice had been visiting her to keep out of her mother's way, knowing Madelaine wouldn't be seen dead on the lower deck.

Beatrice hunted out the book she'd promise to read to the child and then collected a packet of biscuits and an apple to take to her. Vomit rose unexpectedly in her throat, and she ran to the basin, retching. When her stomach settled, she drank a glass of water and stared at her reflection in the mirror. This was her first bout of seasickness ever. She splashed her face with water, straightened her blouse and buttoned her cardigan then went off to visit the girl.

Across the other side of the world, George West sat in the hotel lounge. Emily sat on one side of him staring vacantly out the window towards the river. George refused to believe the verdict and demanded an explanation from the coroner. Then, when the verdict was confirmed, he called Howard and commanded the Commonwealth Investigation Unit do their job, or if it wasn't their job, then the police must investigate properly.

To add to the insult, Howard told him he was resigning from the force. Arthur had offered him a job. After all George had done, he was leaving, and the inquest verdict remained. The fire brigade chief gave testimony that it was an electrical fire, evidence of rats in the ceiling.

To George it made little sense. How could the two things connect to make a fire. He was so sure his wife had started it. As if any of this was an accident, but if it was rats, then it was not her fault, and perhaps it was his. He almost wished it was the start of a Communist

insurrection and was surprised at his disappointment that it wasn't. The desire to fight someone grew with every new setback.

Rats! He acknowledged he should have done something sooner to get rid of the blighters but who on earth thought rats would eat electrical cable, and then that it would cause a fire. That was the trouble with all this modern fandangle stuff: it was unpredictable.

George pondered whether he should leave the region. Negotiations would take place in London for the first International Sugar Agreement, which Arthur was to attend. They had to settle the world-wide sugar glut, either by creating more demand or further restricting Growers' quotas. The latter was unlikely, so they would need to increase demand and George had a good idea for doing just that—*Sugar: Sunshine for Health!* It had a ring about it. Perhaps he should go too and volunteer his services. The farm would be safe enough as more trouble in the region was unlikely. Howard had said the Communist leader Jack Henry was moving to Brisbane, so he doubted any further industrial strife would cause a problem for his current sugar crop. He could leave that in the hands of the mill.

George ran his finger under his collar. They had taken rooms in the hotel, but it wasn't comfortable, not like his home. Perhaps they should retire to England and buy a little house in the countryside. His land would fetch a good amount, although he didn't need the money. He hesitated. This was all he really knew, his family home. He had expected to be buried on the farm in the family cemetery.

An alderman walked towards him, hat in hand, along with two politicians, one of whom was a candidate in next month's state election, the other, a federal politician whose term was

nearly up. They approached his table and he stood up as they commiserated with his tragedy. He wondered whether they would be here if this was midterm in the electoral cycle.

Emily was clearly charmed by them. Something about her had changed. She looked younger, smarter, and altogether more aware ... animated even, as he hadn't seen her for years. She seemed to know everyone in the hotel. Even walking down the street, people greeted her.

He shook hands with the dignitaries, thanking them for their concern but he knew why they were here. He gave a lot of money to their campaign coffers, but he remained circumspect. He had worked too hard to throw it all away on a sharp word. He wouldn't yet decide, not until his mind was clearer.

22.

Grey clouds hung low over the city as Mark bought a ticket to Sydney for the following day. Then he caught the tram back to the shared house in Skew Street. When he arrived at the tram stop, he saw Javier walking across the road and hailed him.

It began to rain. Not the relentless deluge of the north, but cold soaking rain. The wind whipped around their legs and Mark stepped on to the pavement to shelter under the shop awnings, pulling his jacket closed against the sudden chill. A newspaper page wrapped around his leg, and he pulled it off, its headline catching his eye. He laughed.

Javier followed him under the shelter. "What's funny?"

"Nothing, mate." He hesitated, then held out the sheet of newspaper. "Look at this. Here I am driving myself into the ground farming and the tin price is going through the roof. I'm making money doing nothing."

Javier grinned. "You're becoming a fucking capitalist."

Mark shook his head perplexed by the randomness of his situation. "All I need now is for my name to be cleared so I can take Beatrice back home."

Javier said, "You know Mark, I do know what it's like. Having the police after me was how I ended up in Australia."

"What happened?"

Javier shrugged. "Distributed Anarchist literature."

Mark stared. "For literature! Hell, I thought I was hard-done by."

"The New York cops had me pegged as a subversive and once they get you in their sights, they don't let go." He drew a breath. "Anyway, I got in with a crew on a ship, thought I was heading for my mother's family in Spain, but I ended up here. So, going to Spain now, well it's by way of a small detour. You should come with me."

Mark was surprised at Javier's persistence, but Spain had an appeal. He asked, "What do I know about fighting?"

Javier tilted his head. "I've seen you fire a rifle and hit a wild boar bolting across a paddock. You know how to set explosives from your mining days with your dad. You can drive. The rest they'll teach us."

A muscle jumped in Mark's jaw. "I'm going to find Beatrice and when this whole inquest mess is sorted, I'll take her home. Fred said he'll represent me, and once my name is cleared, I can take Beatrice back with me to the farm."

"Well, think about Spain, will you? The Queensland coppers can't get you outside Australia."

"Oh, yes they can."

Javier grinned. "They have to find you first, but I told Carmen I won't be fighting. Told her I didn't think I could kill someone. She said she'd arrange for me to get involved with a blockade runner to run supplies. They need people who know how to drive." He looked at Mark hopefully.

An image of the little girl in the photograph filled Mark's mind but he pushed it away. He had to find Beatrice, then build her a proper house, with a kitchen and a bathroom. With the shares in tin going up, and his and Bert's business doing so well, he could afford that soon, so long as the police left him alone. The irony of having shares in tin had never escaped him but he didn't want to dwell on it. When in Rome ...

They arrived home and Mark saw Jack at the top of the stairs. He had a telegram in his hand. "Look what the postie just brought." He grinned at Mark and Javier. "Good news, mate." He held out the telegram.

Mark read, *All clear. Accidental misadventure. Telephone soonest. Bert.*

He was no longer a wanted man. The world seemed to lighten. He placed both hands on his head and had an overwhelming urge to caper down the street, but he remained motionless, trying to sort through colliding emotions. Today must be the luckiest of his entire life.

Jack glanced at Javier. "Come on, I'll shout the beers. I reckon a celebration is in order."

"Hang on, Bert says to phone. What's that about?"

"You can call into the post office on the way." Jack grinned.

They walked down the street to the pub a few blocks away, Jack and Javier talking, Mark between them, silent but jubilant. He could go home. Tomorrow he would go to Sydney and then, he didn't know how, he would take Beatrice home.

As they waited for the barman to pull three beers, Mark went across the road to the post office to phone Bert.

Bert answered immediately. "I'm glad I caught you before you went to Sydney," he said.

A feeling of dread lurched in Mark's chest. "What's up mate? Is everything all right? Is it the farm?"

"Everything's right here. I have offered the old farm shed to Immanuel and his family now they're homeless."

"Who?" Mark didn't recognise the name.

"Beatrice's uncle's overseer. He and his family are without work since the house burnt down. That bloody, heartless bastard George West kicked them out. Now they have no job and nowhere to live. Immanuel says he will run the farm if they can live in the shed."

"Sure, but the shed is not in a liveable state."

"They will fix it up. He wants to build his own house like the one they had before, and it will be good to have some help."

"Right oh. That's a relief. It'll be good to have someone looking after things. Tell them they can use my house until they build their own. Oh, and tell them they're welcome, but hey, I thought you wanted me to call for something urgent." Mark waited, but all Bert did was clear his throat and Mark could hear paper rattling. "What's up Bert, speak man."

"You know how the newspapers list travellers and shipping news?"

"What about it?"

"There's an announcement."

“Come on Bert. What does it say?”

“Mark my friend, it is very bad news. Beatrice has left for London. Wait, I read it.” Bert cleared his throat, then read aloud.

The only daughter of Lord Alfred Denton, Lady Madelaine and her daughter Miss Beatrice Langham, the lovely heiress to her grandmother’s cotton fortune, boarded the RMS Otranto for London. They will be in plenty of time before the start of the next social season and will attend King George VI’s coronation in May.

Mark said quietly. “Bullshit!” His mind was reeling. “What paper’s that in. I don’t believe a word of it.”

When Mark returned to the pub, Jack placed a hand on his shoulder. “Are you all right, mate?”

The firm pressure and warmth of the touch helped but his mind seethed in confusion. The paper wouldn’t lie, surely. His eyes smarted and his throat burned. He looked at the untouched beer on the counter in front of him and said to Jack in a strangled voice, “Sorry mate, I have to go.”

Mark walked out of the bar not knowing where he was going, his mind in turmoil. He walked all night, at times lost in unfamiliar streets, at times just sitting on benches staring into the night. He’d known the story before, saw it in the newspaper, but Beatrice had said that *The Johnstone River Advocate* had exaggerated the whole thing. She’s said her grandfather had been born into an aristocratic family, but they’d lost everything during the Baring Bank crisis

in 1890. She'd told him that her grandfather now worked in some civil service ministry and lived in London just around the corner from his office. But clearly that was not the whole truth.

Mark had been deluding himself, wanting to believe they could be married and be happy together on the farm. He put his face in his hands and began laughing. He was such a mug.

The next morning, he walked out to the veranda where he found Jack leaning against the rail his arms folded. Javier sat on the bed, his head in his hands.

"Mark?" Jack said pushing away from the rail. "You're back."

Javier stood up. "You okay?"

Mark nodded. "I'm going to Spain."

Jack leaned back against the rail and refolded his arms. "What's brought this on? I thought you were going to Sydney today?"

Mark relayed the story.

Jack said, "I can't believe she'd lie about something like that."

"Maybe she didn't lie, just left bits out of the story," Javier said. "I do that all the time."

"Really? I'll remember that." Jack said.

Doubt plagued Mark and he said, "It was a Sydney newspaper. Why would they print it if it wasn't true?"

"Don't know mate, but you don't need to volunteer for Spain. If you want to help the cause, you can do the work in Australia. Mark, the SRC needs volunteers to raise awareness

and money. You don't need to go to Spain. It's dangerous and things aren't looking good, from what I hear."

"I can go with Javier and drive trucks. I can run blockades. I don't have to fight."

Jack shook his head. "Everyone has to fight." He paused, and his brow cleared. "Although not journalists. We need stories and photos to raise money and awareness. Maybe you can do that while you're over there. It would give you an opportunity to do a side trip and find Beatrice. Then you could decide. If we organise a press pass you can get into Spain and get some real information, not just capitalist propaganda."

"Mate, I'm no reporter."

"No, but you're an artist. You'll be able to take photos. We'll get you a camera."

"Hang on, I've never even used a camera." Mark frowned. Could he actually do this?

"You can learn. You understand how things work and you're pretty articulate and can write well. I'm really warming to the idea. What do you reckon, Mark?"

Mark shrugged. A feeling of destiny had settled on his shoulders as if this were inevitable and he couldn't change it now.

Jack said, "Look, think about it a bit. Sure, they will welcome your help as a fighter, but I need your help too. Real pictures and stories from the heart will raise more money and it gets the truth out there. You'll be more help to the cause than one extra fighter. Don't do anything on the spur of the moment."

Mark said, “What about Javier? He’s going to fight. Jack Garcia, Ray and Ernesto are all volunteering or have gone already.” He glanced at Javier. “If you can do it, why not me? I have nothing keeping me here so I may as well join you.”

Javier said, “No. For me it’s different. My family is there. Your family is here, you have the farm, and you don’t know about Beatrice. Jack’s right, it all helps the same cause. Look at the impact Carmen’s photo had on you. What could photos like that do for the people of Australia?”

Mark remained silent for a moment and then said, “Bert will take care of the farm. All right then. I’ll go to Spain and get some stories, and fight if I’m needed.”

Jack got up from Javier’s bed. “Getting passports might be tricky but so long as you don’t tell them you’re going to Spain it might be all right. Can’t guarantee anything, but we have a comrade on the inside, maybe he’ll have some advice. I’ll arrange your press credentials and other paperwork with the Central Committee.”

A few weeks later, Mark leaned on the ship’s rail as the *RMS Orcades* left Melbourne in its wake. He could no longer see the dock and felt a mixture of relief and sadness as he stared at Australia receding into grey drizzle.

Earlier, fog had slumped stubbornly across Port Phillip Bay and delayed their departure. Now it lifted, leaving a cold damp shroud obliterating the sky, but with enough visibility to see the smudge of land receding. He pictured his farm bathed in sunlight and shivered. He’d never been this cold in his life. His fingers were frozen, and this was summer. Would he see his farm again? He didn’t know, but he’d left all the official documents with the Party, leaving Bert to sort out the farm and business if something should happen to him.

He turned away and went down to join Javier and a couple of other Australian volunteers in the tourist-class saloon where they were playing euchre. Now, he just needed to concentrate on what was in front of him, nothing more.

Part Three – A Summary of Chapters.

The full chapters are available in the appendix.

Chapter 23.

Beatrice is in London when Mark arrives. She has been ill and has only recently sent a letter to Mark to say where she is and why.

Her mother is determined to arrange a birthday party for Beatrice against her wishes. Beatrice wants to go back to Australia.

Mark and Beatrice reunite, and Mark learns about Beatrice's real background and why she didn't tell him who she was before.

He doesn't see how a relationship between them can work and tells Beatrice he is going to Spain.

Heartbroken, Beatrice enlists her grandfather's help. She comes to realise that Mark is never going to save her but expects her to manage her own life and make her own decisions. Her grandfather tells her that her cousin Charles, with the BBC, is staying with the British ambassador to Spain and Beatrice shouldn't worry. Her grandfather rings the ambassador.

Chapter 24.

Through his communist party contacts Mark has a commission from the French Communist newspaper *L'Humanité*.

He tries to enter Spain via Hendaye but is unable to do so as the Spanish insurgents have taken the border towns.

He meets Charles West, Beatrice's cousin, who takes him to lunch at the British Ambassador's residence in Port de Saint-Jean-de-Luz, where the ambassador is staying. There Mark meets numerous people including a journalist from the *Washington Post* who gives him good advice and some support.

Mark decides to try to get into Spain through Barcelona. On the train he meets up with Charles again.

Chapter 25.

Mark enters Barcelona during the 1937 May days civil unrest and street fighting between the Spanish Republican left factions. He learns more about the causes and problems in the civil war and that there are opposing points of view on the Republican side.

He takes photos for his commission for *L'Humanité* with the help of a Spanish man, Eduardo who is a member of the POUM, an Anarchist group who have followed their own ideological beliefs in opposition to the needs of the Republican government. Mark later helps Eduardo escape with the aid of his Communist Party card.

While in Barcelona, Mark has time to reflect on his and Beatrice's relationship and the gulf between them. He decides it doesn't matter and writes to apologise to her. He receives an invitation to meet her family and he goes back to England.

On the way his photospread makes a big splash, picked up by *The Washington Post* and *The Times of London*. Mark thinks it is due to his friendship with the reporter from *The Washington Post*.

Chapter 26.

In the meantime, Beatrice takes on a volunteer role with the Basque Children's Committee working for the Duchess of Atholl.

Mark returns to London and meets Beatrice's family with Beatrice's grandfather smoothing the way.

Mark asks Beatrice to marry him, and she agrees on condition she can continue with her new career even after they marry.

Chapter 27

Mark learns Beatrice's grandfather's role within the Foreign Office is not what it seems. He suspects the grandfather has been manipulating events and has possibly influenced his photojournalism success.

He agrees to help with the grandfather's agenda which amounts to spying on the Fascist and Nazi's who will attend Beatrice's forthcoming birthday party.

Chapter 28

Beatrice has her 21st birthday party at the Ritz where her engagement will be announced. Mark finds he is quite good at spying, and enjoys it, so long as it is Fascists he is spying on. When he meets Count Gino Grandi, Mussolini's ambassador to Britain, he finally realises where he

belongs and how he can retain his ideological integrity in light of his new role as a member of Beatrice's family.

Chapter 29

While Madelaine plans the wedding, Beatrice sets up a refugee centre for those fleeing both Nazi Germany and Spain. Mark goes back to Barcelona on a brief trip to find Ethel and witnesses the bombing of Valencia.

Mark and Beatrice both achieve their desires (indicated at the beginning of the novel) in as much as Mark finds where he belongs, and Beatrice learns to be independent.

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Appendix

Part Three

23.

The telegram gave no information at all, just said, *Your letter forwarded 16 King Street, Covent Garden, London. Telephone soonest, Innisfail 209. B.* Beatrice sucked in her bottom lip, frowning at the slip of paper in her hand. She recognised the telephone number. It was Bert's café, but what did it mean and why had Bert sent a telegram saying he'd forwarded her letter to London. And most importantly, why hadn't Mark sent a telegram or a letter?

The postman, or rather the boy for he looked no older than 17, was still standing on the doorstep. Was one supposed to tip in England? Her glance travelled past him to his motorcycle on the pavement, and then across the road to the rows of respectable houses with their classical proportions, porticoed entrances, and first floor balconies. The blind-eyed windows stared out of white stucco faces, into the middle distance, as if she and the boy were nobody's business but their own. A tip might be insulting, and she didn't want to give offence. Afterall, they paid posties a proper wage in Britain so it couldn't be too different from home.

"Thank you." She turned indoors. It was lucky that she had been passing or the telegram might have fallen into her mother's hands. She shut the black lacquered front door, folding the telegram, and slipping it beneath her waistband, just as her mother swept down the stairs.

"My dear, what are you doing out of bed. You know the doctor said complete rest."

"Oh Mother, he said that weeks ago. I'm fine now and sick of being cooped up. I think what I need is a walk in the fresh air."

“Absolutely not. My dear, you know very well how ill you've been and if you do not heed the doctor, you may have a relapse.”

Beatrice sighed. “I'll just sit in the morning room for a little while then.”

She did feel a bit shaky. It had been almost a month since they'd arrive in London, and she had been ill ever since. It had started with the German measles that she'd caught from the child on the ship. Then she'd miscarried. Until then she hadn't even known she was pregnant, and then she got pneumonia. She was as thin as a scarecrow and even walking down the stairs left her exhausted.

She made her way to the morning room where the early spring sun pooled palely through the wide windows that overlooked the street, almost deserted at this time of mid-morning. It always surprised her how, just blocks away from the main thoroughfare, London streets could exude such quiet. Yet, she hadn't remembered it being so cold the last time. Her grandfather said it was because she was unwell that she felt the cold so bitterly.

She flopped onto the little sofa hauled under the window for her use and thought of the golden tropical light she'd left behind. Her eyes filled and she swore she would get back just as soon as she was well and had accumulated a sufficient amount of her allowance to buy a ticket.

The doctor had told her to bare her skin to the sun every day, but the sun was such a spineless thing. Mother came back into the room and began to fuss about, placing a blanket over Beatrice's knees. Beatrice touched the back of her hand gently. She hadn't fully forgiven her, but it was unusual for her mother to be so solicitous.

Beatrice ran her hands over her flat belly, feeling its empty uselessness and choked back desolation, but the miscarriage was her secret and one she had only shared with Gladys Fuller, the nursing sister who had first attended her when she was admitted to hospital. She couldn't have hidden the miscarriage from Gladys, or from Doctor Goodall. Gladys and Dr Goodall were the only friends she had in London and now she was home, she missed them.

Her mother's voice penetrated her reverie. "Now my dear, Your birthday party. It was such a pity you were so ill, and we missed the date, but it can be a belated celebration. After all, it's not every year one comes of age."

"Oh Mummy, I'm not sure I'm up to it." Beatrice didn't want a party. She hated that sort of thing, especially in London where she never quite knew how to behave and was sure she would make some horrible social gaffe. She might be born British, but her upbringing in Australia made her seem something other. Sometimes their ways left her flummoxed. Now she was exhausted just thinking about it.

"You won't need to lift a finger. I shall arrange everything. It'll be a small affair, perhaps a cocktail party at the Ritz or even the Savoy. I've asked Grandfather to use his influence and arranged for you to make your curtsy at Buckingham Palace at the start of the season. So, you will have to get used to being out and about. Perhaps we should send you for some training in etiquette and the proper manner of the curtsy. We miss so much out in the antipodes. Still the Ritz is nice and has such an intriguing cabaret although I am told, far too many Americans and journalists frequent both the Ritz and Savoy nowadays. All this nonsense about another war. Besides, your father would prefer Brown's, what do you think dear?"

Beatrice shrugged and pulled down the corners of her mouth. "I am not going to be presented at Court, Mummy. I'll attend a party but that's it. Nothing more. The whole Deb thing is an anachronism."

"One cannot let one's coming of age go by without some sort of marker, and you have missed so much. But never mind, we can still look forward to our dear King's coronation." Her mother clutched her pearls and gazed out the window. "I remember when I was presented, Oh my dear, it was so wonderful."

Beatrice sighed and blocked out her mother's rambling. Mark would hate it. It was the kind of thing he said turned human beings into commodities.

Then her mother said, "If you won't be presented, and I haven't made up my mind about that yet, you must treat your party as your entry into society. Its high time we found you a husband. One of good English stock. Although," her mother gave her a coy look, your father says Lawrence Anderson is doing very well in Sydney. Perhaps we could invite him to attend. You'd like to see a familiar face I'm sure." She hesitated. "He might take an aeroplane to be here on time. What do you think?"

Beatrice sighed again and closed her eyes to defend herself from her mother's persistence. "I'm very tired Mummy. Can we discuss this later?" She wasn't ungrateful and didn't want to show anger, but she wished her mother would just behave with her usual lack of concern and leave her alone.

"We'll have to discuss it soon, my dear. I shall ask the doctor, when he visits this afternoon, when he thinks you'll be well enough."

“I am quite well now Mother, just a little tired.” Beatrice picked up the book she had been reading and opened it, hoping her mother would take the hint.

The new maid, Annie entered the room with the laden tea tray and just as she did the telephone jangled in the room next door. The alarm on Annie’s face made Beatrice want to laugh. Poor girl, she was still terrified of the thing.

Beatrice levered herself up. “I’ll get it.”

“No, stay where you are my dear. Symons will get it. Put the tray over here next to the sofa Annie. We’ll pour our own tea.”

But Symons, her grandfather’s valet, was running errands for grandfather, so Beatrice ignored her mother. She walked into her grandfather’s study to pick up the phone.

When she hung up she returned to the morning room. “There’s an emergency at the hospital and Dr Goodall is unable to call, but he thinks I am quite well now and will send Sister Fuller to check on me. You remember Gladys Fuller, Mummy?”

“That is just not good enough. You need a doctor attending to you.”

“I would prefer Sister Fuller, she’s my friend and anyway Doctor Goodall says I am out of danger. I just need fresh air and some exercise to build back my strength.” She stopped as an idea flickered into life. She took a breath as she launched her lie, colour creeping up her neck. “Doctor Goodall thinks a walk with Gladys this afternoon might be just the thing to help my recovery, and she will know when I have had enough.”

Once her mother left the room, Beatrice lay back. Innisfail was on the other side of the world. What time would it be? She had no idea. Why on earth had Bert forwarded her letter to Mark to a London address? It didn't make sense. She needed to get out of the house so she could call Bert and she was certain Gladys Fuller would help.

Mark looked around the dormitory he shared with several other men, then went over to the window and gazed down into narrow Litchfield Street. So, this damp, dull, grey place was London, the capital of the British Empire, the economic bastion of the world. The sun barely lifted its watery blotch above the smog before it plummeted back into what Mark imagined was a swamp. It was supposed to be spring, but it was like the artic. He'd bought a coat in Melbourne, but it just wasn't warm enough, and his shoes syphoned in water and froze his feet. His fingers and ears had turned a permanent shade of blue.

Robbie at the London Party office thought it was very funny but promised, in-between chuckles, that he'd take Mark to the market to get suitable clothing. Of course, that meant braving the outside world once more. He couldn't believe anywhere in the world was this cold.

He watched the bustling street below. So many people, horses, carts, motor cars, noise, and commotion, and accents he didn't understand. Mark spoke English, Italian, and some French he'd learned at school. He'd learned some Norwegian from his father and a few phrases of Dyirbal from Yamani, before he disappeared. He also spoke workable Spanish that Javier had taught him on the ship, but the English spoke a language that was outside of his experience.

He thought longingly of his brilliant sunlit paddocks, the gentle sea breeze fluttering the forest leaves, the sorrowful cry of the currawongs, the silent flowing waters of the creek with its inhabitants, the platypus, the jungle perch, and the turtle. He closed his eyes and for a moment he imagined he felt the sun caressing his cheek. He sighed and steeled his resolve. Then he went downstairs and opened the door, plunging into the bitter flurry outside.

At the market Robbie looked him up and down. “What’ll it be then, lad? We can get you proper kitted out for a cockle.”

Mark shook his head. “Sorry mate, I don’t understand.”

Robbie said, “I thought you Aussies spoke English. How much money do you have?”

Mark fished in his pocket and pulled out some notes.

“Aye lad, that’ll set you up, all right. Come along then.”

An hour later, Mark had on a warm fleece-lined leather jacket, a greatcoat, gloves, a muffler, and a tweed cap to replace Bert’s Fedora.”

Robbie said, “The hat tells a man who he is and what he stands for. You’ll be right in the cap in these parts.”

Mark also carried several brown paper parcels with warm long-johns, long-sleeved undershirts, socks and a stout pair of boots, some warm woollen shirts, two jumpers, and two pairs of thick woollen trousers. He’d never thought clothes so important, nor bought or owned so many at one time. He dropped his parcels off at the dormitory and walked outside, muffled up, and warm against the biting wind.

Now he could think of something other than the cold. He just needed a telephone directory to find Beatrice. Two hours later he had rung every Langham in the book but had got nowhere. He went back to the Party head office, wondering how he would find her.

At the King Street office, a fat envelope awaited him with multiple thruppenny King George stamps lined up to the right of the royal airmail wings. The letter was from Australia, addressed to Mark in Bert's handwriting.

Mark took the letter through to the kitchen and sat at a table in the warmth radiating from a coal stove. He poured a cup of tea and sat down to read Bert's letter, finding pleasure in anticipation of momentarily losing himself in details of life and business in Innisfail. He wouldn't have believed a person could be so homesick.

He ripped open the envelope and found a single sheet wrapped around another envelope and his pulse raced. The letter was from Beatrice.

He read Bert's note,

Mark, this letter arrived for you on Monday, and I sent Beatrice a telegram to say you were in London. Her address is on the back of the envelope. Good luck. All well here. Bert.

He carefully opened the envelope from Beatrice, so he wouldn't tear the address on the back and smoothed the pages.

Robbie walked into the kitchen and said, "Any tea left?"

Mark nodded toward the stove where he had replaced the pot. "I think it's a bit stewed." He looked at his half full mug distastefully.

“Just the way it should be,” Robbie said.

“Do you know a place called Pimlico?”

“Certainly.” Robbie took out his pipe from his jacket pocket. “It’s two-mile sou-west from here.” He filled the pipe and lit it.

The smell of pipe tobacco reminded Mark of his dad and another stab of homesickness engulfed him. He took another swig of the awful tea.

“What do you want with the likes of Pimlico, then lad?”

“The woman I plan to marry lives there.”

“Ah, in service, is she?”

“No, she’s here on holiday, staying with her grandfather.”

Robbie looked at Mark sharply. “You, with the likes of them over there, a Pimlico lass?”

“No, an Australian woman.”

Robbie said, “You bloody colonials! You think its colour not class that’s a problem. Let me tell you, it’s the capitalist class that created the idea of colour to keep the locals in servitude.”

A woman rushed in. “They bombed Durango.”

Mark asked, “What’s Durango?”

Robbie introduced Mark to the woman. “Katie, this is our Australian comrade. He’s heading for Spain.”

She pushed the round-rimmed glasses up her nose and a red curl sprang out from a hair comb and tumbled down her face. She pushed it back into its confines and wiped a hand down her freckled upturned nose. “You men are such fools. You don’t even know the place names in the country you are going to fight for!”

Robbie laughed. “That’s our Katie, always the cheerful one, but he’s going as the Australian Party’s reporter and war artist.”

“He’s still ignorant, and he’ll still be killed. That’s what war’s for—to kill people.”

The war suddenly seemed real and very close and the woman, despite her acerbic assessment of him, had a point, Mark needed to know the country better than he did. He asked. “Do you have a map of Spain?”

Katie nodded and went out to get an atlas.

Mark examined the map. “My friend Javier was heading there, he pointed at Bilbao. He was going to join the Basque army.”

Robbie and Katie exchanged looks and Katie said, “You don’t have to go, nobody will think less of you.”

Mark shook his head and got up. “How do I get to Pimlico?”

Katie looked baffled at this change of subject, but Robbie said, “You’d better put on the Fedora again lad if you want to go courting a lass from Pimlico.”

An hour later Mark stood on the pavement, staring at a tall white stucco façade. It sat in the middle of a long line of houses all exactly the same, all joined, like one long building. Huge pillars stood sentry either side of a large portico that gave entry into the house. A little way along the house, stairs descended behind iron palings, into what appeared to be a basement entry. Windows ran in marshalled rows, gazing down at him blankly. He glanced across the road and saw a curtain twitch. He couldn't just loiter in the street hoping she would come out.

He squinted at the sky but didn't know how to tell the time when the sun was not visible. Maybe he should get a watch although the good thing about London was the clocks. They were everywhere chiming the hours. Should he just march up and knock on the door? He took a step forward and then saw two women turn the corner and walk towards him. It was Beatrice, her arm linked with another woman in nursing uniform. Mark dithered, suddenly unsure of his welcome.

The women came closer, curiosity registering in Beatrice's tilted head. Then her hand flew to her mouth, and she let go of her companion to run along the street towards him.

He remained stock still until she stopped in front of him.

"Mark, you're here."

He lifted his hat as the nurse arrived.

She looked askance. "Beatrice?" But she stared at Mark.

"Oh Gladys. Its Mark. The man I told you about from home. Mark this is my friend Sister Fuller. I told her all about you." She held out her hand to touch his. "I'm so glad you're here."

He looked around. "Can we go somewhere?"

Beatrice glanced at the house. "Mummy's indoors." She turned to appeal to Gladys.

Gladys pressed her lips together, then sighed. "There's a Lyon's tearoom near the station where you can have a spot of tea in relative peace."

Ten minutes later, they left Gladys at the station and walked into the tearoom. Mark ached to hold Beatrice close. Her face was so pale, and she was thin as a cane stalk, like she'd been starved.

When they sat down, he said, "What's happened to you?"

Beatrice put her finger against her lips as a waitress took their order. "How are Jack, and Bert?"

"They're fine. Jack was elected State secretary, and he's moved to Brisbane, so they've merged the 9th District into the State branch under his leadership."

When the girl left, Beatrice reached across the table for Mark's hand. "I missed you so much."

He withdrew his hands to his lap. but said nothing.

"I was just about to buy an aeroplane ticket back to Innisfail when I got Bert's telegram last week. Who's looking after the farm?"

Mark cleared his throat. "Immanuel."

"Who?"

“Your uncle’s overseer.” This was the nature of her class. They had no conception of the people who worked for them.

Beatrice shook her head in bewilderment as an uncertain smile hovered around her mouth.

Mark stared at her. “Did you know your uncle’s house burnt down?”

Beatrice stopped smiling. “Yes, Mummy told me. It was lucky no one was hurt.”

“Rainer blamed me.” He glanced at the table knowing that he was being unfair and forced the anger down, back into the pit of his stomach where it seemed to have skulked for so long.

Her hands flew to her mouth. “Oh, how awful, because of me. Mark I’m so sorry. I’ve brought you nothing but trouble.”

He shook his head, ashamed of his accusation. “It’s not your fault. Anyway, it’s all right now. The inquest cleared me.”

“I heard about the inquest: rats in the ceiling. But I didn’t know about them blaming you. That’s so terrible. My family is treacherous.”

“There’s more.” His eyes scanned her face. “Your uncle kicked all the staff out of their homes.”

Tears spilled down Beatrice’s cheeks and Mark took a breath. “Look sorry. But it’s all worked out well for me, because now they’re looking after my farm.” He forced a smile.

She responded through glistening eyes, but her smile remained tentative. “I couldn’t believe it when Bert told me you were coming to London. I would have come back earlier, but I was ill you see.”

Her eyes filled again, shining like the early morning sun on the rain drenched grass at the farm. He wanted to reach across the table for her, but he stopped himself. “I need you to tell me the truth about your family Beatrice.”

She crinkled her nose and plucked at the tablecloth. “Maybe you should just come and meet them.”

“I would have liked that, but it’s not going to happen, is it? Your grandfather’s an aristocrat.” He paused, then said, “when were you going to tell me Beatrice?”

She remained silent.

“Why did you lie?”

“You wouldn’t have carried on seeing me if you knew.” She didn’t look at him.

Was that true? Perhaps in the early days he might have turned away. He nearly had when he found out she was the daughter of a CSR executive.

She continued. “I didn’t really lie. I just didn’t tell you everything because I thought you wouldn’t like me if you knew I was one of the people you despise.” A tear ran down her cheek and she brushed it away.

“It’s not the people, it’s what they stand for. I always knew who you were, just not the extent. Tell me the truth now.”

She took a deep breath. “All right.” She picked up a teaspoon and dug it into the table, and then still without looking at him she explained. “My father is as you know him. He grew up in Sydney and is just an ordinary Australian. His father was a banker. It’s my grandfather on my mother’s side who’s the aristocrat. Grandfather, Alfred Denton, is the Earl of Banville, but what I said is the truth. His father lost all his money in the crash of 1890. They had to sell their home, Banville Hall, and Grandfather went into the Navy. He met my grandmother, Violet, when he was in America, and it was her money that bought back Banville Hall. Her father made his money from tobacco and cotton.” She laid down the teaspoon, frowned, and took another deep breath. “I suppose that’s even more of a capital sin.”

“What?”

“Never mind.” She shook her head. “A few years before the Great War my grandfather was sent out to Australia with Governor-General Munro-Ferguson to advise on the setup of the Royal Australian Navy. That’s when my mother met my father and they got married. Then during the war, my father was in the Australian army and Mummy came home to Banville. Its where I was born. After the war, my grandmother died from the Spanish flu, but she left all her money and the Hall in trust to me. I don’t think my mother has ever forgiven her for that. She has always blamed me although I was only three when my grandmother died. The Hall is now rented out to some American family, and we never mention it or talk about my inheritance. I think my mother and father would prefer to forget it exists. My father manages my inheritance as it remains in his trust until I’m twenty-five or I marry.”

Mark stared at her. It was like seeing someone so familiar, they were part of you--the very breath in your body and the blood in your veins, and yet he didn’t know her at all. How

could he have ever thought he might marry her. It wasn't where she came from but who she was now. It was simply impossible, and no one would allow it to go ahead. He could see himself behind bars again. They were bound to have another version of Howard Rainer in London doing their bidding. Besides he couldn't expect her to be happy living in such basic conditions as those at the farm. He rubbed his forehead.

She said, "Say something."

"You said your grandfather worked for the civil service and lived around the corner from his work."

"That bit's true. Grandfather didn't like living at the Hall, said it was too countryfied. He prefers the city, and he has lived in the Pimlico house for years."

"Where does he work? In the House of Lords, I suppose."

She paused and then said, "I suppose he does, but that wasn't what I meant. He works for the Foreign Ministry. In what capacity I don't know. He never talks about it and whenever I have asked him, he just makes jokes about making tea and doing the filing."

She fell silent and he didn't know what to say. So, they drank their tea quietly in the middle of the noisy tearoom. A sense of futility weighed on Mark's shoulders.

Eventually she said, "I'll have to go home; my mother will be worrying, but will you come and meet them? I think you'll like my grandfather. He's not like my parents."

Mark shook his head. "I don't know Beatrice. I came to tell you I'm going to Spain."

She frowned. "Of course. I should have guessed you'd volunteer."

He hesitated, feeling the press pass burning against his left breast. "I'm not really volunteering."

She waited.

He felt obligated to explain and told her about his assignment and while he spoke he felt the hot blood rising up his neck. She must realise what a fraud he was, pretending to be a journalist. "I'll be taking photos more than reporting, so I'm not really going as a reporter so much as a sort of journeyman. Tomorrow, I leave for Paris, where I have a contact at a newspaper. He's going to show me how to operate the camera and explain the ropes." He changed tack. "Do you remember Javier?" She nodded. "He volunteered. I guess he'll be there already."

When he finished, she said, "But you're still going."

He nodded.

"Where are you staying now?"

"It's a Party dormitory, in Litchfield Street, Covent Gardens."

She got up. "Will you come home with me now?"

"I'll walk you home, of course."

When they arrived, Mark stopped at the entrance to her house. He took off his hat. She just stood staring up at him. He waited for her to say something that would tell him what to do next, but she didn't. So, he said, "Goodbye Beatrice," and turned and walked away.

Beatrice had waited for Mark to tell her what to do, to give some sign of what he wanted from her, but he gave her nothing, and she realised then that he would never give her the security and guidance she craved. He would always expect her to behave independently and while she thought that was what she wanted, she also hoped he would sometimes look after her, treat her as fragile and precious, the girl she had always rebelled against being. She didn't cry until she got to her room and then she threw herself onto her bed. She had thought they would face the world with news of their love together, but he didn't want her, not any longer or at least not enough to overcome their differences. A knock on her door forced her off the bed and she hastily dried her eyes as her mother came in.

Her mother peered into Beatrice's face and said, "Are you ill again?"

Beatrice said, "I'm fine, just tired."

"Who was that man I saw you talking to?"

Beatrice took a deep breath and straightened her shoulders. "That was Mark, Mummy. The man from Innisfail."

Her mother inhaled, her hand flying to her throat. "Oh no, Beatrice! Not again."

Beatrice pushed past her mother and said, "Well you've got your way. He's left!" Tears made it difficult to navigate the stairs.

She heard the front door open and Symons' voice. "Good afternoon my lord."

Symons had once been grandfather's batman in the Royal Navy. He was taciturn and ridged but devoted.

She walked downstairs to greet her grandfather. He kissed her then held her by the shoulders and examined her face. "Have you been crying, my dear?"

She nodded.

He said to Symons, "Bring some ice through to the drawing room." Then he guided Beatrice, his hand warm and comforting in the small of her back. "We'll have a drink and talk about what's troubling you."

Her mother followed, her mouth a tight line. When they reached the drawing room her mother said, "She's been crying over that man I told you about, the unsuitable one. It seems she has learned nothing."

Her grandfather said to his daughter, "Just a minute my dear. Let's get some drinks organised and we can discuss this in an adult-to-adult fashion."

After Symons brought the ice and they were comfortably seated with drinks in their hands Beatrice told her grandfather what had happened. She was grateful to him for stopping her mother's constant interruptions. When she had finished, the room was silent but for the clink of ice in their glasses.

After a minute or two her grandfather said, "What's your objection to the man, Madelaine?"

“He’s completely unsuitable. Where can I begin...he’s a field labourer, a foreign immigrant, and a Bolshevik, isn’t that enough?”

“An immigrant!” He looked bewildered but said, "Never mind. But labouring is honest work although I thought he had a farm in Australia. What is the problem really, Madelaine?”

“What about Beatrice’s inheritance?”

Beatrice’s grandfather cocked his head and examined his daughter. Then he said, “Have you met the man? Is he a decent sort? I’ve met a few Bolsheviks in my time, and they seem quite normal: no horns or tails. Granted they seek to rid the world of capitalism, but its Beatrice’s money. She can do what she wants with it.”

“They’re a threat to national security!”

“I very much doubt that. From what Beatrice has said, it sounds to me like he treats her as an equal, insisting she stands on her own feet and decides her own future. Besides I wonder if the communists really want world domination. I met Joseph Stalin before the finalisation of the Montreux Convention. My assessment is that he’s more afraid of being attacked at home than of setting out to conquer others, despite the Third International or the Comintern rhetoric of world revolution. I think all he wants is recognition from world leaders and protection from his own people. He’s terrified Leon Trotsky will overthrow him, or that the western powers will sneak up through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles and attack him through his country’s soft underbelly. It’s making him quite paranoid, for which unfortunately, his own people are suffering.” He shook his head. “I’m quite sure he’s not planning world domination, not just yet at any rate.”

“What about the Bolshevik uprising in Cable Street last year? We might have been murdered in our beds.” Her mother was so agitated she had screwed her long strand of pearls into a knot.

“I think that little fracas must be laid at the feet of one of our own. Sir Oswald Mosley is probably more of a threat to Britain with his allegiance to the German National Socialist’s Party. But enough of that. We are discussing a young Australian man. Do you remember meeting Arthur, Madelaine?”

“Of course.”

“And do you remember your mother trying to prevent you marrying him because she didn’t want you to marry an Australian. She was afraid you would live on the other side of the world, and she’d seldom see you. But you did marry Arthur. You insisted, and we didn’t stop you. Do you regret it now?”

Beatrice brimmed with gratitude toward her grandfather, although it was too late.

Her mother pulled back her chin and said, “But Arthur is British. It’s different.”

Her grandfather pursed his lips. “I thought Beatrice’s young man was Australian.”

Beatrice said, “He is. He was born in Australia so he’s more Australian than either Mummy or me.”

“So, in fact he’s a British subject. Is it ethnicity, class, or creed that bothers you Madelaine?”

Her mother looked furious. “You just don’t understand what these people are like.”

“I think I do, and really if Beatrice wants to see this man, I don’t see what say any of us have. She’s over twenty-one, so perhaps we should all make an effort to get to know him before we judge.”

Fresh tears welled in Beatrice’s eyes. “It’s too late, he’s going to Spain tomorrow.” Was her grandfather right. Was that what Mark was doing, waiting for her to take control of her own life and destiny without his coercion. Isn’t that what she had always wanted? It was terrifying.

Her grandfather smiled and said, “It’s a very small world in our circles. Did you know your cousin Charles is staying with Sir Henry Chiltern at the moment?”

Beatrice shook her head a little bewildered by the change of topic. “I haven’t seen Charles since we’ve been here.”

Her grandfather turned to her mother. “You remember Henry, don’t you Madelaine? He married your mother’s second, or is it third, cousin. They have two daughters around Beatrice’s age.”

Beatrice said, “I don’t know who he is.”

Sir Henry is the British ambassador to Spain, although he’s billeted in France at the moment, but I just happen to know him very well and he is, after all, almost a relative. Leave your young man to me, my dear. And Madelaine don’t worry. I am sure we can buff up this young man’s credentials, or enough that you and Arthur are not too socially embarrassed.

24.

The insurgent's planes were just specks against a brooding sky. Like demons after prey, they had risen over the dark massive called the Iron Belt Range to drop their bombs on loyalist towns in the Basque country of Northern Spain. Now they made a wide circle towards Irun as they headed back to base. Mark could see the smoke plumes rising above the low line of hills, and almost fancied he could feel the earth shaking. It was a strange feeling to be safe in one spot, while you knew that somewhere beyond your vision, terror and destruction rained from the sky.

They'd destroyed Durango, Elgeta, and Guernica, and last Friday, he'd heard the Italians had marched into Bermeo after bombing it into submission. So much for the international non-intervention pact. Mark's anger grew and all he could do was stand witness, but even that was impossible if he couldn't make out whose planes were dropping bombs today. They were too far away to see their markings, even through binoculars. Whether they wore the insignia of the Spanish military rebels, or the broken crosses of the German Condor Legion, or the Italian roundels, he couldn't tell. One thing he did know was that they were killing innocent civilians, dropping bombs indiscriminately in a terror never before witness in the history of humankind's desire to wreak destruction on their enemies. He had to find a way to make the world sit up and take notice—to stop the invasion of a democratic country and halt the slaughter of innocents. Surely no one who witnessed such cruelty could remain impartial.

His efforts to cross into Spain so far had proved fruitless; even crossing illegally over the mountains was impossible. The militant rebels, under the command of Alfonso Beorlegui, had taken the border towns of Irun, and San Sebastian only months ago. The rebel insurgents, who

called themselves Nationalists, or more correctly, Nacionales, because they considered themselves to embody the true character of Spain, were made up of several right-wing groups from Fascists to Catholics. Alfonso Beorlegui was of the latter variety, a Catholic Carlist, and Mark could see the distinctive red beret of his men's uniforms on the streets of Hondarribia from across the river. It seemed getting into Spain wasn't going to be simple.

“Are you planning on hogging those binoculars for the duration.”

Mark lowered the binoculars and turned to his companion. He'd met the man at breakfast when he'd sat down uninvited and demanded to know if Mark was the Australian reporter he'd heard was in town. When he'd introduced himself as Charles West, Mark had almost choked on his coffee, but the son wasn't responsible for his father's behaviour.

Charles was dressed in dark cream flannels worn above cream and brown brogues. A chestnut-check sports jacket covered a pale primrose silk shirt, and he sported a navy tie, fixed by a club pin that matched his gold cufflinks.

“Sorry, I was trying to make out the plane's markings,” Mark said holding out the binoculars.

Instead of taking them, Charles lifted his Panama to a passing woman and gazed after her as he ran his hand over short blond hair, slick with pomade.

“What for?” Charles said, as he eventually reached for the binoculars and turned to focus on the planes.

Charles had shown Mark the spot where reporters came daily to track the progress of the war and afterwards, to return to their comfortable hotels or for a spot of sea bathing. It might be

a normal day's work for a journalist, but it bothered Mark that he was safe while the loyalist Basque people suffered such carnage.

Even without the field glasses Mark's keen eyes could see quite clearly across the inlet to a line of hills and the Spanish border town. It was so close he could swim across but then what could he do in a town crawling with Nationalist troops and him without a guide or a visa. Even he realised that was impractical if not downright dangerous in the middle of a civil war.

He wondered if he could capture a fraction of the terror on film. In Paris they'd shown him how to use the Leica, but Mark was still unsure how much use a camera might be. Sketching with pencil and paper was infinitely more satisfying because you could highlight the points you were trying to make. With the camera the world was too big, the proportion all wrong, the horror indistinct, grainy, and distant. He didn't know how to show the evil intent of those planes the way he could do with a drawing. The trouble was, people believed photos couldn't lie, but even a photo depended on focus and perspective. He turned the camera on the waterfront, capturing a group of journalists gazing across the border. Each angle has its own story.

Charles said, "So, tell me, have you heard what the hell is going on in Barcelona?"

Mark lowered the Leica and said, "You mean the general strike?"

"Is that what it is?"

Mark frowned. "What do you think it is?"

"That's what I was asking you, but I might head on down that way. What do you say?"

Mark shook his head. “I had hoped to get across the border here and get photos of Guernica.”

“What! The havoc the Reds left behind.”

“I understood it was the Nationalists.” Mark ignored the pejorative term Charles used for the Basque army who remained loyal to the Republican government.

“So, the propagandists would have you believe.”

“But I read George Steers report.” Mark frowned.

“Can’t believe everything you read. I was part of the tour the Nationalists put on for the Press shortly after the event. The town looked like it had been dynamited and one could smell the fuel the Reds used to spread the fires. The Basque army is made up of miners and they all carry dynamite in their packs. It was definitely done by the retreating Reds to ensure nothing was left standing when the Nationalists arrived—scorched earth so to speak. *The Times* editor is a close friend, and he rather prefers my version to the sensationalist hysteria of the Steer report.”

“How the hell did you get into Spain. I’ve tried and drawn a blank.”

Charles examined Mark. “You’re new at this game, aren’t you?”

Mark shifted his feet. “This is my first reporting job.”

Charles chuckled. “I guessed as much but everyone has to start somewhere. Look Sir Henry’s having some expatriates to lunch. Why don’t you come along? You’ll meet people

who know about these things, and you can hear it firsthand. If Major Julián Troncoso Sagredo is there, you might even wrangle a press pass.”

Who?”

“The governor of Irún. But you’ll need to show your Press commission: free lancers aren’t that welcome in the North. It’s easier to get into Barcelona, more welcoming of the Press so long as they reproduce the Red propaganda spewed out by the Republicans.”

Sir Henry Chilton’s residence was along the coast from Hendaye at Port St. Jean de Luz, an impressive home, overlooking a white capped stretch of the Bay of Biscay, grey green under the gathering storm. So, this was the company Charles kept: it was way out of Mark’s league. He suppressed a momentary flutter of nerves as he was introduced to Chilton and his wife Katherine. Would they call him out for the imposter he was?

Chiltern was a short man, at least by Mark’s standards, with thinning hair and a pompousness about him that seemed to suit his role, probably making him a non-threatening everyman in diplomatic circles. He wore a dark suit and tie and sweated in the humidity. His wife hailed from American money, judging by her accent and her jewellery. The two daughters were aloof, barely interested in any of the present company and hardly acknowledged Mark before disappearing into the gloom of the house’s nether regions.

Chiltern suggested they all move to the veranda where pre-lunch drinks would be served. Several other people were already in conversation, and Mark was introduced to the circle one by one, including the Governor of Irun, Major Julián Troncoso Sagredo who was talking to a

uniformed Nazi, Captain von Graff. Mark could barely bring himself to acknowledge the man although he did want to talk to the Governor.

Before he could collect his thoughts to ask how he might get a permit to travel into Spain, another woman strode onto the veranda and thrust out her hand.

“Sylvia Boyle from *The Washington Post*,” she said. “Apologies, Ambassador Bowers couldn’t make it, so he sent me instead. Hope that’s acceptable.”

She was about forty, on the bony side of slender, dressed in loose-fitting trousers and jacket. A long scarf around her neck fluttered in the salt breeze. How did a woman like her come to work on a paper as prestigious as *The Washington Post* and travel to places like this? Beatrice would admire Sylvia enormously. A vision of Beatrice standing in the street where he left her threw him off kilter for a moment. She would have loved to meet Sylvia.

Sylvia interrupted his thoughts. “What brings you to this part of the world Mr Anders?”

Before Mark could answer, Charles chimed in. “Can you believe he’s on a mission, to unearth the truth about this war.” He chortled.

Sylvia didn’t respond, just gazed at Charles with level eyes.

A servant hovered next to Mark with a tray of drinks. Tall glasses contained pink juice with tiny salt crystals around the glass rim and a curl of fruit skin astride the lip.

Chiltern said, “Katherine is trying out some concoction called yea old salty dog today, gin and pink grapefruit juice. You drink through the salt, which is supposed to refresh one in hot weather.”

Mark took a glass hesitantly, envying Sylvia's boldness when she refused and said to the servant, "Bourbon Américain avec glace, s'il vous plaît."

He took a small sip. It wasn't bad although he was wary of drinking gin so early in the day.

Chiltern addressed Mark. "The truth of the Spanish war is that the Republican government is Russia's puppet. The Nationalist simply feel honour bound to act and stop the Bolsheviks seizing their country. Look at what's happening in Barcelona. The Republicans are powerless to control the revolutionary forces operating in the country."

Charles was quick to seize the moment. "Which is why we will have to go to Barcelona Sir Henry and find out what's really going on. Mark and I were planning to leave as soon as we can get a visa. Do you think the Embassy might help in some way?"

Sylvia responded to Chiltern's summary. "Aren't you overlooking the fact that the Republican government was democratically elected, and President Azaña is a liberal. Franco can't stage a coup just because he doesn't agree with the people's choice."

Major Troncoso joined the conversation. "Yes, but was the election completely above board? There seems to be some question."

"My dear Julián, I didn't see any evidence of any ballot rigging when I was in Madrid last year, just jubilant people, ecstatic they had won." Sylvia said, a light of pure devilment dancing in her eyes.

Major Troncoso scowled but bowed towards Sylvia without saying more.

How did she get away with it? Sylvia seemed not only well informed but was also rational rather than ideological in her assessment. Mark was determined to get her on her own and ask her what she really thought was going on with this war.

As soon as an opening offered itself, he said quietly, “Do you know who bombed Guernica?”

She looked at him speculatively. “What do you think?”

“I’m certain it was German bombs, but Charles is adamant that the Basque army blew the place up as they retreated.”

She patted his arm. “Don’t worry. Noel Monks told me it was definitely German Heinkel’s. He was on the road to Guernica and was strafed by the bastards after they dropped their load, but in this war its who you want to believe, and that depends on whose side you’re on.”

Her blue eyes crinkled in the corners at Mark’s stunned expression. He recovered quickly but he’d never heard a woman swear so openly before, especially in this kind of company.

She added. “I can see you’re an idealist searching for what can only be described as an illusionary truth. You’re new at this game, aren’t you?”

He sighed. “Is it so obvious?”

She gazed at him. “So, what are you doing here Mr Anders? This war will eat idealists for breakfast and spit out the bones. You should go home before you get killed.”

“You’re right, I am new at this, but perhaps my idealism might be the required antidote to the Nationalist propaganda and intolerance for democratic rule.”

Her laugh was a short startling bark. “That’s priceless. Idealism, the antidote for intolerance.”

Mark felt the hot flush of embarrassment creeping up his neck and looked around the group hoping no one else had heard. He attempted to change the subject. “What’s Chiltern doing in France if he’s the ambassador to Spain.”

Amusement lit-up her face. “Madrid’s a little uncomfortable at the moment and as you might have guessed Sir Henry Chilton’s not a fan of the Republican government.”

“What else can you tell me about him?”

She glanced across at Chiltern. “He loves us Yanks. Not only did he marry one, but he is especially fond of American companies that re-route oil, gasoline, and vehicles to Franco on credit. Actually, the Nationalists would have lost the war already if those supplies went to the Republicans as was intended. Claude...that is the American ambassador to Spain, Claude Bowers, begged our President to stop American companies supplying the Nationalists.”

“Because of the non-involvement pact?” Mark knew all about that fence-sitting ploy used by the British to avoid getting involved.

“Not just that, but also because if America doesn’t act, Claude is worried this little Spanish coup will start a much wider European war. I must say I agree with him.”

The next day Mark went back to Paris to ask his contact how he might get into Spain through Barcelona. His contact at *L'Humanité* made going to Spain easy, commissioning a photo story that would show the world that Republican Spain's socialism wasn't something to fear. As an assignment it was raw political propaganda but for Mark it presented a contract for a two-page spread. He could show the world how a democratically elected government was being held hostage by an army coup, an illegal insurgency. He hoped the world, blinded by propaganda against socialism, would wake up and support the Spanish Republican government against a Fascist takeover.

As he waited for the train to Perpignan, he gazed up at the Meccano-like dome of the Gare d'Austerlitz, mentally going over his plans until he was satisfied all was in order. Among the other passengers waiting for the train were two men with brown paper parcels under their arms, trying to look relaxed but frequently glancing across at each other, as if they were friends pretending not to know one another. Mark recognised the taller man from having seen him standing outside Party headquarters, but both had that look of nervous anticipation as if at any moment someone might leap out and disclose their secret.

The shorter of the two men looked like he'd barely had a meal in weeks. His gaunt shoulders, pasty face, lank hair, and hollow eyes made him look like he'd been hidden in a drawer all his life. The taller man looked healthier, ruddy faced like he'd spent time outdoors, but with the thuggish appearance only a broken nose can provide.

Mark guessed they were doing the same thing as he was, and had been warned not to communicate with each other, at least until they were on the train. This was precautionary in case the Gendarmes tried to stop one of the volunteers, the others could still get through. He

had been given instructions not to talk to any volunteers until safely inside Spain or he might blow their cover.

When the train finally left Paris, Mark distracted himself by watching the unfolding landscape. Outside the city, it opened into a flat and forested plain under a wide saucer of pale sky. The sun tracked to the right, so he figured they were heading south.

A conductor rattled then opened the door. “Billet s’il vous plait”

Mark handed him his ticket.

The conductor asked Mark for his destination. “Quelle est votre destination?”

“Perpignan,” Mark said. He’d chosen a second-class ticket because he guessed a journalist might not travel third, but he couldn’t bring himself to lash out on a first-class ticket.

The conductor examined Mark, his eyebrows slanting towards the peak of his cap, “Vous êtes Italien?”

Mark’s French accent wasn’t perfect, and he realised he must speak like an Italian. Not surprising given his mother’s background. He shrugged and said, “Australian.”

“Quelle est votre entreprise à Perpignan?”

He wondered what business it was of the conductor to know what he was travelling for, but perhaps he was supposed to ask such questions. Maybe he was just nosy. Mark pointed at his camera. “Photographié.”

“Ah, un journaliste?” the conductor nodded. “Votre ami vous a demandé.”

Mark was baffled; what friend was looking for him? The conductor was already leaving. Mark shook his head and looked out the window. He didn't have any friends on this train, nor in France for that matter other than the people he'd met in Paris. The conductor must have mistaken him for someone else.

A little while later Charles walked in. "I thought you'd be here, but you might have waited for me." He raised a sardonic eyebrow and looked around. "You should come and sit in my compartment. It's much nicer than this." He sat opposite Mark and said, "So, did you manage to get a Spanish visa?"

25.

It was late afternoon when they arrived in Barcelona, and Mark went straight to the Press and Propaganda Secretariate in Diagonal Avenue. A woman greeted him, Madam de la Mora and told him that although he had been given a billet in the Bristol Hotel, it was too near the Telefonica where the fighting was, and they had moved him to the Majestic. She added, he was very lucky because Mr. Hemmingway also stayed at the hotel when he was in Barcelona. Mark thanked her, but he hadn't expected to find himself in the middle of a miniature war within the larger civil war, and famous authors weren't going to stop bullets.

For the first few days after his arrival, running gun battles raged in the streets, and journalists were confined to their allotted hotels for their own safety. Food was short and drinking in the bar relieved boredom. Everyone he spoke to, journalists mostly, had different opinions about what was happening.

After a few days, things quietened down, and an official Press briefing was held in the Generalitat de Catalunya. The Generalitat was the Catalonian Regional government operating out of the Colon Hotel, which they had commandeered at the start of the civil war. On the outside of the hotel was a large banner hung between portraits, one of Lenin and one of Stalin. The banner proclaimed the hotel and therefore the Generalitat was under the control of the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia or PSUC, a union of socialist groups that were affiliated to the Comintern, and who were pursuing the popular-front strategy that Georgi Dimitrov, the Comintern leader, had advocated for creating socialist democracies around the world.

The Press officer delivering the briefing was Manuel someone or other, Mark had missed his surname and his rank. He was a dapper clean-shaven officer of the Republican army and

stood behind a lectern in a smartly creased khaki uniform, replete with Sam Browne belt and pistol, reading a memorandum aloud in fluent, if heavily accented, English. The room was packed with journalists from all corners of the earth and many interrupted with shouted questions.

Beads of sweat broke out on the officer's forehead and he wiped a finger across his temple appealing for silence to read out the briefing. Yet despite his earnest appeal, the briefing smelled of propaganda. Not that Mark had much experience in discriminating between propaganda and fact in Press briefings, but he knew people and trusted his own instincts, which were usually sharp, despite Charles jeering at his desire to find the truth.

While Mark was in Paris, he'd mentioned his desire for the truth to his comrade at *L'Humanité*. The bloke nodded sympathetically but said searching for the truth was a futile exercise. At the time, he was giving Mark a lesson in how to develop and print the photos he'd taken in Hendaye, and Mark bemoaned his inexperience in trying to make the planes over Basque country meaningful when they were so distant. He explained that he wanted the photos to speak the truth of the war, but his comrade had told him that for the camera, emotion is the only truth.

Mark wasn't convinced. Instead of truth, he would seek the facts of the last couple of weeks. That way he could chose his angles and perspective to show corresponding emotions through the camera lens. But listening to the Press briefing Mark was beginning to think facts didn't explain anything. The street fighting began in earnest when the government tried to wrest back control of the Barcelona telephone exchange from the Anarchist's workers parties affiliated with an Anarchist union. What did that tell him? It said nothing about why. Yet, it

seemed the Anarchists were more interested in their own Catalonian revolution than supporting a united front to win the war. They had challenged the Government by calling for a general strike, resulting in this latest round of street fights. Mark remembered the bitter sugar strike he'd been involved in in '35 but to imagine the strikers in Australia coming out with guns, fighting pitched battles in the street, was beyond him. That was the stuff of real revolutions, but it was usually carried out against the enemy, not your own political partners. In this war the enemy was supposed to be the Nationalist insurgents under Generals Mola and Franco.

The Press Officer said the Republican government had sent in the Assault Guard to put down a Fascist rebellion against the government. Anarchists would never side with Fascists. So, what was the truth? What had changed? Whatever started the street fight, it sounded more and more like rivalry between different left factions within the Popular Front Government, rather than any sinister Fascist conspiracy.

Bitter experience in the cane fields of North Queensland showed Mark that leftist infighting was the bane of any militant unionist action. The right always seemed more disciplined in holding ideological differences together, perhaps through a sense of loyalty, self-interest, coercion, or perhaps by brute force. Yet, here it was more complicated, and in the middle of a civil war it became deadly. How was he to show the world they had nothing to fear from a socialist government when propaganda could so easily paint a different picture?

It was clear that the Republican government wanted to present a benign and sophisticated front to the world, not one of infighting and chaos. So far, the official Press tours had all been about Barcelona's culture, sophistication, and the city's normality, as if the authorities were also trying to convince the rest of Europe they had nothing to fear from socialism. Now the

Government was planning to return some of the property, the Anarchists had collectivised, to the bourgeoisie and even to allow a couple of churches to reopen.

Mark had no patience with Press briefings, especially when they gave sanitised versions of events. He wanted to get out and talk to the people in the streets, and the soldiers fighting at the front. They would give the real picture.

The briefing came to an end and the Press officer announced the bus would be leaving in one hour to take them to lunch and more sightseeing. Mark scanned the room as the journalists began to filter out. He nodded to those he'd met over the past few days and then he saw Charles. Even though Charles was Beatrice's cousin, Mark didn't want to have anything to do with any of the West family, but it seemed Charles was hell bent on claiming him.

He called out, "Ah Mark. I've been looking for you. We're heading to the Continental for a snifter before the bus leaves: are you coming mate?"

Mark shook his head. So that's where he was staying. The last thing he needed was to get too close to Charles, who would ask more questions about his background in Australia. Besides he would learn nothing from Charles and his cronies. Most of the other reporters knew no more than he did, although they all had their opinions, some well-informed, but others merely assertively stated. Most were more interested in interviewing the men of the International Brigades than they were in the Spanish people.

He wondered if he could escape the Press officer and explore on his own. They were closely monitored, apparently for their own safety, but Mark had enough tourist photos. Even if he could get away, he might still be locked up or shot by Anarchists, libertarian youth, or even the Civil Guardia, who, Mark had been warned, were a different breed from the more

professional Assault Guards. The occasional pop of a pistol was still heard, but since the arrival of the Assault Guard from Valencia, peace was mostly restored.

On the streets, evidence remained of the street fighting including the ripped-up cobblestone barricades in Las Ramblas, a series of streets through the heart of the city from the Plaça Catalunya to the waterfront at Port Vell. It was the second time in a year the barricades had been used. Last year at the start of the attempted military coup, the Anarchist militias broke into the armouries and armed civilians, who fought the military insurgents in these same streets from behind the same barricades. They'd beaten the rebels off, and Barcelona remained loyal to the Government. That is, until this recent fracas, when the cobbles were ripped up once again to build barricades. Some wag at his hotel suggested the cobblestones should be numbered for greater ease of replacement each time they were ripped up.

Since the recent street fighting had stopped the boards had come off the windows, and Mark could see out into the street. The early summer sun streamed through the glass panes in crystalline brilliance, more brittle than the golden glow that bathed his farm back home in the Wet Tropics. It was supposed to be a hot start to summer, but Barcelona wasn't as hot as home, or not yet anyway. They said it would get hotter, but he was grateful for any sunshine after the feeble gloom of the London spring, where the sun had to battle through despondent cloud and malevolent smog.

He waited until the briefing room cleared before he rose to leave. As he walked toward the exit, two women stood in the doorway unaware he was behind them but blocking his way. Mark was in no hurry and waited for them to notice.

One of the women, the dark-haired one, spoke in a low voice to the other a fair-haired woman, in what sounded like a Scot's accent.

When she noticed him, she said, "Och, sorry," and stepped aside, pulling her companion with her.

"Thanks." Mark nodded intending to walk on.

But the dark-haired woman said, "I haven't seen you before. Where are you from?"

Mark wasn't sure what to answer. Did she want to know what country he was from, or what hotel he stayed at?

She screwed up her nose. "It's not a hard question you know--which paper?"

His hand went immediately to his left breast, feeling the press pass in his jacket pocket for reassurance. "*L'Humanité*."

"You don't sound French." Her grey eyes narrowed.

He felt the blood of an imposter rise in his neck. "Australian." He felt sure the woman could see straight through him, knew him for an amateur. "I just arrived a few days ago."

A frown flickered across her face. "Well, what did you think of the press briefing?"

He smiled, but inside a warning went off. In this place nothing was a casual question. He put out his hand. "I'm Mark Anders."

She took his hand and laughed. "A canny one," she said to her friend. "I'm Ethel and this is Jenny."

The soft Scottish brogue sounded familiar, and it dawned on Mark who these women were. “You’re the one on the wireless.”

“Clever boy.” Ethel gave an exaggerated eye roll to her friend and shook her short wavy dark hair away from her face.

Mark felt the heat of embarrassment rising from his shoulders again. “Excuse me.” He made a move to pass the women.

“Och...don’t be in such a rush. Tell us all about you.” Ethel laid her hand on Mark’s arm.

Here was the answer. These women could tell him, not only what was going on, but might introduce him to local people. Just what an outsider needed to gain acceptance, if not trust.

“What do you want to know?”

The woman glanced at her companion. “We’re going for a cup of tea, get out of this place.” She raised her gaze to the vaulted ceilings. “Find more friendly air. Would you like to join us?”

The café they took him too was a dingy canteen. Communal tables, laid out in rows, were filled with women and a few men, who looked up as they stepped through the café door, but when they saw Ethel and Jenny they relaxed.

Ethel sat down and introduced Mark to the man on her left, calling him Eddy. He was a short man with powerful shoulders and a deep chest, a two-day growth of beard on his chin.

Eddy glanced at the door before he leaned over to shake Mark's hand. "My name is Eduardo Cardona, only Ethel calls me Eddy."

Ethel folded her arms and said, "So, Mr Anders tell us all about you. Why are you here?"

Mark could feel the café patrons silence and wondered how many spoke English. He would keep his limited Spanish under wraps until he knew the lay of the land. It was always a useful means of discovering stuff when people didn't know you could understand the language. Although most of the people here would speak Catalan, another language he'd have to learn, but it had the same Latin roots as that of French, Spanish, and Italian, as well as Toscano, his mother's native tongue. Languages came easily to Mark for they were like any pattern, once the basic structure was recognisable the rest fell into place.

"I'm just trying to find out what's really going on." He paused then took a gamble. "I didn't buy the briefing this morning."

Ethel gazed at him speculatively. "That's because none of it's true."

"So, what is the truth?"

"The truth is that the Communist Party have taken control of the Republican government and are calling the shots. They're the anti-revolutionaries supporting bourgeois democracy against the Anarchist triumph of the proletarian revolution. Yet, they are trying to paint the Anarchists as anti-revolutionaries, in league with the Fascists. If you had been here a month ago you would have understood. Catalonia was totally classless after the revolution, with the land and factories collectivised and the workers in control, women emancipated, and children fed and educated. Centuries of oppression from the bourgeoisie and the church was finally

defeated. All decisions were made in consultation and through consensus, even those of the war, and it worked.”

Mark wondered if a classless society was possible. Australia called itself classless, but they were clearly deluding themselves. He said, “Yes, I got that bit.” The story of the crime gangs that had arisen to take advantage of imposed anarchy flitted through his mind, but he didn’t want to argue, so he said, “But I don’t get why.”

“The revolution is more important than a bourgeoisie war.”

“But the war is still being fought and if the Nationalist win then the revolution is dead.”

“Ha! But the Nationalists cannot win a war against the people if the people are armed. We showed that when they tried to take power last year in Barcelona, we beat them then and if they try to crush the revolution, we will beat them again. But now the Republicans want us to put away our weapons and our revolution, until the war is won. They want to give back the land and businesses, we collectivised, to the bourgeoisie. It is a ruse to de militarise the revolution and take back state control.”

“You don’t think that state control and organisation is needed to win the war first?”

She pouted her cheeks and rolled her eyes. “It’s Stalin who wants to control Spain as he oppresses Russia with his totalitarian state. If you are with *L’Humanité*, you’re probably a member of the Communist Party, and a spy, so you’d know.”

Mark said nothing about her inconsistency. Since arriving in Spain, he’d kept his party membership under wraps, but *L’Humanité* was run by the French Communist Party so it wasn’t a wild guess on Ethel’s part.

Eduardo made a noise in his throat and glared at Mark. Then he stood up. “Come, I show you what these bastards do.”

Mark glanced at Eduardo seeing the weight of a pistol dragging at his coat pocket. Was it wise to go anywhere with the man? He said, “Let’s get this straight. I’m not anyone’s spy. I’m only here to find out and report the truth.”

“We’ll see.” Ethel added, “Eddy’s not going to kill you if that’s what you’re worried about. It’s the bloody PCE, the Communist union, who runs around killing people.”

Mark stood up. “Aren’t you coming?”

She shook her head. “Bye, Mr Australian war correspondent, if that’s who you really are. Tell the truth of what you see for your newspaper.”

Mark gazed at her for a minute. Everyone wanted the Press to report what accorded with their own beliefs of what was happening. He wondered what his reports would show. Despite his belief in socialism, he was determined to remain rational, to report only what he found, not what he believed might be happening, yet he was beginning to realise that might not be possible.

He followed Eduardo out the café and down a back alley, noticing the walls on either side were chipped and pock marked, presumably by bullets. After about ten minutes, Eduardo stopped at a doorway to a small house, and then after checking along the street both ways, he opened the door.

An old woman, dressed in black with a headscarf covering her head, greeted them. Her face was a mass of wretchedness as she hugged Eduardo. Eduardo introduced Mark to his

mother and led him into another room. In the centre, laid out on a wooden table was a dead man, his head wrapped in fresh bandages, his arms folded over his chest, his jacket encrusted with what looked like dried blood. Women and children sat on benches pushed against the walls. They stared at Mark.

Eduardo explained that the dead man was his younger brother, shot in the head by Assault Guards after the battle to take the Telefonica.

Mark mumbled his condolences, shocked by the unexpected situation and recognising his inadequacy in the face of so much grief. He waited silently to one side of the room as Eduardo spoke with his family.

Then Eduardo hugged his mother and said to Mark, "Come, we have not finished."

They left the family and walked along more back alleys, and through the homes of Eduardo's comrades. They entered a tall building and went up the stairs, climbing out a window onto the roof. Eduardo motioned to Mark and crouched behind a bulwark.

Across the street, was an enormous walled compound. Inside the outer walls, numerous large buildings spoked out from a panopticon style central building. It looked like a giant bicycle wheel except the spokes were different lengths as if some were broken.

Civil Guards in their distinctive three-cornered hats strutted behind a gated entrance. On the street leading to the entrance, carts and lorries trundled back and forth. Soldiers milled about the pavement outside the gate. Women and children squatted within the wall's shade as they waited, presumably to get inside to see loved ones.

Eduardo said, "The Czech."

Mark scrutinised Eduardo then looked back at the prison. Czech or cheka is the word for an unofficial secret prison, and this was clearly no secret, just a vast and forbidding prison complex from which it would be difficult to escape.

Eduardo said, “My older brother Bautista was arrested as a traitor.” He spat towards the prison, and a glutinous gob of impotent hatred fell to the street below. He added, “The Guardia are the traitors, counterrevolutionaries trying to overturn the revolution.”

Mark unslung his Leica from his shoulder, unclipping its cap, and glanced at Eduardo for permission. Eduardo nodded and Mark adjusted the camera’s rangefinder.

For the next two hours, Eduardo took Mark from place-to-place, along back alleys and over rooftops, avoiding Guardia of all stripes. They spoke to several men, and while Eduardo translated each personal story Mark took photos. This was what he was here for, not press briefings and drinking and lunching with other journalists.

As he focused the lens, a barrier rose between him and grief. He had never seen such sorrow and suffering, nor had he ever seen such callous disregard for human life. The lens brought a distance that diffused the horror and instead filled him with a euphoric sense of purpose. All afternoon he took photos of men who had been executed and left lying-in back alleys, their blood drying into black pools. Some were brought home and laid out in the front rooms like Eduardo’s younger brother, with grieving widows and bewildered or scared children staring into his camera lens.

Mark was told this dead man was a member of the Anarchist CNT union, or its political wing the FAI or to the POUM workers’ party. That one, just an old man minding his own business. This one, a youth, merely out to get a coffee and play chess with his friend.

With each new encounter and each story, Mark wanted someone to blame, to vent his anger against, but who? It was the Spanish people on the same side of a civil war, killing each other in internecine violence, instead of focusing their fury on the Fascist enemy.

They arrived at a cobblestone barricade, and Eduardo said, "This is where my fathers died."

Mark examined the barricade then looked at Eduardo; what did he mean fathers died? Perhaps it was a language thing. Poor bastard. Aloud he said, "You lost your father as well as your brothers?"

Eduardo said, "I lost my father here during la Setmana Tràgica. I was born in August 1909 just two weeks after my father died at this barricade, so I never knew him, but he fought for justice." He paused, scrutinised Mark, and then said, "You have heard of the Rif wars?"

Mark shook his head.

"So, when the Rif war in Morocco began, the government called up men who had already done national service, but they wanted them again for colonisation, my father among them. The Anarchists had no interest in colonisation, nor did they have any anger towards the Riffian tribes. But when the State wants war, they call the poor. The rich pay for other men to go in their place, but for the poor it is always a tragedy because they must go themselves, leaving families behind to starve. This time the men with my father said, no!" Eduardo paused; his eyes glistening. Then he added, "They stood together here. They fought and died bravely, just like my stepfather died at this barricade last July, fighting the Francoists. Now my brother is also dead at this barricade and my other brother will die from torture in the Cheka, once more at the hands of the State. This is why government must be abolished." He sighed. "Now I must live,

for I am the only future on earth for my father. I must live to make his existence and death worth something, but we need to rid Spain of these bloody governments who kill us. This is the story you must tell for the world.”

Mark depressed the shutter on the camera. “I will tell your story.” He promised.

The next morning, Mark went back to the Café hoping to find Eduardo or Ethel. He wanted answers to so many questions that arose during the night. He hadn’t slept, just sketched scenes from his memory in an exercise book and then wrote accompanying notes so he wouldn’t forget the details.

Neither Eduardo nor Ethel was at the café, and he didn’t think he could remember how to get to Eduardo’s mother’s home, so he asked the man behind the counter if he could leave a message. The man looked worried then shrugged. Mark wrote a note to Ethel asking if she could contact him at the Hotel Majestic. The grand address felt like a betrayal, and although it was where he was billeted, it wasn’t a hotel Mark would have chosen.

He left the café and decided to head for the Continental Hotel. He would run into Charles, but too bad. He might hear something that would shed light on what was happening in the rest of Spain. He really wanted to go to Madrid but that would have to wait for his next trip. He knew he’d be back but first he should get his copy to *L’Humanité* and then go and see if Beatrice would forgive him.

He’d been such an idiot. What did it matter who her family were, and perhaps she might come back with him? Since the street fighting was largely over, the place was relatively safe.

He sent her a letter shortly after he arrived in Barcelona, apologising, and hoping she might forgive him. He said, he'd be back in a week or two and he'd see her then. That's if she still wanted to see him. He couldn't blame her if she didn't. He hadn't had a reply and didn't know if that was because she hadn't yet received his letter, or if she was no longer speaking to him.

The Continental's bar had reopened since the fighting had stopped and Mark walked in and ordered coffee. He sat away from the large plate glass windows with his back to the wall from where he could survey most of the room. Charles and another journalist came in and Mark sighed. He couldn't get away from the man.

Charles hailed him and walked over to his table. "I thought you were avoiding me, but now I have tracked you down, you can back me up. Sam here says the Americans aren't colonials like the Australians by way of the American-British Treaty. What do you say?"

Mark glanced from one man to the other.

Sam laughed. "You've no idea what were on about, do you?"

Sam was young, maybe twenty-two. Brown hair and eyes and thick lensed glasses. His mouth formed a bow with a seemingly permanent smile.

Mark swallowed the last of his coffee then shook his head.

Sam leaned in with his hand outstretched. "Samuel Riding, *Courier Journal*, Louisville Kentucky. Sam to my friends," he said grinning.

"Mark Anders," He said shaking Sam's outstretched hand.

"I know that name. I think you met my aunt, Sylvia Boyle."

“Your aunt? Is she here? I would love to see her again.”

“She’s in Paris, but she took a real liking to you. Are you with the BBC like Charles here?”

Mark was determined to get his credentials ironed out in front of Charles--to hell with his relatives. “I’m freelance, but on assignment for *L’Humanité*.” From the corner of his eye, he noticed Charles didn’t seem surprised. “What’s this about Americans being colonials?”

Sam chuckled. “*Don’t-call-me-Charlie-boy*, here, called me a colonial and it started the argument, but it’s just a bit of fun.”

Charles got up. “Fun! I think not, but you’ve made your point and I’ve changed my mind. Americans may not be colonials after all, for they know nothing of good manners.” He grinned. “Which I suppose means I’m to get in the first round again. What’ll it be Mark. You can’t drink coffee all day.”

“Thanks, I’ll have a beer.”

Charles walked to the bar and Sam sat down opposite Mark.

Mark said, “You seem to know your way around?”

Sam shook his head. “I’ve been here for a few months, so I wouldn’t say I knew my way around, but I hear things.”

Mark nodded. “You wouldn’t happen to know how I might get to Madrid?”

Charles came back to the table. “Whatever for? The place has been bombed to smithereens?”

“That’s why I need to go. Aren’t you curious?”

“Nothing doing old chum,” Charles said. “A scouting mission to find out what the Barcelona street fight was all about was my mandate, nothing more.”

Mark was about to ask what his verdict was when all thoughts of Barcelona vanished with Charles’s next statement.

“I have my cousin’s party to get back for. I just received an imperious command from my Aunt Madelaine to attend the Ritz, for my cousin Beatrice’s twenty-first.

Mark choked on his beer.

“You all right, old man?”

Mark wiped his mouth on his sleeve and nodded.

Charles leaned back and continued. “She’s an odd sort, my cousin: a bit of a radical blue stocking. Like you Sam, banging on about equality, fraternity and all that hullabaloo, but all right I suppose, and her party should be an event. My aunt doesn’t do things by halves.”

Mark stared into his glass avoiding Charles’s eye. A longing seized him. He should get back. He had enough for the spread in *L’Humanité* and he needed to get back and apologise to Beatrice in person. It was her, the woman that he loved, not her station in life. That just came with the territory. He’d always known that, so what had possessed him to become so self-righteous. He wondered if she would forgive him or even speak to him again.

Later, when Mark got back to his billet at the Hotel Majestic, he was handed an envelope containing an invitation wrapped in a letter from Beatrice, asking him to come and meet her family. If he hadn't heard Charles's version of events, he wouldn't be any the wiser about what was ahead of him. At least now he had warning. Damn, how was he to navigate this challenge. Perhaps if he said his return trip was urgent, he could just see Beatrice and avoid any family gatherings. He paused and then realised he was running away again, but who could blame him. After all, his previous experience with her family didn't leave any hope that the meeting would be a friendly event.

A rapid banging on the door jerked him away from his ruminations. It was probably Charles, demanding he join them for more drinking. He wrenched open the door intending to put Charles off, when he found Ethel.

She looked dishevelled. "They're after Eduardo. You have to help him!"

"What do you mean—who's after him?"

She pushed past him, into his room. "The bloody PSCU, that's who. They say he's a Trotskyist and one of the POUM ring leaders who started the fighting.

"Is he?"

"Well, he's POUM, and he believes the revolution is more important than the war, but that's beside the point. He's in danger and you have to help."

“What can I do?” Mark liked Eduardo but couldn’t work out what he could do to help or even if it was advisable. What did he know about what was really going on, and if he intervened who was he really helping?

“He needs papers, even just a Communist Party card. He just needs it for about forty-eight hours, then you can report it missing.”

“How will Party Membership help?”

“Better you don’t know too many details.”

“If you want my help, you’d better tell me something.”

Ethel snapped, “You’re just wasting time. Even now they might have found him.”

“Well, you’ll have to give me some idea of what I’m getting myself in for, or I can’t help.”

“You mean you won’t.” She sighed. “All right then. I know of some merchant seamen who will help a fellow communist party member. They’ll get him on board using the kind of papers seamen use and then he won’t need a passport.”

“How will he pass for an Australian?”

Ethel shrugged. “The ship’s crew isn’t English. They won’t notice that Eduardo speaks English with a Spanish accent.”

Mark pressed his lips together. “What harm could it do? If he gave Eduardo his Party membership booklet, he would still have his passport and Press Credentials. “All right, but I have to leave in the morning, so I’ll report it missing when I’m back in London.”

26.

Beatrice sat in the morning room with her mother, and father, who as usual had blocked out his family by reading a newspaper. Rain lashed the windows and ran down the panes in miniature rivulets, but the room was warmed by a fire in the grate. Earlier when she had asked Annie to build the fire, the poor woman had looked bewildered. But its summer Miss, she had said. It didn't feel like summer.

Now Beatrice was in an argument with her mother. "I'm going Mother, whether you agree or not. I would like your blessing, but if not," Beatrice shrugged, "I'm still going. They need all the help they can get and they're just children."

"You know nothing about nursing: you forfeited that opportunity." Her mother's hands were tightly clasped, gleaming knuckles crowning her bejewelled fingers.

Beatrice frowned. "I won't be nursing. I'm volunteering, a VAD, they'll teach me everything I need to know. And really, the children just need someone to look after them. I can do that."

Her mother turned to enlist her husband's support. "Arthur, say something."

He lowered his newspaper. "I don't know why you bother Madelaine. Beatrice has made it clear she has no respect for her parent's views."

Beatrice wondered if her father would ever forgive her for inviting Mark to meet her family. He'd been almost more furious about it than had Mother and still refused to speak to her directly. If it wasn't for her granddad's intervention, he might have tried to get her committed. He certainly threatened as much. She stood firm, and since his initial fury he'd

mellowed marginally, more intent on returning to Australia, and washing his hands of her. He said her grandfather could take the responsibility.

Beatrice hadn't retaliated by pointing out that none of them needed to take responsibility for her actions although she wondered if she should have. Still her father hadn't forgiven her and while he was now speaking to her, he still made barbed comments every chance he got.

"But if you must know," Arthur added, "my view is that the children will be lice infested little thieves who should have stayed in Spain, rather than being brought over here without their parents."

"Daddy! They're being bombed by German planes. How can you say that? They're just innocent children."

"I think the bit about German planes has been refuted but hear me out...Now the children are here, it seems the enterprise is quite respectable. At White's yesterday John Stewart-Murray said the Basque Children's Committee is to be headed by his wife."

Her mother gasped. "The Duchess of Atholl—is that why they're calling her the Red Duchess!"

Just then Beatrice's grandfather walked into the room and interrupted. "Nonsense! There is nothing red about her. Kitty has taken an interest purely as a humanitarian gesture, which is also Beatrice's concern. Stewart-Murray is in full support of his wife's approach, for he said, and I agree, that there is no excuse to machine gun women and children fleeing bombing and fires, as the insurgents appear to be doing, regardless of the propaganda you read Arthur.

Her father grumbled. “The Germans deny it, Franco denies it, so who else but those heathen Bolsheviks.”

Her grandfather looked at her father sharply. “The bombing is definitely the insurgents with help from the Italians and Germans. It has nullified the pact and I shall have something to say to Plymouth at the next League meeting.”

Her father said, “If Beatrice must help the refugees, she should help those fleeing from the Reds.”

“What do you mean?” Beatrice sat forward in her chair.

But her mother was still on the subject of the Atholls’ and ignored her. “The Duke has interests in American sugar, doesn’t he Arthur? You would have a lot to discuss.” She clutched her pearls and gazed at the rain rushing down the windowpane. “Perhaps it might be an idea to invite the Duke and Duchess to your little party, Beatrice dear? That would give your involvement with the Spanish refugees some semblance of propriety.”

Beatrice sighed. “Why would they interest themselves in a volunteer’s birthday party? Mummy please don’t, it would be so embarrassing.”

Her grandfather surprised her. “I think it’s a splendid idea Madelaine.” He turned. “Beatrice my dear, I hear your young man is making quite a name for himself. His photos of the ordinary people suffering in this nasty little war have caused quite a stir. Even *The Times* ran one of the photos although their editorial was not what was printed with the original in *L’Humanité*, but *The Washington Post* has reprinted all two pages in their entirety, albeit in English not French.”

“Do you have a copy?”

Arthur interrupted. “Given the British and French position of neutrality on the war it’s a disgrace it was printed at all—pure propaganda.”

Her grandfather ignored him. “I’m sure Kitty would be delighted to discuss the situation with him. When does he arrive? I’m looking forward to meeting him myself and I personally felt his article was very balanced although the photos show the horror.”

Beatrice smiled at her grandfather. “I received a letter from him saying he’d be back next week, so I’ll just nip down to Southampton tomorrow and then be back in time for his return.”

Her mother shuddered. “I am quite sure he won’t approve of you being involved with children who have diseases and lice. No self-respecting gentleman would.”

Her mother was already reinventing Mark, and Beatrice couldn't help the irony creeping into her voice. “I’ll bathe before I come home Mother.”

“Your father says they’ll be little savages and thieves and steal from you. There won't be any gratitude. You mark my words.”

“Would you rather I went to Spain?”

Alarm drew deep creases in her mother’s usually composed face. “You wouldn’t!”

Beatrice smiled with wicked delight “Don’t worry, I told Gladys I’d be on the midday train to Southampton.”

The next day Beatrice boarded the train for Eastleigh, a station just north of Southampton. She was alone in the compartment and as soon as the train began moving, she pulled a Spanish phrase book from her bag. She had never been a particularly gifted language student but had persevered with Latin and French at school although in the intervening years she had forgotten most of what she had learned. Now she was trying to learn a new language from scratch.

As she was alone in the compartment, she sounded the words aloud. “Hola niños, mi nombre es Beatriz.”

She sighed. If only she had half Mark’s ability with languages, but he’d grown up in a trilingual house, so he had an advantage although he said his dad didn’t speak Norwegian at home much, except when he was angry. It was enough they had to speak English at school and Italian to their mother. Beatrice had never met Mark’s parents and dearly wished she could.

It was Doctor Goodall who had first brought the plight of the Basque child refugees to Gladys’s attention. Kitty Stewart-Murray was a friend of his and was looking for nursing volunteers. Of course, when Beatrice heard, she demanded that Dr Goodall include her with the volunteers, and although she had no nursing training, he suggested she could help in other ways, particularly with administration.

It was late afternoon by the time Beatrice arrived at Eastleigh station and saw with relief that Gladys was on the platform waiting for her. They drove in a borrowed committee car to a farm on the outskirts of Eastleigh where the children’s camp was located. As they crested a hill Beatrice saw a large field under a low grey sky. Tents, row after endless row, fanned out across the flat land.

Gladys pointed to the only permanent building in the field. “That’s the clinic and next door is the administration tent where you’ll be working. We’ll go there once we get you sorted out.”

“It’s huge.” Beatrice said in awe.

“It is.” Gladys looked pleased. “The most marvellous thing is that this is all done on donations because the Government refuses to help. I can’t tell you how stout the townspeople are. They bring fresh food and toys and whatever they can spare for the children, and I am quite reconciled to the unions now. They have collected so much money. Without them I just don’t know how we could have coped.” She looked around as if someone might overhear them in the car, and then said in a conspiratorial voice. “I wouldn’t say this to anyone else, but the British Communist Party have been terrific in organizing all of this along with the Quakers. They’re an odd combination but everyone puts their differences aside to help the children. It’s just the beastly government who won’t help. And Isabel Brown is just terrific. She’ll be here in a few days, and I’ll introduce you.”

Beatrice was astonished at Gladys’s change of heart but all she said was, “Who’s Isabel Brown?”

“Isabel works with Kitty but manages the Communist Party side of things. They have to keep the parties separate, so the Labour Party and the unions aren’t accused of being Communists. Silly really. I don’t know why everyone’s so afraid of the Reds.”

Beatrice stared at her friend in shock.

Gladys laughed. "I know, I know, I've changed my tune but really they are just like us when you get to know them, Aren't they?" She glanced apologetically at Beatrice. "Well, here we are. We are to share."

"It's a tent!" Beatrice looked around the muddy field as if expecting a building to arise where one had not been before.

Gladys arched her brow. "What did you expect? The only proper building we have is the clinic."

Beatrice shook her head. "Sorry, I don't know what I was thinking. I've never lived in a tent before. I expect it'll be fun."

"It's not fun. It's awful but it's all we have and after a while you get the hang of it. Or at least that's what I'm told. I haven't yet managed to get organised and doing the slightest thing is such a chore, but we'll put down your suitcase and I'll take you over and introduce you to the others. Doctor Mayhew is the duty doctor and I'm sure you'll love him. He's dreamy but of course, completely beyond the pale. He's also a socialist you know. Not a Communist, although I am never sure of the difference."

Beatrice shrugged. Neither was she. "When will I meet the children?"

Gladys looked askance. "You are on a mission, aren't you? They'll be having tea now in the refectory tent because it's drizzling and then they go to bed. Probably better to meet them in the morning when they're fresh. By the end of the day, Doctor Mayhew says they can be as crusty as the bigots' ward."

“There’s a ward?” Beatrice saw Gladys’s grin and said, “Oh you...but you say that as if the children are loaves of bread.” Beatrice touched Gladys’s arm. “You know I’m awfully grateful, don't you?”

Gladys tilted her head. “Why on earth would you be?”

“You've saved me from my mother.” Beatrice put her case on the narrow camp cot that Gladys indicated was hers, and said, “Come on then, let's meet this dishy socialist and ask him to explain the difference.”

Mark arrived in London two days early. He put his gear down in the dormitory he had stayed in previously and then went to Beatrice’s home. It was a grey and cold Saturday afternoon and he hoped she would be in. The man who opened the door was impeccably dressed and held himself as upright as if on parade. He looked Mark up and down, a disdainful expression on his face.

This must be the grandfather. “Hello I’m Mark Anders.”

The man said, “How can I help you...sir?”

“Is Beatrice in?”

“Is Miss Langham expecting you?”

Mark frowned. The bloke was strange, to say the least. He wished he hadn’t agreed to come and meet the family. It would be a nightmare. “Ah, I don’t know, probably not.”

“She’s not in.” He began closing the door.

“Just a moment.” Mark placed his hand against the door. “Where is she?”

“I am afraid I cannot say.”

At that moment, another man came into view. “That’s all right, Symons.”

Symons stood back. “Very good my lord.”

“You must be Mark.” The man held out his hand. “I’m delighted to meet you. I’m Beatrice’s grandfather, Alfred Denton. Will you come in for a while? I am afraid Beatrice is not yet back although we expect her any moment. The trains may be running late.”

Mark looked from one man to the other, a little nonplussed by Denton’s friendliness and his outfit. He had on an old brown cardigan, corduroy trousers and slippers. If Mark was asked to guess who the aristocrat was, he would have been wrong. In fact, he had been wrong.

Just then a taxi pulled up on the street. The door flew open, and Beatrice jumped out.

She said in a breathless rush, “The busses are on strike, and I couldn’t find a cab. Oh, Mark you came home!”

Mark stood back, wondering what Denton would make of his granddaughter’s enthusiasm.

Denton stepped back into the house, saying, “Perhaps we should go inside.”

Despite his title, Denton seemed quite ordinary, a down-to-earth sort of bloke, but when Mark went inside the house he was subjected to Beatrice’s parents’ frosty reception. Denton

made the whole thing easier, talking to Mark about his photography and generally putting him at ease, while Langham glowered, and his wife sat tight lipped as if they would rather call the police to arrest him than take tea with him. Beatrice hovered the whole time, adding to his nervousness, to the point he almost dropped the fragile teacup he'd been handed by the maid.

Finally, he suggested a walk around the block.

It had become misty outside, but it was such a relief to get out of the house, what was a little dampness, although the street was a bad place to make his apology. They crossed the road and walked to a park, where he led Beatrice into the shelter of an oak tree. She leaned against the trunk gazing up at him in silence. He took her hands, wondering what he could say. Then before he thought about it too deeply, he said, "Beatrice, will you marry me?"

She didn't say anything. For what seemed like an age she stared at him before she spoke. "Mark, I want to marry you, but I have conditions."

He frowned. "All right then, I deserve that." He waited. Then he said, "Beatrice please, tell me."

"She said, "I want a career. I think I have one with the Basque Children's Committee, but I want more. I have discovered I have a talent for administration, and they want me to set up a place for refugees in London. They are pouring out of Germany as well as Spain and I can help."

"What about the farm?"

"The farm will still be there when we have finished here, but we are both still needed. Your photos have made a big impact."

“It was just dumb luck and who you know. I met a journalist from *The Washington Post*. Sylvia Boyle. You’d like her...”

“It doesn’t matter, but you can’t stop now. Your photos are so powerful, and while you do that, I can help the refugees. Then when the madness settles down, we can go home.”

He pulled her into his arms. “I can cope with that.” The familiar scent of her hair filled him with a sense that he had finally come home to the place he belonged, and now nothing else mattered.

27.

A hand delivered letter arrived at the Litchfield Street dormitory via Symons, the man who Mark had mistaken for Beatrice's grandfather when he opened the door. The embossed envelope held no seal or return address for which Mark was very thankful, but Symons, with a pained expression gave the game away as he waited for Mark's reply. As Mark read the letter, he tried to ignore the curiosity and scowls from some of the other blokes in the common room.

Denton wanted him to go to dinner that night at his club to discuss something of a private nature. It sounded like he was in for an interrogation, perhaps about his prospects or intentions or whatever the upper classes felt a need to discuss. He would have thought that was the father's prerogative, but Langham was still not on friendly terms with Mark.

On Beatrice's instructions, he'd hired evening dress, and that evening, clad in the uncomfortable and unfamiliar clothing, Mark went off to have dinner with Lord Denton at his Gentleman's club in Mayfair.

Now, Mark gazed across the occasional table that separated him from Alfred Denton. Both were seated in deep leather armchairs. They had already dined, something Mark would never have imagined doing in his wildest dreams. Yet he couldn't help liking Denton even though he represented everything that Mark thought was wrong with the world, with the exception of the man's admirable calm and rational mind. He wasn't driven by unquestioning beliefs in the sanctity of the British Empire's righteousness in the same way Beatrice's father was.

Mark gazed around at the expensive wood panelling, comfortable armchairs, high decorative ceilings, plush carpets that deadened noise so that its patrons would not be overheard. The lighting was discreet, separating groups from one another as if ensconced in different worlds. Only unobtrusive waiters passed silently through the dim patches between one table and another. The old but expensive and slightly shabby lavishness was enough to intimidate, and he'd never imagined being in a space like it, let alone sipping an after-dinner brandy from a balloon glass. He'd never before eaten Foie gras, wasn't sure what it was other than knowing its literal translation was fat liver. Nor had he tasted pheasant cooked in burgundy before today. Denton warned, he might bite into an occasional shotgun pellet. Mark assumed he was joking although he'd eaten rabbits with pellets in them.

It wasn't that the food was foreign for he'd grown up on Italian food, but he wondered what dinner had cost and how much the obsequious waiters were paid. He felt ridiculous in his fancy clothes and Denton still hadn't told Mark why he wanted to speak to him.

A waiter hovered at Mark's elbow. "Cigar, sir?"

Mark glanced up at him. Was he in some elaborate satire?

Denton said. "Do you smoke Mark?"

He shook his head. "No thank you."

"Wise man. You don't mind if I have one?"

"Not at all." He watched Denton choose a cigar and waited while the waiter lit it.

Denton puffed and exhaled and sat back in his chair. “D’you know I was in Australia before the Great War with Governor-General Munro-Ferguson. I was expected to advise on the setup of the Royal Australian Navy. Then I was recalled to London, what with the war and everything. Madelaine didn’t want to leave because she had met Arthur. Her mother, God rest her soul, was adamant that Arthur wasn’t a suitable catch, but Madelaine got her way eventually.”

Denton’s eyes became shiny, and he pulled his handkerchief out his pocket and blew his nose, then said, “Silly really, after all this time, but the memory always stirs me up, you see Violet, my wife, died shortly after the Great War.”

Mark nodded sympathetically. It was a sad story but surely this wasn’t why Denton asked him to dinner.

Denton composed himself and chuckled. “I can see you wondering why I’m telling you this ancient history.”

Mark shifted in his seat and stretched his neck easing it in the high shirt collar and bow tie.

“The thing is parents never think a prospective suitor is good enough for their offspring. My parents didn’t want me to marry Violet. Her father was in cotton and my mother couldn’t countenance an association with new money or trade. Rather ridiculous actually, as my father had lost everything he’d inherited, and we were as poor as the proverbial church mice. Violet’s money got the family out of an awful pickle, but that wasn’t why I married her. I loved her.” His eyes became shiny again, but he went on. “Then when it came to Madelaine wanting to marry Arthur, Violet was opposed. Now it’s Madelaine’s turn to disapprove of her daughter’s

choice, but it'll pass. We never think our children's lovers are good enough." He paused then changed tack. "But you'll be wondering what I wished to see you about."

Mark leaned forward, interlaced his hands and cracked his knuckles.

Denton winced.

"Mark said, "Sorry."

"Don't be. Right, to business!" Alfred also sat forward in his chair. "I have a proposition to put to you. You don't happen to speak German or Russian, do you? Only Beatrice says you're a bit of a linguist.

"I only speak fluently in Italian and English. Why?"

"Did you write the copy in *L'Humanité*?"

"Yes."

"In French?"

"Well yes but writing and speaking are different. If you can't think of the right word when you're writing you can look it up. My French is passable as is my Spanish but it's not fluent and I think I might speak French with an Italian accent."

"Any other languages?"

"I know a fair bit of Norwegian, or enough to get by."

"Beatrice said, from your father. Is that similar to German?"

“I don’t know. Look why do you ask? I’m not looking for a job as a translator. I have a job - two jobs - and I would like to get back to my farm in Australia. I have a lot to do.”

“Bear with me a minute.” Denton said. “Have another brandy.”

“No thanks. I’d appreciate it if you got to the point.”

Denton twisted his mouth in a self-depreciating grimace. “Yes of course. It’s a thought really, not well formed, but you could be enormous service to the Crown with your reputation as a photojournalist and with your ability with languages.”

Mark stared in astonishment. “Serve the British Crown?” Then he laughed. “I think that’s unlikely.” This was not satire, but downright comedy.

Denton looked put-out and puffed on his cigar. “Well, I need another brandy.” He raised his hand in a small gesture and a waiter rushed to his side. He ordered and then examined Mark carefully before saying, “Let me explain. You see, I need someone sensible to serve the Crown against growing Fascism even though some within the Crown don’t think it’s required, but they will come to see the problems as we do.”

Mark frowned. Now he was interested. Any fight against Fascism was one he was willing to join, even one led by the British Crown, but it seemed different camps within the government were working toward different ends. “I thought the British Crown was in favour of a little Fascism.”

“There are some that cannot see the danger it poses, and I mean to help them see the light.”

“And you think I may be able to help? I think you’re mistaken, but I’m willing to listen.”

Denton waited until the waiter placed his brandy on the table then said to Mark, “Everything I tell you is classified. I have to trust your word as this is not official, and you are not yet governed by the Official Secrets Act although I hope you will consider it.”

“All right.” Mark said and then wondered if it was, and whether he actually understood any of it.

Denton went on. “The British Government, generally speaking, does not accept that Adolf Hitler is any real threat, at least not to the British. It’s absurd when you realise they made the same mistake about Germany before the Great war. The trouble is, many in the establishment admire Germany and can’t see what the fuss is about. They think the Communists are much more of a threat to the stability and continuing prosperity of Britain. Furthermore, the British people do not want another war and are quite happy with the government’s efforts at appeasing any belligerent European sabre rattling. But I and a few of my colleagues think differently. Certainly, the Spanish war is in Italy’s strategic interests and, if they didn’t plan and foment it, they certainly gave it a helping hand.”

Mark opened his mouth to say that Sylvia Boyle had said a similar thing about Germany, but closed it again remembering her motto, *watch and learn*.

Denton’s eyes narrowed momentarily as if he was trying to read Mark’s mind but then he continued. “The issue is any alliance between the two countries is a problem for Britain. The influence Count Galeazzo Ciano has in Italy with Mussolini and Admiral Canaris has with Hitler, has created the problem because both see a Nationalist Spain as an opportunity. You see, Germany needs Franco to remain a benign presence in the face of their increasing desire to

plunder Europe. Furthermore, the German's need Spanish coal and steel in order to mount any belligerent attack on another country, and Hitler is gearing up for war, I am certain of it.

The Spanish Republican's strategic position on the Mediterranean, and the current democratic socialist government, would aid Leon Blume's Popular Front in France. This would defend against Italian plans to control the Mediterranean. The French have also struck an agreement with Russia to come to each other's aid, which is no more than the League of Nation's articles allow. But Lloyd George, who holds great sway in the House of Commons, insists that the Franco-Soviet pact caused the German remilitarisation of the Rhineland in fear of a Russian/French two-pronged attack. I think that is more a German excuse than any real fear of war. We, the British government, are trying desperately to prevent the Spanish war becoming a European conflagration. Our problem is that if the insurgents control Spain they may mount an attack on Gibraltar leaving the Italians with strategic control the Mediterranean, and compromise British access to the Suez Canal. If Franco wins, in exchange for Germany's help now, he will be expected to provide coal, steel, pyrites, as well as food to bolster Hitler's capacity to wage war. Now can you see my problem?"

Mark nodded, but what had any of it to do with him and how could he possibly be any help to Denton. The man was clearly onto all the double dealing and diplomatic intrigue, whereas Mark knew none of it. "Why not appeal to the Soviet Union?" He asked.

Denton drew a breath. That would be a strategy, but many in the British government fear the Bolsheviks more than the Germans."

"So, who is it you most fear?"

“Personally—Germany. Italy is a problem, but Germany is the greater issue since we have done nothing about the German invasion of the Rhineland. Hitler becomes bolder. He is not yet ready to mount an all-out war, but he will be in a few years and he wants his ducks lined up nicely to accommodate German ambitions.”

“So, what—are you saying Britain should pre-empt Germany’s aggression? To Mark’s horror Denton appeared to contemplate that suggestion.

After a moment’s pause, Denton shook his head. “We are in no position to go to war. Not only do the British people object, but we are not equipped. Instead, I think we should rapidly rearm in case of urgent need, but what I am really getting at is that Britain’s non-intervention policy in the Spanish War plays into both Hitler’s and Mussolini’s expansionist agenda, do you see? We need to get the winning side of the Spanish war on Britain’s side so in the event of war, Spain will support the British.”

Mark gazed at Denton. Who did he think was going to win the Spanish war? “The British leadership of the non-intervention pact supports the Spanish rebel’s position. Surely you are not suggesting Britain recognise the insurgents!”

“No. I am not keen on the insurgents winning. I am being pragmatic. Someone will win, and Britain needs to play both sides without giving support to the rebels. Our future is at stake.”

Denton had summed up the situation in a way that gave international posturing a different perspective from that of the newspapers. Was Denton’s angle right? It sounded plausible. “What has all this to do with me?”

“Ah! With your budding reputation as a photojournalist, you might come across gossip that would help us persuade our new PM, that Germany is a threat, and we should be taking a tougher line.”

The new Prime Minister of Britain was Neville Chamberlain and from what Mark could gather he was more interested in sorting out home affairs, like the London bus strike, than getting involved in international ones.

Denton said, “Of course my own Ministry’s undersecretary the Earl of Plymouth is vehemently opposed to Britain’s involvement in Spain, which is all very well, but of course it leaves the door wide open for Hitler’s march through Europe and Italy to control the Mediterranean.” He glanced at his brandy and frowned. “It wouldn’t do to make Plymouth nervous, but you’ll meet him, for he along with other influential people will attend Beatrice’s party tomorrow night. Many will be coming out of curiosity to meet you, an unknown Antipodean making a big splash from his debut as a photojournalist, and of course never doubt my daughter’s ability to inveigle her way into British society. Madelaine has invited half the British aristocracy along with most of Europe’s ambassadors. Many have accepted, mostly I suspect out of curiosity, and the Ritz is always a popular venue.”

Mark felt a tremor of distaste at the whole concept. He imagined Denton himself had a lot to do with who might accept an invitation. After all he had all the necessary tentacles of power, money, position, title, and a seat in the Lords, not to mention his job in the Foreign Ministry, whatever that was. Mark had only agreed to attend for Beatrice’s sake, but it was supposed to be a small intimate family affair. She hadn’t said the party was to be anything like

what Denton described. No wonder Beatrice was concerned about his clothing. He felt the jaws of a trap closing in on him.

Denton said, "Have another brandy my son, you look a little peaky." He signalled the waiter. "Now the three people of most interest are the Duke of Alba. He's a relative of Winston Churchill's so I'll make sure you are introduced. I had hoped he'd be here tonight."

"Who's he?"

"A Spanish nobleman whose palace in Madrid is currently occupied by the Spanish Communist party. He's not an admirer of the Republic and he is Franco's unofficial representative in Britain. If he takes a shine to you, he may get you into Franco's Spain although the Nationalists are not as keen on the Press as the Republicans are--a little paranoid I suspect. The other two useful contacts are the Italian and German ambassadors, or their representatives, whoever comes. If they send representatives, you can be sure they are intelligence."

Mark rubbed his forehead. He wasn't in a satire or a comedy but a nightmare.

Denton indicated the waiter should put the brandy in front of Mark and then continued. They will be suspicious of you of course because of the way you showed the plight of the ordinary Spanish people. You have to understand Mark, this is a propaganda war we're fighting, and they don't like the fact that you've seized the advantage towards humanitarian visions of human frailty and the downside of war on the people. They want the Republicans to be demonised not held up as martyrs."

“I still don’t know what you want of me. All you have outlined is the scenario as it stands, what role do you expect me to play?”

Denton examined Mark’s face, took a deep breath, and said, “I would be very grateful if you could do two things to help us defeat the Fascists.”

Mark sat forward alarm bells ringing in his head. “And they are...?”

“Try to establish rapport with these people so they feel you are one of us, so to speak.”

“That’s one thing.”

“And keep your membership of the Comintern secret.”

“Ah ha. You want me to spy on them, inveigle my way into their circles, pretend to come around to their way of thinking.”

“Well, if you say so, yes.”

“Can’t be done. It’s easy to check on my membership. The Australian Commonwealth police have a dossier on me in North Queensland and everyone knows my sympathies.”

“I can deal with official dossiers and given your membership of this family, many will see it as a natural progression from idealistic youth, to growing up as you approach your more mature years. People often change their minds after they have seen evidence with their own eyes, and converts are always a great coup for propaganda agents, especially ones with your blossoming profile.”

Mark took a glug of the brandy and felt it burn a space for him to breathe. “What? Pretend to be a Fascist sympathiser. I’d rather be dead.”

“Not necessarily a sympathiser but less of a political threat. What I’m asking is a shock. I understand completely but all I ask is that you consider it. Remember, what I am asking you to do is help us defeat Fascism and even Stalin would give that his blessing, I’m sure. You do not need to convince people that you are a Fascist supporter. You could just convince them, your photography is your only object, and you are mercenary about pursuing that alone, regardless of politics.”

Mark sat back in his chair silent. The choice was horrendous. He couldn’t do it. Then a thought dawned on him. “How much of my recognition as a photojournalist have you manipulated.”

Denton held up his hands. “Mark, don’t doubt your talent.”

“You have!” Mark could feel hot blood rushing up his neck. He forced himself to breathe.

Denton said. “All I have done is moved the process on faster than it might have occurred naturally. You know the saying about silk purses and sows’ ears. Well, if the material is already available to work with, all it needs is a nudge in the right direction.”

Mark stared at Denton. “Who the hell are you?”

Denton smiled. “Mark, the real question is, who are you? Or rather, what do you want to become. You can be anything you choose, and I can help you achieve that so long as our goals align.”

28.

Beatrice alighted from the Rolls Royce Mummy had ordered for them, her buttery satin gown gleaming warmly in the lights spilling out from the Ritz Hotel. She gazed up at Mark admiringly as he helped her from the car. He looked so smart in his white tie and tailcoat.

He'd been subdued ever since dinner with grandfather last night, but Beatrice couldn't get out of him why. Mark's response was vague, but none of that mattered now. Beatrice was in a feverish state of excitement. She had not wanted the party or the fuss, but now it was upon her she was thrilled, and they were to announce their engagement.

The room fell silent as they entered, and then the noise reignited as Mark and Beatrice were absorbed into the crush. Her grandfather claimed Mark and asked if he might introduce him to a few colleagues.

Gladys pulled Beatrice aside. "Who are all these people? It looks like a volume of Burke's Peerage disgorged its pages into the room."

Beatrice chuckled and said, "It's so exciting, isn't it although I had nothing to do with it. It's all Mummy's doing. Who knew all these people would come? Oh, look there's Charles."

Charles arrived and kissed her cheek. "You look quite marvellous cousin. Who would have thought it? You and my friend engaged. I had no idea you even knew each other. He didn't let on, sly dog."

Beatrice smothered a laugh but didn't explain her grandfather's deviousness.

Charles turned to his companion. "Have I introduced my friend? Geoffrey Dawson, my Australian cousin, Miss Beatrice Langham. Dawson here is editor of *The Times*. I invited him along to meet Mark. I hope you don't mind."

Beatrice introduced Gladys. "Charles this is my friend Gladys Fuller. Gladys may I also introduce Mr Dawson."

Impatient with the formalities Charles nodded at Gladys, "Of Course. How are you. Now Beatrice dear, where is this fiancé of yours? Dawson is desperate to meet him."

Beatrice glanced around. "He seems to have vanished. Oh no, he's over there with Granddad. I must say they have hit it off rather splendidly."

"Good gracious is that Fitz-James Stuart. I have been trying to get an interview with him for ages." He gazed at Beatrice speculatively. "You do have the oddest collection of friends."

"I don't know any of them."

"Well, it seems your intended does. Come along Dawson, we can both benefit from this little gathering."

Beatrice gazed speculatively at the group. It was almost as if her granddad was polishing Mark's image; one that wasn't quite so red. She shrugged her shoulders at Gladys and said, "Oh look Dr Goodall is over with Dr Mayhew, talking to Kitty. I do want to catch up with them. You'll want to talk to Doctor Mayhew, I suppose." She rolled her eyes at her friend. "You go ahead, and I'll join you in a moment." Then she walked towards Mark and touched his elbow. He made room for her and squeezed her hand.

Denton said, “Ah, my granddaughter, the star of the show. My dear may I present, The Most Excellent Duke of Alba and of Berwick.”

The Duke leaned over her hand, but Beatrice felt intimidated by his titles and remained tongue tied. She glanced up at Mark who seemed at ease in the group. It wasn't fair. He was the one that hated all this pomp, yet when confronted by it, he was the one who looked like it fitted seamlessly. Whereas she felt like she had uncoordinated limbs that might at any moment choose to abandon her. She smothered a laugh at a sudden image of her legs and arms detaching from her body and wandering off in different directions.

The Duke of Alba turned back to Mark. “Lunch tomorrow at White's. We can talk more about Britain's mining interests in the Basque country.” He handed Mark his card with a dry smile, bowed to Beatrice and walked off to join another group of people Beatrice didn't know. She took a glass of sherry from a passing waiter and sipped it, her hand in the crook of Mark's arm. He smiled at her. Then turned back to the conversation, which had turned to the Spanish war.

She looked around for Dr Goodall and Gladys. Her job with the Spanish Relief Committee was so interesting, she really wasn't ready to leave England just yet, not when she had the first job she'd ever had, even if she wasn't paid. She was just about to leave the group when Mark said something quite unlike him.

“They can't win, you know.”

Charles laughed and said, “Can I quote you on that?”

Mr Dawson was gazing at Mark with a speculative look on his face. "So, in your assessment why can't they win?"

"They're too disorganised. The Anarchists are at the socialist's throats and the socialists are trying to herd Anarchists in a direction they think is bourgeois and anti-revolutionary. The liberals are focused on trying to win a war. There can be no democracy in war. Winning requires tight hierarchical organisation, with everyone carrying out their role without question as if it's a personal crusade. I don't know how the Nationalists are organised but for sure the Republicans are divided."

Dawson said, "You seem to know a lot about it. Do you have a military background?"

"No, but I was a unionist, and any union organisation will tell you the same thing. There has to be control and discipline or any militant action will fail."

"I agree entirely." A man stepped up next to Beatrice and bowed to her but spoke to Dawson. "I would be obliged if you might introduce me."

Dawson looked as if he was thinking about the request before he said, "Of course, Miss Langham, may I present Captain Hans von Graff, Military attaché with the German embassy."

Von Graff said, "If you will excuse my intrusion Miss Langham. I would like to extend Ambassador von Ribbentrop's felicitations on your birthday and your impending marriage and to such a fine photographer. He would have like to be here himself, especially for Lord Denton's granddaughter, but alas, duty calls." He turned to Mark. "Mr Anders I am delighted to meet you again. You may recall we met at Sir Henry Chilton's in St. Jean de Luz."

Mark said, "Of course. How do you do." To Beatrice's amazement Mark smilingly shook hands with the Nazi Captain.

Von Graff said, "I admire your Spanish photographs, so evocative, so heart rending. I too am a student of photography and would very much like to discuss the subject sometime if you are to remain in London."

"I'm merely a bit of an amateur and all I saw of the country was Barcelona. I assume it does not typify the whole place."

"No indeed."

"Have you been?" Mark asked.

"Only to Madrid some years ago."

Mark said, "I would like to see Madrid also, but I hear it's a bit difficult at the moment. You just missed the Duke of Alba, who mentioned he has a rather fine house in Madrid and suggested that if I make the trip, I might report back to him on how it's standing up to the bombing."

For some reason, the men all laughed as if Mark had made a clever witticism. She stared in amazement at him grinning at von Graff and wondered when he'd decided on going to Madrid.

Then he said, "Seriously, I would like to get to the north. When we last met, I was in Hendaye hoping to cross the border but wasn't able, which is why I went to Barcelona. It seems the only way to get in for the moment."

Von Graff examined Mark's face. "Why would you wish to visit the north?"

"Wouldn't you? Look at the name George Steer has made for himself. I envy him his scoop on Guernica."

Von Graff's face clouded, and Beatrice noticed what appeared to be triumph in Mark's eyes. What was he doing?

Von Graff replied stiffly as if Mark had offended him. "I am not sure that it was an accurate portrayal and I have heard he wasn't actually there at the time. So, his eyewitness account was all hearsay."

Mark smiled and nodded. "Yes, I heard that rumour." He turned to Dawson. "Your Newspaper published Steer's account, what do you make of it?"

"Steer was in Bilbao and only arrived after the event. Our reporter James Holburn said the town was destroyed by the Basque army who blew it up rather than have it fall into Nationalist hands."

Mark nodded, "That was Charles's summation also." He turned to von Graff. "You see, that's one of the reasons I want to go to counter the gossip and propaganda. From a distance it's hard to see through the fog to uncover the truth?"

Von Graff looked at Mark askance. "So, what do you think is the truth, Mr Anders?"

"Mark, please. We Australians," he squeezed Beatrice's hand. "Aren't known for our formality." He stopped for a moment as if thinking. Then said. "I imagine the Nationalist troops are better organised, more disciplined, better equipped. They are after all made up of

experienced officers, and the Africa Army is a forbidding force, striking with lightning speed which nothing seems able to stop.”

Beatrice was completely puzzled by Mark’s behaviour, not only what he was saying but also the way he was so relaxed, chatting amiably to a Nazi. She’d never seen this side of him. She realised Dawson was watching her, and she smiled and looked around at the guests. She should go and talk to Kitty. It was so nice of her to accept the invitation. After all Beatrice was just a lowly volunteer helping her organise things, not much more than a private secretary.

Dawson said, “You wouldn’t be happy with your fiancé rushing off back to Spain I take it Miss Langham.”

An idea lit her face. “Oh, I wouldn’t mind because next time he goes I’ll go too. I’m keen to set up a refugee support network in Spain to help those made homeless by the war.” How would Mark extricate himself from that?

Mark broke the ensuing silence by saying, “I guess that puts paid to my next trip.”

The men chortled in masculine solidarity.

Beatrice was furious with him. What was he playing at?” She excused herself and walked off to find Gladys and Kitty. They were infinitely more congenial company.

Mark didn’t know when he made up his mind. It hadn’t been an exact moment, just a natural progression of events where he found himself acting out of character. He hadn’t said anything that went against his principles and told no outright lies, but he’d behaved differently. While he

couldn't quite put his finger on what it was, he knew he was presenting a different angle to the lens through which others might see him, and he'd once more infuriated Beatrice. The thing that surprised him was how it had come to him so naturally, although not the bit about making Beatrice mad. For that he'd have to apologise again.

Denton had been right about embassy spies though; von Graff was sure to be one. He wondered how many more he might meet before the evening was done. It dawned on him, he was thoroughly enjoying himself playing this game, whatever it was, and never once all evening, did he feel out of his depth with the elite society he was keeping. The Duke of Alba's jewellery alone would have supplied the Republican's with a new plane or two, of that he was certain. At any other time, the extravagance would have infuriated him, leaving speaking to the man difficult, but not tonight. He wondered why. Perhaps because of a greater purpose and if he could learn something that might help the Republicans, so much the better.

He glanced around the room and caught Denton's eye then looked away, but it was enough. He was now in the game, but he'd have to confide in Beatrice. She knew something was up and wasn't happy. If he didn't tell her she would make it difficult to continue. He couldn't blame her, but he'd have to talk to Denton first. He looked around the room but couldn't see her.

Charles was in deep discussion with von Graff, with a feigned nonchalance that didn't ring true. Whatever they were discussing it wasn't the weather. Mark strolled towards them, taking a drink from a waiter's tray and looking around as if he was searching for Beatrice. He leaned against a pillar a few feet from Charles and strained to hear their conversation.

Charles said, "Is it arranged?"

“Yes. Mola will be out of the way soon. Not before time, in my opinion the man is too cautious, and this will leave Franco a clear path. You have the coordinates of the iron ring.”

“I should have them within days. It’s just a rough map but I’ll send it on as soon as it arrives.”

“Good; you’ll get the mining concessions. Franco assured me personally.”

Von Graff strode away, leaving Charles to go off in a different direction. Mark watched him go wondering what that was all about. Was Mola, the General Mola, the master mind behind the Spanish coup? He’d been José Sanjurjo’s second in command, before Sanjurjo’s plane went down. Mark looked about for Denton, but this wasn’t the place to discuss this bit of information. It could wait for a more private place. Mark wasn’t going to make the mistakes he saw others making. There was always someone listening.

Later Mark danced with Beatrice. It terrified him but the music was sedate, and Beatrice had taught him the steps most commonly used. The dance floor soon filled up with other couples. The Duke and Duchess of Atholl came up alongside and separated, with Atholl bowing to Beatrice and whisking her off while Lady Atholl took Mark’s hand to dance.

He said, “I must warn you I am not much good at this.”

She smiled. “You’re doing fine. I wanted to congratulate you on your photos of Barcelona.”

“Thank you, Lady Atholl.”

“Kitty, please and I shall call you Mark. You are all dear Beatrice talks about. She has been such a blessing; I hope you are not planning to whisk her off to play housewife somewhere. She did mention you have a farm in Australia.”

“That’s up to her. But I want to return to Spain for a while as soon as I can—more photos begging to be taken. After that perhaps we can return home.”

Kitty was silent for a moment. “I would like her to stay on here for a while. She has been a great help organising things for me. Would you consider leaving her behind if you go back to Spain?”

Mark laughed. “It won’t be up to me. You’ll have to ask her.”

Kitty looked thoughtful. “I’ll do that. Thank you.” She paused then said, “Tell me did you meet Ethel MacDonald while you were in Barcelona?”

“Yes, she was very helpful. In fact, if it hadn’t been for her, I don’t think I would have managed to get many of the photos I took.” For a minute Mark wondered if she’d managed to get Eduardo out of the country, but he said nothing about that incident, although it reminded him, he hadn’t reported his Party card lost.

“We are a little worried about her. She seems to have gone missing.” She stopped dancing. “I would like to introduce you to someone. Do you mind?”

Mark shook his head. Missing? What did that mean? An image of the prison filled his mind. No. Impossible. They wouldn’t lock up a British subject whose only crime was broadcasting. That was something he might expect of the Nationalists not the Republicans.

He followed Lady Atholl who turned to him and said, “When do you think you can return to Spain?”

Mark shook his head. “Not sure really. I can’t get a visa unless I have a commission.”

“If I can help with the commission, will you make inquiries about Ethel for me?”

“Of course.” He said, without further consideration, but her next statement sent alarms ringing.

“I am sure your new grandfather to be will be pleased to help.”

Mark knew he’d fallen into a trap. Denton could do nothing that went against the British policy of non-intervention no matter how it was phrased. “Won’t the British Ambassador make inquiries?”

Kitty looked at him sharply but continued walking until she spotted someone and waved. Mark realised he’d been too quick to get involved. He was a babe in this den of intrigue. Nothing was what it seemed. He wished now he hadn’t felt so cock-sure of himself.

She tucked her hand into the crook of Mark’s arm and approached a tall urbane bespectacled man standing with an older woman who wore a determinedly bullish look as they approached. She examined Mark, frankly as the duchess introduced him.

“Mr Anders may I introduce you to Mrs Eleanor Rathbone and Mr Fenner Brockway, they were both keen to meet you after reading your analysis in *L’Humanité*.”

“Pleased to know you sir.” Brockway shook Mark’s hand. “You might settle an argument. I was just saying to Mrs Rathbone that your analysis was spot on, but I do think that the people’s revolution must go on, despite the war.”

Mrs Rathbone scoffed. “Of course, he’s wrong. I’m all for Leon Trotsky’s point of view and think Stalin has corrupted socialism by seizing absolute power and destroying all opposition, but Winston is absolutely right in his assessment. We in Britain must take action. This current appeasement policy is just an exercise in supporting Hitler’s aggression. Spain today, the rest of Europe tomorrow.” She turned to Mark, her forbiddingly strong face breaking into a surprisingly mischievous grin. “Brockway here is a pacifist and won’t countenance war.”

Brockway shook his head. “Au contraire. That’s no longer my stance. Certainly, I did feel that way, but the current circumstances have changed. If I were in Spain at this moment I should be fighting with the workers against the Fascists. We in Britain should be arming the Republicans for I fear they are fighting our battle.

Lady Atholl smiled and said, “Good gracious. Winny will have you in his camp after all. But I didn’t bring Mr Anders over here to listen to you two squabbling but to see how he might advise on tracking down Ethel. If he does go back to Spain, he has agreed to look for her. Dear Fenner, how can we support Mr Anders. He needs a commission.”

“Ah ha. I should be delighted to have you do a piece for the *Labour Leader* Mr Anders. It’s my fault Ethel’s in Spain for I was instrumental in her going. We must see she comes to no harm. He took a card from his pocket. Call me tomorrow and we’ll make the arrangements.”

Denton interrupted. “You will excuse me barging in, but I am keen for Mark to meet someone.”

Mark nodded and said, “Nice to meet you Mrs Rathbone, Brockway.” He turned and said in a low voice. “Thank you for the introduction duchess. I’m very grateful”

She said, “Kitty please, but don’t be grateful. I have an ulterior motive for I expect you to find Ethel. But we can discuss details later perhaps.”

Denton took Mark’s arm and said quietly. “Wrong crowd my boy.”

Mark followed Denton, realising everything came at a cost. Ordinarily he’d jump at the chance to work for the *Labour Leader*, go to Spain, and look for Ethel. In fact, he still would, but he needed to talk to Denton about it before he could commit himself. Suddenly he felt out of his depth. These people despite their wealth and titles, were working to support the greater good for humanity and he didn’t want to deceive them, but he was no longer at liberty to do their bidding. It was a dilemma. Who was he—what was he becoming and what did he want? He’d been so sure of himself, so committed to his ideology and the righteousness of exposing truth but none of it was as simple as he’d thought.

While lying came easily in front of Fascists it wasn’t so easy when confronted by decent people who cared for their fellow man. Now he no longer knew if he wanted in or out. His farm back home in Queensland took on a simple allure and for a moment he felt a sense of rising homesickness for a quiet life.

He was still feeling nostalgic when Denton introduced him to Italy’s ambassador to Britain. The man was pawing Beatrice, holding both her hands in his as if he had no intension of letting go. Beatrice glanced at Mark, her eyebrow lifting marginally.

“How do you do.” Mark said when Denton introduced him to Count Dino Grandi of Mordano.

The man looked Mark up and down in an arrogant fashion. “You are the journalist who takes photographs of Red peasants?”

Mark smiled wryly; here was another Fascist to bring down. He looked into Grandi’s eyes and spoke in Italian. “I’m honoured to meet you sir. I hope my fiancée has been entertaining you and you are being well looked after.”

The initial surprise at Mark’s rapid Italian quickly disappeared from Grandi’s eyes and he stroked his luxuriant beard. “Your Italian is very good.”

“My mother is from Italy.” Mark said.

The conversation quickly became intense with Grandi losing his arrogance, asking for details of his mother’s patronymic, and where they had hailed from in Italy.

“Rossi, but what of your father. Anders is not an Italian name?”

Mark explained his father, Alessandro Contarini had died, and his mother remarried a Norwegian man.

“I know the Contarini family. You come from a very old and venerable lineage.” Grandi said drawing his hand down his clean-shaven jaw. “I am sorry to hear of your father’s death, but why did your mother never bring you to Italy to meet your father’s family?”

Mark shrugged. “You’ll have to ask her that.”

Grandi turned to Denton. “This is not good enough. For an Italian man not to know his family and his country is for him to forget his own heritage. How can you know who you are, where you belong, if you do not know where you have come from?” He glared at Mark. “Now you are so close in London, perhaps you will consider a visit soon. You and your lovely fiancée will be very welcome.”

Mark stared at Grandi. He’d never asked to be thrust into the spotlight, always preferring to remain behind the lens, but if he was called upon to stand against injustice and oppression, he could do that too. He knew how to play their game, and what he didn’t know now, he would learn. In fact, he would relish it. The only way to change the system, without violence and suffering, was from the inside, and that took careful planning and patience. Besides, Grandi was wrong: he didn’t need to visit Italy to know where he belonged. He placed his arm around Beatrice’s waist and gave her a small squeeze before he lied. “We’d be honoured.”

29.

Beatrice had opened a new office in Litchfield Street, next to the International Brigade's London office. Isabel Brown asked her to devise a new administrative system to provide support for the refugees that poured out from Europe, not just from Spain but from Germany as well. So, while her mother planned the wedding, Beatrice sat at the rickety table that acted as her desk and listened to yet another story of one family's horror. She listened to appalling stories of hunger, the bombs, the strafing while on the road fleeing the Spanish Nationalist's terror. She heard about the lost or missing members of families separated as they fled Nazi Germany. She heard of rough sea voyages on coal ships, crewed by socialists, by which so many had escaped. She listened to stories of the hunger and the bombing of Bilbao under siege, by rebel insurgents who knew they had time on their side and were in no hurry to engage the strong Basque army until they had been worn down by lack of food and constant shelling.

Each refugee had a story that was beyond anything Beatrice could imagine, leaving her with nightmares of blacken and shapeless bodies, clothing blasted off in ultimate disrespect for the dead, emaciated bodies surviving on rats when all the cats and dogs were eaten. Yet, she wrote down every detail, checking on names, dates, and places. One day this would be over, and people must be able to find each other, and in the meantime, she would record and bear witness, if only vicariously. She wished she could do more. She wanted to personally take a bomb and drop it on Franco for all the carnage he'd caused in his lust for power.

She told Mark that when they were married, she would need to carry on her work, and he'd agreed it was vitally important, so that was that. She secretly knew that he was so

enamoured with his new photojournalist role, he would agree to anything so that he could keep taking pictures for the world to see what was being done to humanity in their name.

They were to be married in June. Beatrice's mother had outdone herself, even sending air tickets to Mark's family, so they could attend the wedding. Beatrice made her include Jack and Bert in the invitations and smothered a laugh at the thought of Jack in the company of her family and their associates, although she suspected he would be too busy with his new role to travel to England.

It was only Mark who wasn't happy with the wedding arrangements. The West's were coming, and Mark hadn't forgiven her uncle George, but she didn't care. He would jolly well put up with dealing with the Wests and all the other pomp and ceremony her mother demanded. If he wanted to marry her, he'd have to have all of her, not just the bits he chose. After all this was England, not Australia, and here traditions must be observed although she had insisted Uncle George apologise for falsely accusing Mark.

Mark had been offered a new photojournalism commission. It was all because he'd mentioned to Lady Atholl that he'd met Ethel McDonald when he was in Barcelona. The duchess had introduced Mark to Fenner Brockway. Brockway gave Mark a commission so that he could go back to Barcelona, but only for a week or at most, two. Beatrice was very firm about that. Getting him out of London while the preparations were going on, seemed like a good idea or he might have just changed his mind and decided marrying her came with far too much baggage, but she was looking forward to his return.

He'd telephoned to say he'd be back in a few days. She decided she'd better hurry and get organised for the film night or she'd have no time with him when he returned. The film

night was her second fund raising event. She'd found that during the Weil's disease strike, people gave more freely when they were involved in social activities. The last event she had also co organised. It was so successful she was called upon to speak. She walked onto the stage and Peter Spencer the 2nd Viscount Churchill, hugged her, tears spilling from his reddened eyelids. The Labour Party leader, Clement Attlee had agreed to attend the next fundraiser and she was sure Mark would want to meet him. Yet so many people were concerned with Spain that there were sure to be interesting people at every fund raiser. It left her feeling there might still be hope left for the world.

It wasn't just politicians who attended but artists, doctors, and novelists. John Priestly came to the last one and promised he'd be at her next event. Beatrice admired John enormously, and shyly asked his advice about writing. She had been secretly writing up the stories of individuals coping with the horror of war, the women, and children mostly. She had asked their permission and disguised the names before she sent the copy to the newspapers, hoping stories might raise more awareness and bring in more funds to help the refugees. She left the account of heroic battles and the geopolitical politics to others.

The door opened and Gladys walked into Beatrice's office, accompanied by another woman.

Gladys said, "Beatrice dear, I hope I am not disturbing your work, but I have some exciting news. Oh, and I've brought someone to meet you. "Miss Pye may I present Miss Beatrice Langham. Miss Pye is involved with the International Commission for the Assistance of Child Refugees in Spain and the Red Cross."

Beatrice stood up and walked around her table towards a small elderly woman with greying hair, parted in the middle and pulled back into a bun at the back of her head. “It’s a pleasure to meet you Miss Pye, I heard so much about your wonderful efforts in helping the victims of war and injustice, and your bravery in China.”

The woman shook Beatrice’s hand. “Please call me Edith.” She looked around the small office. “I was interested to see what you are doing here.”

Gladys was jiggling up and down with impatience. “Please can I share my news first. Oh, Beatrice, what do you think? Doctor Mayhew, you remember him, don’t you? Well, he’s going to Valencia with the Red Cross and I’m going too when the new ambulance is ready. Of course, that’s why we’re here. Fundraising. Oh, but it’s so exciting. I just had to come and tell you.”

Beatrice smiled at Gladys’s excitement. How people change for love. When Beatrice had first met Gladys, she was so easily scandalised by any views other than the most conservative, now she was in love with a socialist. Not a communist, he had assured them at the children’s camp when they asked him about the difference, but a Fabian, an off shoot of Labour, which advocated bringing about socialist principles through a gradual evolution rather than through revolutionary force.

Beatrice hugged Gladys. “I am happy for you and a little jealous, but you will both be here for the wedding, won’t you?”

“Of course.” Gladys frowned and looked at Edith. “It’s only a couple of weeks away and by then the ambulance will be ready for transportation.

Edith Pye said. “Now Gladys has got that off her chest, I wonder if we can discuss Swiss Aid. You see Miss Langham, we are trying to evacuate the women and children from Madrid, and I heard of your fund-raising efforts and wondered...”

Beatrice said, “Absolutely. I would be happy to do whatever I can.”

Two days later, Mark put his bag down in the Litchfield dormitory where he still stayed while he was in London. He was tired, needed a bath and a shave, but first he wanted to see Beatrice. She had tried to persuade him to stay at her grandfather’s house, but Mark wasn’t keen, not while Beatrice’s parents were still there. It was one thing to marry into the family, a whole other thing to actually like them; well, at least her father. The grandad was great, and her mother was bearable he supposed, but the father still made the hairs on the back of his neck bristle and Mark broke into a cold sweat whenever he was forced to be in the man’s company for long.

Barcelona this time around was not a happy place. The war and sanctions made life there increasingly difficult, not as bad as what he’d heard about Madrid but still pretty bad. He’d found Ethel playing Scarlet Pimpernel, smuggling the revolutionary Anarchists out of Spain before the Republican government caught up with them for causing the early May uprising. The government was still looking for Andres Nin who they blamed for starting it.

Ethel was furious that he’d found her, only to try and make her go home like some recalcitrant schoolgirl. She’d said some unrepeatable things, calling Mark a traitor to the socialist cause, and basically refused to return with him. Perhaps he’d handled it badly, but as far as he was concerned that was all he could do. He’d have to let Brockway know where she

was and perhaps, he'd have more success in persuading her to leave Spain before she was arrested.

The day after he left Ethel, he'd got a lift on a supply truck travelling to Valencia. The city was crowded with refugees from the front lines, men, and even women in uniform. Despite the war, the place was like a carnival. Girls in pretty dresses and in uniforms flirted with the soldiers, motor vehicle horns blared incessantly, hawkers shouted themselves hoarse vying for custom, and street musicians ratcheted-up the cacophony on every corner, all of it adding to a sense of urgent gaiety. Every venue was crowded, and every building was plastered with meeting notices, revolutionary slogans, the workers symbol of hammer and sickle, portraits of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin alongside union banners in Communist red or the Anarchist red and black.

He awoke on the second morning to the noise of a siren wailing. For a moment he didn't know where he was or what was happening. One of the other men in the guest house yelled it was an air raid and Mark raced out towards the bomb shelter, just as a formation of bombers rumbled overhead. Without thinking, he stopped and raised his camera. A banshee scream filled the air with terror as slugs fell from the bombers' bellies. Thumping explosions shook the earth beneath his feet, and around him buildings lit up from the inside before crumpling into themselves. Fighter jets screamed above the city, their empty bullet casings rattling across rooftops as deadly tracer fire stopped people in their tracks.

Then it was over. Mark wandered through rubble strewn streets filled with the wounded and the dead and on towards the harbour, his mind blank, camera missing nothing. At the harbour he heard the raid was intended to destroy Republican Naval ships, but there was no discrimination and they had hit even those ships that showed the British flag. The port was

destroyed along with at least fifty other buildings including foreign Consulates. Even worse, a bomb fell on the hospital, blowing the sick from their beds. It was as if the enormous Red Cross flag on the hospital roof was a target, rather than an international sign of humanitarian neutrality.

The British Consulate managed to survive although the consular offices were damaged. Two days later Mark managed to interview the British Consul, Mr. Sullivan, who admitted there was no denying the bombs were dropped by Italian planes. In all, the attack had lasted no longer than about half an hour before the planes sheared off to their home base in Soria. Behind, they left two hundred dead and many more injured, rushed to hospital by friends, relatives, and strangers, carried on donkeys, on trolleys, by car or physically carried. Sullivan tried to justify the bombing raid saying the Republicans had done the same when they retaliated the following day. He said indignantly, the Republican air force flew over Soria and destroyed fifty of those same planes on the ground.

Mark tried to say it was not the same thing at all. The Republican air force destroyed planes not civilians. Destroying planes after the fact is no consolation at all, particularly not for those poor souls who have lost everything. But Sullivan just gave Mark an indignant stare, and turned his back to walk away, the interview at an end. Mark snapped a photo of his retreating back.

All in all, he'd got some really great photos and now he just wanted to put them together for *The Labour Leader*. Then he had to find a way to get into the north. He'd speak to Denton, who he was sure could arrange it. But there was the wedding and then the honeymoon, and he'd promised Grandi they would visit Italy. Actually, he was looking forward to that. He

wondered what the Italian people really thought of Mussolini and their nation's activities in Spain. Although, he also wanted to get into the Spanish Basque country to see if he could find out what had happened to Javier. He worried for his friend and Bilbao was still under siege. Still, all of that must wait. Now he just wanted to see Beatrice and hold her in his arms. A thrill of pleasure rushed through him. He took the stairs three at a time, strode out into the street and along the road to her office, where she said she'd be waiting for him.