Rigby's Romance

Adapted by JOHN DERUM
From the novel by JOSEPH FURPHY

INTRODUCTION

This adaptation of *Rigby's Romance* is intentionally in an overwritten state. Rather than predict what actors will do in the realisation of Furphy's characters, I have left the script with longer versions of the characters' stories than will be required in performance. From my experience in the process of rehearsal, I expect that the stories will be edited in accordance with the development of character and action.

The reader will notice a firm stage direction at the beginning of the main scene on the riverbank that makes clear that the characters are not sitting or standing around listening to each of the stories. They are all very busy, while listening to the stories and trying to catch that mighty fish.

PART ONE

Tom Collins, our storyteller, enters and addresses the audience as if he is continuing an established yarn. Tom clearly enjoys the drama of his story and loves to embellish and dramatise at any opportunity, despite his own observations in this first speech. His enjoyment of language and ready acknowledgement of his own wit and expression is a recurring feature of Such is Life *and its sequels.*

TOM: Whilst conveying my own unobtrusive individuality into Echuca on a pleasant evening in the April of 1884, I had little thought of the delicate web of heart history that would be unfolded for my edification on the morrow. My mind was running rather upon a whole bag of chaff for my two horses, a satisfying feed for my kangaroo dog and a good sleep for myself.

I was bound for Yarrawonga, via Echuca, on business of my own; but the smoothly running Order of Things had chosen me as eye-witness and chronicler of a touching interlude—a love passage such as can befall only once in each person's scanty dividend of Time.

The fact is, I object to being regarded as a mere romancist, or even as a dead-head spectator, or dilettante reporter of the drama of life. You must take me as a hard-working and ordinary actor on this great stage of fools; but one who, nevertheless finds a wholesome recreation in observing the parts played by his fellow-hypocrites. (The Greek hupokrisis, I find signifies indifferently, "actor" and "hypocrite").

For my own part, I had no cash reserve, not being blessed with the saving grace of thrift ("saving grace" is good).

Just as a bale of wool is dumped, by hydraulic pressure, to less than half its normal size, I compressed something like twenty-four hours' sleep into the interval between 9pm and 7am. Then, a touch of what you call dyspepsia, and I call laziness, kept me debating with myself for another swift-running hour.

Tom moves to a table in the Inn as Mrs. Ferguson serves him.

So it was getting on for nine o'clock when I sat down to breakfast with Mrs. Ferguson. All the boarders had by this time dispersed for the forenoon. I varied the usual breakfast-table gossip by asking:

Have you seen the Colonel lately, Mrs Ferguson?

MRS. FERGUSON: Not since a fortnight after the last time you were here; it's nine weeks today and the other'll be seven weeks come Friday. There were two ladies here inquiring for him yesterday afternoon. They wanted to know his address.

TOM: Badly, no doubt. Had they little Johnny with them?

MRS. FERGUSON: Go 'way. They were both strangers to me, and when they found I knew Mr. Rigby so well, I got them to come in and sit down in the front-room in the cool. They were very quiet-mannered and nice-spoken. I don't care what you say.

TOM: And where is Rigby now?

MRS. FERGUSON: Why he's at Yooringa, of course. Maginnis (late Waterton), Farmer's Arms, Yooringa.

TOM: And what is he doing?

MRS. FERGUSON: He's taking pictures and writing for them American people now. It's for a big book, all in volumes, on farming, on dairying, and vines, and fruit trees, and one thing or another, in different parts of the world. It was the American consul who recommended him; and well he might, for there's very few things that would take Mr. Rigby at a short.

TOM: I'll be pretty sure to meet him at Waterton's, then?

MRS. FERGUSON: Maginnis' (late Waterton's), Farmer's Arms, Yooringa.

Tom moves from the breakfast area and resumes his narration.

[*The following scene is presented by the actors as it is described by Tom. They mime riding on horseback (Tom) or in the carriage (Sam, the driver, Kate Vanderdecken and Artemisia Flanagan) and show the passing and re-passing on the track*]

TOM: I followed the road up the river, had cantered a mile, or better, and was hardening my horses with a long walk, when a buggy and pair overtook and passed me. Though grappling at the time with an exceedingly subtle metaphysical problem, I casually noticed that the driver was a boy of sixteen or seventeen wool seasons, and that there were two women in the buggy, each sheltering herself from the blazing sun with her umbrella. The buggy went on its way.

My next spell of cantering took me past the vehicle, and my next spell of walking brought the vehicle past me again. This occurred time after time: it occurred till I was sick of it. Other travellers overtook and passed us, and were as though they had not been. We overtook and passed others, who similarly sunk into oblivion. But we couldn't get rid of one another.

When the buggy overtook me for about the fifteenth time, the boy pulled up to the walking pace of my horses.

SAM: Say, boss, do you know where Maginnis' Farmers' Arms is, if it's a fair question?

TOM: Yes, straight ahead, twelve or fifteen miles. That's where I'm bound for.

ARTEMISIA: Could you tell us what kind of place this hotel is?

TOM: Well, to tell you the truth, ma'am, the hotel itself would be no disgrace to Echuca, but the management as I knew it, was not good; it was but so-so; and so-so is not good, it is but so-so. I trust it may be better now, though there are more promising names than Maginnis.

My friend, Steve Thompson, would prefer to camp under the stars and will be found tonight at Cameron's Bend, on the river near Waterton's. However, I am looking forward to seeing another old friend, Jeff Rigby, a striking contrast, who may be staying at Waterton's.

ARTEMISIA: Pardon my question, What countryman is your friend?

TOM: Australian, madam, born near Geelong. His parents are English.

KATE: I beg your pardon, were you speaking of Mr. Rigby or the other gentleman?

TOM: I was speaking of Thompson, madam. Rigby is an American. He came out here, let's see, just when the Dunolly gold broke out in the sixties; and our acquaintance began immediately after. Of the many friends he has made, my father, I think holds priority in date, and I take precedence in intimacy. In many ways, I have been a mere disciple of the Colonel's. In fact, we differ only on points where he's grimly and disagreeably right, and I'm

comfortably wrong. For instance, I'm a conservative; and he is—well, not to mince matters, he's a State Socialist. In other words, I adapt myself to the times and the seasons, whilst he thinks the conformity ought to be on the other side.

KATE: What is Mr. Rigby's occupation?

TOM: Second-rate photographer and descriptive writer, at present, madam. He has been a first-rate engine-driver, a third-rate journalist, and a fourth-rate builder. At various times he has ranked up to ninth and tenth rate in a score of more menial occupations; but speaking with actuarial precision, he's a land surveyor. If there's any question of his identity, I may add that he was born at a place called Marathon, somewhere in the backblocks of New York State.

KATE: This is a most happy coincidence. Mr. Rigby and I were born less than five miles apart. I knew him in America up to the time of his departure. Is—is he much altered since you knew him?

TOM: A good deal, madam. The second twenty-five years of a man's life covers about two of the Seven Ages. In this instance they have transformed the lover, sighing like the she-oak, to the mature egotist, full of wise fads and modern theories. Physically, he's as strong as ever he was; he attributes this to his Puritan descent— I attribute it to my climate.

ARTEMISIA: He hasn't been successful?

TOM: Only in asserting himself, madam. Financially, he's a failure—like myself.

ARTEMISIA: He has served in your military forces?

TOM: You refer to the title of Colonel? The whole thing is merely a spontaneous concession to his nationality, carrying neither flattery nor sarcasm. You will hear me call him Judge, Admiral, Eminence or General just as my sentiment and his mood invite.

ARTEMISIA: Is he married?

TOM: Oh, no. So far from it that the incongruity of the idea amuses me.

ARTEMISIA: A woman-hater, I assume.

TOM: Anything but that. His demeanour towards women is partly paternal and partly reverential and partly oblivious. I have always compared him with the earlier Benedick—one woman was fair yet he was well; another was wise, yet he was well; another was virtuous, yet he was well; and if all graces had come into one woman, he would have congratulated that woman and passed on well pleased for her sake. I never met anyone else like him in this respect. But pardon me, ladies, I ought tell you that my name is Collins. In occupation, I change involuntarily, like the chameleon, according to my surroundings. At present, I must stigmatise myself as a cattle drover. I'll feel very much honoured if you avail yourselves of any information or assistance that it may be in my power to give.

ARTEMISIA: Indeed, Mr Collins, we appreciate your courtesy. (*She hands her card*) Miss Artemisia Flanagan. I feel myself relying upon you already.

KATE: (*She also offers her card*) And I'm Kate, Kate Vanderdecken.

SAM: I say, ladies, if this bloke's going to the same place as us, I wouldn't mind lettin' him take a spell of drivin', and I'll ride.

ARTEMISIA: I have no objection, Sam. It rests with Mr. Collins. But don't imagine that we're tired of your company.

SAM: I want a smoke; an' I got too much manners to stink up your clo'es with tobacker.

Through the following they change places; Sam rides off on Tom's horse, Tom drives the buggy.

TOM: Is it coincidence or were you expecting to find Rigby in these parts?

ARTEMISIA: My brother has a position in a publishing firm. Their agent in Melbourne had

employed Mr Rigby. That's how my brother came to hear mention of his name. I have never met the prodigal, Mr Collins, although I know his step-brothers and their families.

KATE: Until Artemisia's brother recognised the name, no one in our region had any definite word of Jefferson or his place of self-exile since he commenced his travels so long ago.

TOM: (*to audience*) So, I had been thrown into an encounter with the very subject of the General's nocturnal confidences over some twenty-three years. I felt deeply impressed by the concurrence that was bringing these two people together so felicitously, yet so involuntarily, after such long separation. Their lines of life must have been insensibly converging ever since. Now, I would make it my business to see that the connection was not missed at the last moment.

TOM: Ah, there. Just ahead. The Farmer's Arms—Maginnis' or Waterton's. And there's the Colonel himself.

KATE: (*Whispered gasp to Artemisia*) NO!

Kate has seen 'a bloated and sottish-looking, though decently dressed old buffer who had just merged from the bar door'—in fact, it is Fritz, a German friend of Tom, whose stepson, Jimmy, is the Landlord.

TOM: In the parlour, you can see him through the window, he's reading a letter.

ARTEMISIA: Thank you Mr. Collins, You're placing us under many obligations.

KATE: Pray don't mention our arrival to Mr. Rigby just yet. I should like to speak to him while I am here, but the lapse of time makes strangers of most intimate friends. Might I ask you to introduce me to him, formally—as his countrywoman—not yet—presently.

TOM: Indeed, Miss Vanderdecken, I shall be delighted to confer such a happiness on the Senator. A message from you will find me in the parlour.

Tom crosses to the bar and joins Rigby and Fritz.

[Note: Fritz's lines are transcribed from *Rigby's Romance*, with "translation" following, and may be modified for clarity]

FRITZ: You goot helt, yentlemence. Peer vor der Yarmance and Yarmany vor der peer. Minezelluf, I schall pe ver podiclo mit mine trinks. Ven der Yarmance knog to hell der Vrench mit dot last var, he vas pe der peer unt der nettle-gon, unt der vine unt der chassepot. Vat der platty hell? Eh?

[Your good health, gentlemen. Beer for the Germans and Germany for the beer. Myself, I shall be very particular with my drinks. When the Germans knock to hell the French with that last war, it was by the beer and the nettle-gun, and the wine and the chassepot.]

RIGBY: Very true, Fritz.

Robert Dixon, a bullocky, enters and joins them.

DIXON: Well, I be blown to blazes. Come what'll you have, chaps? Mine's a meejum shandy.

FRITZ: Minezelluf, I vill you helt trink mit von long peer. Peer vor der Yarmance, unt Yarmany vor . . .
[Myself, I will your health drink with one long beer. Beer for the Germans and Germany for . . .]

DIXON: (*to barman*) Any letters for Robert Dixon or Stephen Thompson, boss?

JIMMY: I'll see in half a minute.

FRITZ: . . . Minezelluf, I schall pe ver podiclo mit mine trinks. Ven der Yarmance knog to hell der Vrench . . .
[Myself, I shall be very particular with my drinks. When the Germans knock to hell the French . . .]

TOM: And you think the beer had something to do with the result of the Franco-German war?

FRITZ: Mine zteb-zon, Yimmy, schall pe der yong man der par mit.
[My stepson, Jimmy, shall be the young man behind the bar]

DIXON: Can't suffer these bloody foreigners, no road, Rigby. Nobody should be allowed in the bloody country only Europeans, like me an' you. Ain't it aggravatin' to hear the gibberage these fellers comes out with? Wonder why the bloody hell they never learn to yabber grammatical?

FRITZ: Minezelluf, ass der nettif moch petter ve schall der platty Anglesch zpeag. Pene--goot; volang--villeen; assylum--soss-yetty; der goot-villeen soss-yetty. Eh? Dot knog you into der gocked hat.

[Myself, as the native much better we shall the bloody English speak. Very good; ?? ?? assylum -- society The god-willing society. Eh? That knocked you into a cocked hat]

TOM: You're a scholar, Fritz.

FRITZ: Mine vrent, der Yarmance vos off Got pe der man high rise mit. Vot vos you glory Gveen? Von Yarmance. Vot vos you noble Brince? Von Yarmance. Minezelluf, I schall von Yarmance pe, unt brout mit. Eh?

[My friend, The Germans was of God be the main high rise birth (?) What was your glory Queen? German. What was your noble prince? German. Myself, I shall German be and proud with it, eh!]

DIXON: Quite common to see this bloody cravin' for a bit o' knowledge among the profanum bloody vulgus. Comes sort o' hard on a pore bastard to feel hisself no better 'n a vox et praeterea bloody nihil, as the saying is. Don't it strike you that way, Rigby?

JIMMY: (*serving drinks*) No letters for Dixon; one for Thompson; forwarded from Hay; fourpence to pay on it.

DIXON: Well, I'll be bloody well toddling. You'll stop with us, Collins? Straight down the fence.

TOM: Right, Dixon, I saw Thompson today coupling his steers.

FRITZ: Dot Domson, he cash der bloody riffer dees mornin' got-vish von dirtyboundher, he tell me der vrog mit.

[That Thompson, he catch the bloody river this morning, caught fish thirty-pounder, he tell me with a frog?(?)]

DIXON: What become of her?

FRITZ: Pag vonce more yomp mit der plank, plop, unt to bloody go.
[? once more jump with a plonk, plop and bloody go]

DIXON: Didn't hear nothin' about it. But then, Thompson cleared off middlin' early, an' I turned out middlin' late. Anyhow, I ain't surprised; the bloody river's fallin' like hell.

RIGBY: Well, we'll follow Dixon and cast our lines in the river, too.

TOM: In the river of Time, Colonel? Our lines are cast therein already, foolish one; and our business is to—oh, now I know what you mean! You want to try and catch this fish. But you should qualify your river by its strikingly appropriate name—for 'murrey' means dark red. And the people who frequent its banks always call it the crimson river. It's the king of Australian rivers, and I naturally feel a little nettled to hear it shorn of its title.

Tom and Rigby move from the bar area to the parlour area.

However, we're not going yet. There's a surprise in store for you. I met an acquaintance of yours today—Miss Kate Vanderdecken. She knows you well, and has been the whole afternoon looking forward to meeting you. She's here now, taking her ease in her inn—the only way in which she resembles Sir John. She intends to stay all night; so I suppose you won't be down at the Red River till late.

RIGBY: Ah! What did you say her name was?

TOM: Miss Kate Vanderdecken. Here's her card. She comes from your own blizzard-smitten land, and the unerring law of Happenology has landed her here, to give you an evening momentous enough to date from. How is that for lofty?

RIGBY: You bewilder me, Tom.

TOM: I expected nothing less, Sheriff. By the way, there's another lady with her—Miss Artemisia Flanagan, and a calculator by profession as well as by nationality. Hence I'm glad to see you so clean and presentable.

RIGBY: I feel like a man in a dream, Tom. You haven't told me how you came to—

Artemisia Flanagan enters from 'the parlour'.

ARTEMISIA: Mr. Collins.

TOM: Miss Flanagan. May I introduce my good friend and your countryman, Colonel Jefferson Rigby.

ARTEMISIA: Mr. Rigby.

TOM: Miss Flanagan is traveling with her companion, Miss Vanderdecken, whom your honour already knows, I understand.

ARTEMISIA: Perhaps, gentlemen, you would be so good as to join Miss Vanderdecken and I in the parlour.

They move towards the parlour to join Kate. Tom breaks away and addresses the audience:

TOM: There was no crash, nor was there any embarrassment on either side, nothing but a graceful interchange of courtesies and polite solicitude, and presently the Senator, according to his custom, settled down into the leading part. I retired with some ceremony, readily

pardonable when you consider everything. I had furnished the epilogue to a drama of thrilling interest. Alone I did it, and therefore felt morally and socially uplifted.

Tom moves away from 'Hotel'.

TOM: Half a mile along the line of fence, I found the two wagons and Rigby's covered wagonette. Mindful of the escaped thirty-pounder, I brought a fishing rod with me.

Tom now approaches the Cameron's Bend riverside campsite and fishing hole.

[IMPORTANT: *The campsite and fishing hole on the river bank is a very active place. While there is a lot of talk and quite intense discussion, there is also constant activity. Those fishing are constantly adjusting bait, hooks and lines and re-casting –even more than is indicated in the text. Others are fiddling with the fire, gathering kindling, re-doing what someone else just did, brewing-up, sampling food, cleaning up. The smoking rituals and ceremonies with pipes or rolled cigarettes are complex and continuous. Tobacco and matches are offered and shared with and without request. Where these activities require communication it is often monosyllabic or by simple gesture. This communication is not specified in the script but it is envisaged that it will be developed to suit each production and complementary to the discussion. It is important that the scene is not a conversation among static people.*]

DIXON: Just set down an' wire in. Soda bread, an' bacon an' honey, ad bloody libitum. Dunno whether you like mustard mixed up or not. We always eat it dry. Ain't got sich a thing as a swappin' book on you, I suppose? One o' Nathaniel Hawthorne's here, waitin' for a new owner. Can't suffer that author no road. He's a bloody fool; too slow to catch grubs.

TOM: Haven't got a book to my name, Dixon. Flying as light as possible this trip. What are you reading now?

DIXON: Bible. Got her in a a swap for one of Ouidar's. 'Spect you're a bit of a ringer on Scripture?

TOM: I only wish I was. Certainly, I had to read a good deal of it when I was too young to understand.

DIXON: That's on'y yer misfortune, it's not yer fault. Three monce ago, I thought hell was on'y a man's own conscience. But that Bible, she gave me a fright, a hell of a fright.

TOM: But surely you didn't find it all discouraging.

DIXON: Dunno, most of it's frightensome. But mebbe things'll work 'roun' all right by the time a feller dies. Sneak in some bloody road. Anyhow, I ain't a Scribe, nor yet a Pharisee, nor yet a hypocrite. Hullo, here's Rigby. More the merrier. Plenty a tea in the billy, anyhow. (*Rigby enters*) I didn't expect you so soon, Colonel.

RIGBY: I can't stay long. (*A stranger, Smith, approaches* (*from different direction*))
Nice evening.

SMITH: I've seen worse and I've seen better. Whereabouts was it your mate caught that thirty-pounder?

DIXON: Sit down and have a drink o' tea. Who was tellin' you about the bloody fish?

SMITH: What's that got to do with you? I want to know where he caught it.

DIXON: Well, you kin jist bloody well find out. (*Smith moves towards the river*.) Polite sort o' bugger you are.

TOM: Who is he?

DIXON: Kangaroo hunter. Supposed to be. Camped over there, aside the big log.

Frank Furlong, a possum trapper, arrives.

FURLONG: Good evening, gentlemen, I believe Thompson hooked a fine fish this morning somewhere here?

DIXON: Who was tellin' you?

FURLONG: That foreigner up at the pub. He's tellin' everybody.

DIXON: Bloody Fritz! Yes, he landed her after a hell of a struggle, but when he thought she was safe, away she goes slitherin' down the bank an' into the bloody river agen. Have a drink o' tea. There's a bloody pannikin.

FURLONG: I've just had supper, thank you.

DIXON: What're you baitin' with?

FURLONG: Bit of roasted possum—can't beat it. (*He withdraws to river bank.*)

DIXON: Decent little bugger. Londoner, name of Furlong. Scrats out a good livin', possumin' in the winter when the skins is good. Allowed to be the best possumer on the track, an' he tells me he wasn't worth a harlot's curse at the trade he was brought up to.

RIGBY: A familiar experience, Dixon. Non omnia possumus omnes— which may be freely translated: we can't all of us be possumers.

DIXON: Well, I'll pack the bloody jewel'ry box, an' we'll go an' have a shake for this thirty-bloody-pounder.

RIGBY: My intentions ran on another kind of fishing. However, I may combine the two forms for a very short time, since the circumstances almost amount to compulsion.

Sounds of horse and man approaching.

DIXON: That you, Thompson.

THOMPSON: (*off*) No. How are you, Rigby? I'm glad to see you.

RIGBY: Evenin' to you, Thompson.

Thompson enters.

THOMPSON: All hands fishing? Any luck?

DIXON: Stacks of it, so fur, only it ain't the proper specie. Layin' wait for that bloody thirty-pounder you lost here.

THOMPSON: And there's five of you on the contract, like the five foolish girls in the Bible. However, I'll keep you company, if anyone can shout me a bait.

DIXON: Plenty mussels in the ole billy in the holler stump. Don't roast none but the one you want. Keep the molluscs fresh. Letter for you in the pocket o' yer bloody wagon - forrided from Hay.

THOMPSON: Somebody stickin' me up for damages, or claiming one of my bullocks, or threatening me with seven years for passing a bad cheque, or perhaps some new style of misfortune.

Thompson withdraws to campsite to prepare bait and tackle.

DIXON: Swore off o' smokin a fortnit ago, an' naterally gits as miserable as a bandicoot when night comes on. Reckons to git his bloody curse shifted through knockin' off his bad habits little by little.

RIGBY: What's this curse?

TOM: He was owing fifty notes to a man who got lost in a shipwreck on the coast of New Zealand. Now Steve is convinced that the transaction adjusted itself and he was left with acurse from that day. At least, that's what he blames for a run of bad luck he's been having.

Thompson returns.

THOMPSON: I get melancholy every time I see this camp. I knew the people that lived here, where the house is burned down. Old associations of ten years ago. Now everything's changed . . . for the worse. The people are gone. The wagon I had then is at the bottom of the Murrumbidgee, the bullocks are gone, every scrap of tackle is gone, the horse is gone, even

the dog is gone, my hopes are gone; I'm neither use nor ornament in the world. It would take a smarter man than myself to tell what I'm living for.

RIGBY: What was her name?

THOMPSON: Agnes.

DIXON: Sic transit gloria bloody mundi.

THOMPSON: I'll tell you the whole story, and you'll see what it is like for a man whose life is composed of retreats from Moscow, one after the other.

FURLONG: I beg your pardon. Were you camped about two miles from Mathoura, four years ago, on the third of March?

THOMPSON: I don't remember. Oh yes, that's right.

FURLONG: I was sure I knew your voice.

They shake hands, Furlong returns to his line. The others all notice this unexplained greeting.

THOMPSON: She was the only girl I was ever properly in love with and one Sunday I took her out in a canoe.

TOM: This won't do, Steve. You must tell us how you met her, what induced you to fall in love with her, what sort of canoe it was, who you stole it from . . . all the details.

THOMPSON: I can tell you exactly what induced me to fall in love with her, Tom. It was you yourself that did it, indirectly, of course. You remember that I met you at Deniliquin in the spring of '72 and we spent an afternoon together at my camp on the common? Do you remember telling me that there were ten masterpieces of poetry that nobody on earth, except yourself, had ever read clean through, or ever would? I took a list at the time but I'm not likely to forget them:

Paradise Lost and Regained, counting the two as one;
Goethe's Faust, especially the second part;
Dante's Divine Comedy;
Spenser's Faerie Queen;
Thompson's Seasons;
Young's Night Thoughts;
Cowper's Task;
Tennyson's In Memoriam;
Edwin Arnold's Light of Asia;
and, lastly, any poem of Walt Whitman's.
Well, being young and flash at the time, I began to think how I would shine if I had those books at my finger ends. I wrote to Cole for the prices of the best rough-and-ready editions. The end of the matter was that the parcel was waiting for me at Echuca. I camped on a little sand-hill, half-a-mile across there. I had nothing to interfere with my reading except to boil the billy once a day and make a damper once a week.

RIGBY: But we want your love story, Steve.

THOMPSON: This is my love-story, and I'm telling it according to Tom's specifications. Or, if you like, I'll drop it altogether.

DIXON: Ne Jupiter quidem bloody omnibus.

THOMPSON: Are you to the fore? You ought to be yarded, without water or tucker, till you learn to speak English again.

DIXON: Didn't mean no bloody offence.

RIGBY: We all apologise; myself foremost. Go on with your story in your own way.

THOMPSON: Very well. After about a month, I went across one day to inquire about a roan steer that had taken up with my bullocks, and there I saw Agnes for the first time. She was a fine lump of a girl, no doubt; but my mind was so disordered and stupefied by the class ofbooks I had been reading that she seemed like a bird of paradise, and she'll have that

appearance to me as long as I've got a head on my body. Well, I bought this roan steer off Cameron and this started a sort of acquaintance. Agnes was just twenty and she and Iunderstood each other. We felt that nothing would shift either of us, but we seemed to have little say in the matter. We were both in such bodily fear of her dad that we were sort of paralysed.

One Day Cameron made me tell all my affairs, and finally told me that if I could give a good account of myself in another year he would allow me to write to Agnes. In the meantime, I was to write to him, but not to Agnes.

Now this happened on a Saturday morning, and on the Sunday, Cameron was to be away with his two boys for a couple of days.

And that Sunday the first thing that caught my eye was a canoe, with a couple of oars in it, sailing along on its own account. I peeled off and snaked her ashore and nothing would do me but to take Agnes out for a pleasure trip in the canoe. She was on, but her mother was dubious. However, I argued so hard, and lied so fluently about my skill in handling boats that Mrs. Cameron gave in at last and off we went.

I just let the boat drift, dipping the oars in a light off-hand way, to steady her along; and the time passed as pleasantly as time can pass. Agnes was even happier than I was, for the whole transaction came up to her poor little idea of devilment. And all this time we were going round one bend after another and evening was coming on full speed. Then I could see that there was nothing for it but to get ashore and walk home. I aimed for a good landing place, and while Agnes crept up the bank on her hands and knees, I plopped into three or four feet of water and the boat was off full-tilt for Echuca with Agnes' boots and shawl and umbrella on board.

There was a curse on that boat.

When we got up the bank things looked worse than ever. No light, no bark of a dog, no sign of population and raining cats and dogs.

It wasn't the hardship, for I've had worse nights, and expect to have worse still before I die, but it was the troubled mind along with it. And in cases of this kind, a girl is as foolish as a foal, so there was Agnes crying and blowing her nose all the time, and wondering whatever she would do; and there was me with my teeth going like a chaff-cutter, and the fine rain for the farmer coming down wholesale where there would be no thanks for it.

The hardship was as bad as Dante's Inferno, and the trouble was a lot worse than Milton's Hell.

TOM: Hear, hear! Wasn't it worth while to be led into all this unpleasantness by those books, when they repaid you with the power of illustrating it in such a scholarly way?

DIXON: Case of vigilate et bloody orate!

THOMPSON: Go ahead, pile it on!

RIGBY: Let them fill up their measure of iniquity, Steve, go on with your story.

THOMPSON: Well, after about three months daylight came, and the rain cleared off. Agnes hadn't felt the cold much for she had a layer of fat all over her and her clothes were dry. We came straight in this direction.

RIGBY: I don't perceive much opening for self-felicitation yet. The figure of Cameron seems to loom large in perspective.

THOMPSON: I whispered to Agnes that it was a dead certainty that I wouldn't be allowed about her place for some time to come. But, I said, 'In six or eight months, I'll come in the night and blaze the big red gum opposite your bedroom window. When you see that fresh blaze, you know I'll be waiting for you at sunset in the whipstick scrub, at the right-hand lower corner of your calf paddock. I'll wait there every night for a week.

We got to about half-way home when up comes Cameron behind us on horseback, as savage as a bull-ant. He told me what he thought of me and I took it like a poor man with a large

family. When he had finished I went to my wagon, yoked up and camped that night twelve mile beyond, gloating over my mortgage on Agnes.

TOM: And the books I had recommended— did you master any of them?

THOMPSON: No, Tom, I didn't. They mastered me. I gave them to the Public Library at Hay. They reflected a glimpse of credit on me in the end. The secretary complimented me onmy choice of reading as he wrote my name and title in the front of each. But says I to him,'I never been the same man since I tackled them.'

RIGBY: Did you keep your appointment with the girl?

THOMPSON: During the season, I wrote two letters to Cameron apologising for the other affair and reporting progress: I had a good year, I had one of the best teams ever travelled Riverina, I had cleared two hundred and ten notes, beyond all expenses; I was a man to be avoided.

I got back here in February and the very first evening I swam the river with a tomahawk in my teeth and blazed that big tree. Next evening I was in the corner of the calf-paddock, and who should come pushing through the scrub but Cameron himself. Agnes seemed to have gone over to the enemy. I felt like a tree suddenly stripped of every leaf in a hail-storm. 'Look here, Thompson,' says he, 'if I ever catch you in sight of my place again, I'll put the dogs on you.'And he wheels round and walks off.

RIGBY: One moment you're clothed in property and cash, the next you're full of indigence.

THOMPSON: I intended to go down to the Murray and fatten up my new lot, freshen my own team, and turn out two tip-top twenties next season, without buying another hoof. I could see my way to an independence while I was young enough to get some good of it; and I could see my way to Agnes in a more manly, off-hand way. But then Ramsay's punt went down with my wagon and things, and I fell in with Dick the Devil. Dick was a well-connected, well-educated fellow. Everybody believed him, for he was always talking about remittances. When you hear a man talking about remittances, have nothing to do with him. You can't touch him without losing by him.

SILENCE.

Worst thing about respectability is the infernal meanness it drives you into.

DIXON: Bloody crawfish has et my bait off. Must go an' roast another, I s'pose.

Dixon goes off to fire.

THOMPSON: That's my love-story, and short as it is, it covers my whole life. No more romance for me. I'll live and die on the wallaby.

TOM: You'll meet your antithetical affinity yet—some woman with the curse of prosperity on her. Why this afternoon when Fritz spoke of your catching a thirty-pounder, I thought at once, from what I knew of you, that he was referring to some heiress. You'll be a man of acres—l like Binney, over there—with good-natured toleration for the lower classes.

THOMPSON: I don't thank you for the compliment, though Binney's a ten-to-one better man than I am. I'm Berryite to the bone; and Binney's tarred with the same stick as yourself—with this difference, that he's a sound Conservative, and you're a rotten one. He's a good honest pillar of Conservatism; and you're a sepulchre, whitewashed with Conservatism.

George Binney, a local farmer and Harold Lushington, Binney's son-in-law approach.

BINNEY: Is that you, Thompson?

THOMPSON: What's left of me, Mr. Binney.

BINNEY: Stay where you, Thompson. All fishing? You'll have company, Harold. Why, Collins, is this you?

TOM: No. *Tom and Binney greet each other warmly*. Colonel, my good friends George Binney and Harold Lushington. Jefferson Rigby.

BINNEY: I heard this afternoon that you were camped here, Steve, so I came over to tell you that I want to send away a couple of hundred bags of barley if you'll take it at the current rate.

THOMPSON: I'll call round tomorrow morning.

BINNEY: We'll leave it till then. Harold is on business too. When he was down at the post this afternoon the old German told him some fish-yarn, and it takes a very small touch to put him off his head on that subject.

LUSHINGTON: What bait are you using, Collins? I have supplied myself with sheep's lungs.

THOMPSON: No good. Dixon'll give you a roasted mussel if you don't mind going up to the fire for it.

LUSHINGTON: Thanks. (*Goes*.)

BINNEY: Now, I don't want to interrupt you boys, go on with your conversation, if it's not private. You were talking of Conservatism, I think.

He seats himself on a root.

RIGBY: The subject of politics was casually glanced at, I remember, but our topic was the romance of life—the love story. We had been listening to a most interesting experience of this kind, and my mind had just reverted to a speculation touching a very worthy, though somewhat profane, friend of ours—now gone to prepare a bait. I was busied in conjecture as to what phase the grand passion would be likely to assume in his case.

THOMPSON: You're doing the chap a great injustice, Rigby. Dixon's not to blame for being rough-and-ready. He's no such half-savage as you want to make out. Why shouldn't Dixon have a romance in his life as well as anyone else. The scene of it was on the Goulburn, twenty or thirty miles from here, and the girl was a State School teacher.

She was boarding at the farm where Dixon padlocked his bullocks five or six years ago. I don't know how it ended, but the beginning was romantic enough for anything.

RIGBY: You whet our curiosity, Steve.

LUSHINGTON: (*returning)* You're friend kindly gave me the bait he had prepared for himself.

THOMPSON: Of course. One Saturday when there was no school, Miss Coone—that was the girl's name—was out with the youngsters of the farm gathering flowers.

RIGBY: Gathering flowers is good, but hackneyed. It dates from the abduction of Persephone.

THOMPSON: Dixon was drawing up to the river with a log, but not in sight of the girl, on account of a belt of whipstick scrub, when suddenly he heard a scream.

TOM: Decency, Steve, that scream is older than the Iliad. Behold it is written in the book of Jasher.

THOMPSON: Have you done? As I was saying, he heard a scream.

RIGBY: And saw the girl struggling in the grasp of two bushrangers. Yes, go on.

THOMPSON: No, I'm damned if I do. Tell the story yourselves to your own satisfaction.

BINNEY: Well you are a polite pair.

THOMPSON: There was an acre of smooth tableland, ending in a steep bank, and the river below. Miss Coone and three or four youngsters were scattered about gathering flowers, and they had a basket pram with the youngest kid asleep in it standing in the middle in the open. It was a beautiful calm day, I believe but a sudden gust of wind caught the hood of the pram and whirled the whole concern, baby and all, straight for the steep bank. Of course, the teacher gave a scream and after it full lick. Providentially, Dixon was close handy, and in

spite of these unmannerly animals, he heard the scream and saw the pram toppling over the bank. Next moment he went head foremost into the river. It was a fat baby, like they generally have on farms, and it floated like a cork, so he had it out in no time. Then he snaked out the pram and pillows and things and went back to his team.

The people at the farm made a hero of him for the time, but whether Miss Coone actually fancied him, or whether it was a sort of gratitude, or whether she was taken with him as a novelty, I can't say. I believe she was a city-bred girl and polished at that.

TOM: (*Aside to Rigby*) Faint praise. She was a poem. I met her afterwards. But that, saving your patience, is yet another romance. (*To all as Dixon returns*) And in good time here comes the noble duke. We'll make him finish the story.

THOMPSON: We were talking about that school-mistress of yours over here on the Goulburn and wondering whether she was gone on you or you on her.

DIXON: Case o' mutuus bloody consensus. Used to fancy myself a bit then. Used to make the bloody silk roar like hell them times. Non sum qualis bloody eram. Gittin' a sensible ole person now.

LUSHINGTON: (*to Tom*) In the name of incongruity, Collins, what have we here?

TOM: Knowledge ill-inhabited, worse than Jove in a thatched house.

THOMPSON: You tell us the yarn, Dixon.

DIXON: They're ain't much yarn about it. Grand bit o' goods she was, too! Knowed grammar, an' jography, an' sums, an' every bloody thing. Gosh! She was facilis descensus—no that ain't it—she was facile bloody princeps. Well, it didn't come off. Couldn't hit it, no bloody road.

THOMPSON: What broke it off?

DIXON: A bloody dance.

RIGBY: You wanted her to go to a dance, and she wouldn't go?

DIXON: Yes, she did go. I bloody well wanted her to go, and she bloody well did go.

RIGBY: And you parted on that?

DIXON: Yes; you see, I got a black eye.

TOM: What did she hit you with?

DIXON: Hit me? That wasn't her bloody style. I goes into the bloody township, and strolls into a billiard room, an' the marker he was playin' billiards, or bagatelle or some bloody thing with another feller; an' the other feller he was a bloody weed to look at; an' in the course o' conversation, he says, 'Cannon!' says he. An' the marker he says, 'No it ain't' says he. 'Yes, it is,' says the telegraft feller.

THOMPSON: Which telegraph feller?

DIXON: Which would you bloody well think? How many telegraft fellers was in the contract? Why the hell don't you lis'n? An' the telegraft feller he turns to me, an', says he, 'Ain't it a fair cannon?' says he. 'No, it ain't', says I. Course, I didn't know a cannon from Adam. 'Oh, yes it is', says he. 'You're a bloody liar', says I. 'What!' says he, an' with that he hauls off. Put the bloody stuns on me.

TOM: Where did he get you, Dixon?

DIXON: Smeller. I never been hit but once before this time, an' once since. Anyhow, my principle is to take the meanest bloody advantage I kin git—an' to take it quick for the sake o' peace an' quietness. But this little bugger seemed to want spankin' more nor squashin', so I goes for 'im bare-handed an' 'e fetches me right bloody bang on the peeper. I follers him up ropeable—gosh! He was like a bloody eel; an' 'e lands me fair on the point; I drops like a cock, jumps up agen, an' goes for him lemons. No bloody use. He gits home on the butt o' the lug this time. I drops agen, an' rolls under the bloody billiard table. 'Come out o' thet,

you dem scoundrel!' says he. 'I'll see you in bloody hell fust,' says I. 'I ain't comin' out till you clear off,' says I. 'I give you the bloody scon,' says I.

BINNEY: Big man in small compass!

RIGBY: And this painful incident disqualified you as a suitor? You and the lightning-jerker were rivals, I presume; and the spoils went to the victor?

DIXON: He never seen the gurl in his bloody life, so far as I know. But we parted that night through a bloody dance. Fond o' dancin', Rigby?

RIGBY: Any man who wants a run for his money must prefer any other folly. I have some little toleration for drunkenness, and gambling, and so forth, but one must draw the line somewhere, and I draw it at dancing.

TOM: And do you think that there shall be no more 'promenard', and 'change partners'?

THOMPSON: Oh shut up, both of you. Never mind them, Dixon. Go on with your yarn.

DIXON: They ain't annoyin' me. It was on'y a sort o' silver-weddin' dance at the 'joinin' farm; an' the whole bloody lot o' us was ast; an' her ladyship was lookin' forrid to it like goin' to heaven—flyin' roun' like a dog off the bloody chain.

THOMPSON: An' you wouldn't go?

DIXON: Yes, I would go, bugger you. Didn't I scoot to the township to get a new set of leadin' harness, an' when I come back, says she, 'What the bloody hell have you been doin' with your eye?'

FURLONG: Were those her words, Dixon?

DIXON: Well, it's five or six years ago, an' I don't s'pose a man can make sure o' bein' ipsissima bloody verba, as the sayin' is.

TOM: Very true, That's all right. How did you account for your eye?

DIXON: I jist told her, plain and straightforrid, I told her three Cousin Jacks manhandled me in the bloody township, an' while I was beltin' two o' them, the other bugger hove a brick an' landed me on the bloody eye.

RIGBY: And you told her you couldn't take to the dance on that account?

DIXON: Wrong. It was her spoke. She said she didn't see what the bloody hell I wanted goin' in sich company.

TOM: Dixon, your own excuse laid you open to that retort. You might, for instance, tell her that you saw a feller morticing posts, and you good-naturedly took his axe for a few minutes, and omitted to dodge the core.

RIGBY: Or you might have told her that you saw a woman winding a bucket of water from a well, and you gallantly offered your services, but she let go the handle before you had a proper hold.

THOMPSON: Satan'll have a hard choice among you three. How did things go then, Dixon? What did you say to her?

DIXON: I up an' says, 'It's no odds, I kin see to dance anyhow.' 'Like hell,' says she, 'why, damn my rags, you ain't fit to be seen at a bloody dog-fight. Think I'd go with you?' says she. 'Do the other thing, then,' says I, 'stop at home.' 'I'll see you in bloody hell fust,' says she, 'I'll jist go.' An' so she did. She went.

LUSHINGTON: Dear, dear, this is dreadful.

DIXON: You're right, young feller.

THOMPSON: So you didn't go?

DIXON: How the bloody hell could I go when she told me not to? But I'll tell you what stuffed the bloody contract. I'd just bin through Jane Eyre along of another feller, name of Jack Whitby, an' I'd come to the bloody conclusion that clever, edicated gurls doesn't believe in a bloody walk-over. They want a bit o' bullyraggin'. They bloody well like it. Let a man be a man, not a bloody monkey, that's their idear. On'y, sometimes it don't work properly. Varium et mutabile semper bloody foemina. I was moochin' about the door, waitin' for her when the corroboree was over, an' our people walked ahead, an' me an' 'er follered in the dark, an' not a word out o' me till we got half-road; then it was hammer-an'-tongs.

RIGBY: You expostulated with her?

DIXON: Not me. That ain't my bloody style. But I argied like hell. Fust she says, 'Done actin' the bloody goat?' 'You ain't goin' to no more dances, jist for this bloody lot,' says I. 'Indeed,' says she, ' 'an' who the bloody hell do you think you're talkin' to?' 'Ain't you gone fur enough?' says I, 'Ain't you bloody well frightened?' 'You ain't my boss; so you needn't be gettin' your bloody wool off,' says she.

LUSHINGTON: Oh dear, dear.

DIXON: 'Who the hell's gittin' their bloody wool off?' says I. 'Not me. But you ain't goin' to no more dances,' says I. 'I'll go if I bloody well like,' says she. 'Say that agen,' says I. 'Think I ain't game, you bloody morepoke? I'll go if I bloody well like.' So with that I ketches holt of her by the arm, an' fetches her a couple o' piccaninny kicks—not enough to hurt a bloody musketeer. Mere matter o' form.

THOMPSON: Had again. You uncivilised animal; you're just about fit to associate with remittance men.

DIXON: Jis' so. Course, you know a bloody sight more'n the bloke that writes books. So do—when it's too late. You know a hell of a lot about edicated gurls.

TOM: He thinks he does. But what did Parthenia do when you admonished her?

DIXON: Ain't hardly fair to give her the name of a racehorse, Collins.

RIGBY: What did she do?

DIXON: She sort o' skulked. Gurls is bloody pig-headed if they take the notion, an' when she took the notion, twenty bullocks wouldn't shift her. We'd a got on beautiful if I'd stuck to my own idear—but it wasn't to be. I always said it was cowardly to be nasty to a woman or a kid,an' I consider the stinkin'est thing a man can do is to welt a woman. Dunno how the bloody hell he kin ever look his self in the face agen. Ain't that your idear about it, Collins?

TOM: Depends on the woman herself. I agree with you in respect of the thin, bony subject, but a plump, cushiony woman seems to invite beating.

LUSHINGTON: I am surprised that you should justify such a barbarism in any case, Collins.

DIXON: I should a backed my own bloody fancy, an' let Mister bloody Rochester go to hell with his bullyraggin'. Too late now.

RIGBY: Nusquam tuta fides, Dixon.

DIXON: Hmmm. I could a said prayers to that piece, like a Jew to a graven image, only I wouldn't bemean my bloody self. So, we walks on home, an' never another bloody word we speaks, from that day to this. Hated the bloody sight o' me. Aut amat aut odit bloody mulier. That's the bloody conclusion I've arrove at, Rigby. Think I'm fur out?

RIGBY: You have the key to the situation, Dixon. But you hove many a sigh when the situation glode across your memory?

TOM: Most unlikely. My impression is that he merely wunk the other eye, and smole philosophically whenever he thunk of his escape from bondage.

THOMPSON: Ever hear what became of Miss Coone afterward?

DIXON: I'm always sort of foxin' round for news about her. Now an' agen I hear how she's gittin' on, mostly through Woods' people, for she keeps writin' to Mrs. Woods. Met ole

Woods just this side of Echucar. He told me the last bloody news was she'd been shifted from two half-times, on the Divil's River, to a provisional on the Wimmera. An' the next word he says was, 'Now, Dixon, don't you bloody well forget to call round and see the little child that you . . .'

Real nice ole bloke, decent fambly—must take a spin over . . . She'll be bloody well gittin' married to some member of Parliament yet, I shouldn't wonder. If things had went middlin' right between me an' her, I might a bin that bloody member o' Parliament myself.

TOM: (*aside to Rigby*) And so Dixon's romance petered out to a lame and by no means logical conclusion.

RIGBY: Romance everywhere hardening into tragedy as the real supersedes the fanciful; for the real is always tragic. Comedy is tragedy, plucked unripe. Farce is the grimmest of all tragedy; it is the blind jollity of an Irish wake, with the silent guest none the less present because unassertive.

I was much impressed this afternoon by the last act, though not the last scene, of a saddening life tragedy which long ago on the other side of the globe opened as love's young dream. It is not for your entertainment that I shall unfold them now, but in order that you may be set thinking for yourselves and thinking in the right direction.

TOM: Oh, give the love-story a rest. Let each of us tell the meanest thing he ever did, or the wickedest, or the silliest, anything but a love-story with a sermon hooked on behind.

BINNEY: Let Mr. Rigby go on, Collins, while he can keep up anything like Dixon's standard.

THOMPSON: Don't pay any attention to Tom. He only wants to follow suit himself. His love-story is a live one—not like Dixon's or mine. You'll hear some version of it from anyone you meet in Riverina, and the only point they'll agree upon is that the other party clings to Tom like a mortgagee, though she's the haughtiest subject on the plains.

TOM: If I happen to be the somewhat measly object of a woman's misplaced devotion, am I to parade her loyalty publicly and make it the text of my homilies.

BINNEY: I apologise for the whole company, Mr. Rigby, as I had a share in the interruption. A story that you think worth telling must certainly be worth hearing.

RIGBY: The fact that the leading character is not more than half-a-mile from us at the present moment brings an element of personality into the story and must be taken under protest. Picture to yourselves a young..

TOM: Hang it, I don't mind if I do tell my love-story. About a year ago, riding along a track through the scrub on Runnymede, I heard the clatter of hoofs behind me, blended with a scream, and the next instant a woman on horseback passed me like a bird on the wing. I noticed that the bit was out of her horse's mouth, and I knew there was a tremendous precipice half a mile in front. I darted forward at full speed till I drew abreast. With one hand I lifted the lady from her saddle and wheeled my horse round just as her horse went over. It was a near thing, but—

THOMPSON: That'll do. Goliath himself couldn't carry out such a contract. And a bolting horse always looks after himself, unless he has a vehicle behind him; and there's not six inches deep of a precipice within a hundred mile of Runnymede. That's the sort of yarn you'll tell when you get into your dotage.

FURLONG: This is hardly fair to Mr. Rigby.

BINNEY: So say I. What's the matter with you. Tom?

LUSHINGTON: Now, Collins, like a good fellow.

TOM: Go on, Judge. I won't interrupt again. (*moving away*) Nor will I listen.

Rigby continues his story to the gathering as Tom speaks to audience.

TOM: And I didn't listen. Whilst Rigby's measured monologue went on I switched off my auditory nerve system.

Sam speaks to Tom without revealing himself.

SAM: You're doing it grand, Collins. Sh-sh, I don't want to let on I'm here.

TOM: Didn't I hear Miss Vanderdecken say she wanted you tonight?

SAM: So she did. And I'm on her business now. Rigby's got the flute, I notice. Don't baulk him agen. He's worth a bob an hour to lis'n to, judgin' by his style.

RIGBY: It has long been the custom in Germany to train all boys to more or less useful trades, so that as a rule every German is a specialist. Fritz, therefore, on leaving school,served an apprenticeship of seven years; then his term of military service—

DIXON: What bloody trade did he learn?

RIGBY: Belt-maker. Three years in the army left him, according to the German idea, fit for anything on earth. I don't know exactly when he met with Wilhelmina Rottendammer

SAM: Rottendammer! It was time for her to get spliced anyhow.

RIGBY: At all events, they loved each other with that calm, devoted, exclusive affection so much less liable to satiety and reaction than the restless passion which, I take for granted, each of you fellows has experienced. Fritz could eke out an existence working twelve hours a day. Mina, whose face was her fortune, made a poorer living working sixteen hours a day in a carpet factory. Socio-political questions didn't trouble these soul-wedded lovers much. They went on their way, rejoicing in the true wealth of mutual affection, and earnestly discussing the great German problem.

BINNEY: You said they didn't trouble themselves with social politics.

RIGBY: The great German problem is black bread and sauerkraut—just as the great Australian problem is resolving itself into mutton and damper.

TOM: To hear you talk, you would think the great Australian problem was closer to yam and possum.

RIGBY: So it is, Tom. Any more objections impending?

SAM: Cripes, ain't he quick on the trigger! This bloke's an artist.

TOM: None. Proceed, good Alexander.

RIGBY: Our lovers had much to rejoice in. Apart from youth, health and hatred to France, they had the satisfaction of seeing people much poorer than themselves; so, like Paul, they thanked God and took courage. Moreover, Providence had met the interests of both classes by pouring on Mina's head a superb crop of that pale golden hair which never goes out of fashion.

THOMPSON; But as far as making a living's concerned, Mina might as well have been bald.

RIGBY: So she was—periodically. But a few silver coins go a long way toward tempering the wind to the shorn girl. The harvested crop being, of course, thriftily reserved for the thin-haired members of your plutocracy.

LUSHINGTON: Mr. Rigby, Mr Rigby, you do the plutocracy an injustice. In point of fact, its office is to spread the blessings of wealth.

RIGBY: And how is this distribution to be carried out? If paid as the wages of wealth-producing labour, our capital will multiply itself by itself, thus aggravating the social-economic discrepancy. If distributed by donation, the effect will be infinitely worse. Any wealthy man will tell you that ninety-per-cent of money given away does more harm than good.

If, however, the idea of sharing can be preserved, the parties are brought abreast and mutually elevated by the primitive virtue of the principle. Whereas, charity brings the parties into contact vertically and the benefaction is poisoned by its implication.

Philanthropists should learn the ever-true proverb 'that a gift destroyeth the heart' and engineer their work accordingly. The idea of sharing, of participation, admits of indefinite extension, and never comes out amiss.

There is ample reason why sharing, not giving, should be the sentiment of bona fide Christianity.

TOM: Confine yourself to the case before the court, Sheriff. You were giving evidence in re Fritz and Mina.

LUSHINGTON: And you may rest assured that our female descendants' coiffures are in no danger.

RIGBY: Mina's face was her fortune. A very good fortune it proved to be. An old financier, Herr Moses Isaacstein, made her an offer of marriage. The lovers discussed their future prospects in the new light of this proposal. They felt it absurd to love so much, unless they loved honour more. The young fellow availed himself of the old fellow's jealousy to obtain a passage to Melbourne. And so they parted. Their only happiness lay in the backward glance of memory. Their only hope lay beyond the grave—the grave of Herr Isaacstein. Fritz reached these shores in '65. It is no light thing, boys, to be a stranger in a strange land—ignorant of language and at your wits' end to find any sort of work.

THOMPSON: You said he was a belt-maker.

RIGBY: His experience lay entirely in soldier's belts. He obtained permanent employment as a gardener's off-sider on Tartpeena station and began to save money. But Herr Moses hung out still. It was on Tartpeena station I met Fritz for the first time. I was in charge of a small survey party. I noticed three excellent qualities in Fritz—one was his simple fidelity to Mina, another was a capacity for thrift, and the third was a patient, unwavering trust in Providence.

In the spring of '65, Tartpeena station was thrown open for selection. Through a very ordinary and vulgar piece of roguery, Fritz managed to acquire six hundred and forty acres and made a start. Three years passed and Fritz learned that Herr Moses Isaacstein had taken his departure to another world, leaving to Mina fifteen thousand thalers, or two thousand two hundred pounds sterling. Fritz sold his selection for two thousand five hundred and sixty pounds—even more than Mina's contribution.

Dixon responds to rustling noises near the campfire area.

DIXON: What the hell's that? Gittin' sort o' satis bloody superque.

THOMPSON: Cattle-pup. Millbank's people gave him to me today. Stump-tailed breed. Poor little chap's lonely. I should fetch him down here. Makings of a good dog if only I could keep him. But I can't keep anything now. I've had five dogs since that infernal thing came on me; and they're all gone. Wonder how long I'll be able to keep this little cove.

BINNEY: Always easy to lose a good dog.

TOM: Any owner of a kangaroo dog will endorse that.

FURLONG: The fidelity of some dogs is marvellous.

DIXON: See how a dog'll shepherd a drunk man. Wonder if the buggers has souls?

LUSHINGTON: The Jewish abhorrence of dogs seems rather strange to us.

TOM: (*to audience*) And so for five or ten minutes we discussed dogs in a manner too trivial to be worth reproduction here. We had forgotten Fritz but the Colonel was leading us at his will.

RIGBY: When Fritz reached Berlin. Isaacstein's will had been successfully contested. Mina's misfortune was a terrible blow to Fritz. Murmured vows, clinging kisses and youthful aspirations could not bring back the fifteen thousand thalers—the absence of which merely

made the heart grow fonder. In the end, Fritz tearfully embraced the doubly-widowed Mina, and tore himself away, giving her, as a farewell present, the sum of one thousand pfennigs

DIXON: At least I give him credit for that.

RIGBY: —equal in value to eight-and-fourpence of our money.

DIXON: Bloody hell!

RIGBY: Mina returned to her carpet factory and the only luxury she could afford—the luxury of despair. Fritz returned to Melbourne and swiftly made for a roadside pub near Tartpeena to see the widow Maginnis who had been left more than comfortable by the wealthy Maginnis. It even occurred to him that Maginnis' clothes would be about his size. But the inn at Tartpeena had been left to Maginnis' son Jimmy and, his mother, Louisa had moved to Melbourne to enjoy her legacy.

Fritz returned to Melbourne and presented himself to her again and again. He was delighted to find her unchanged and she was gratified to learn that her image, engraven on his heart, had impelled him to repulse a young German heiress and return to his Australian enchantress.

Fritz now spent his own money with a free hand. And in a matter of six weeks, the nuptials took place; I gave the bride away.

Immediately after the marriage Mr. and Mrs. Wetterliebenschaff discovered that Maginnis' legacy had become a sinking fund—to cover Maginnis's land and mining speculations. Compound interest had undermined the property and, of course, she was fooled by the practical jokers of the Civil law.

On mentioning this to her new husband, the poor woman went on to affirm that the loss of property didn't cost her a second thought as she still had Fritz.

And indeed she had him to perfection.

It was about thirty-six hours before he came to.

Our hero was, in the first place, mentally limited and morally neutral. Edgar is right—"The worst is never come while we can say, 'This is the worst'".

That was thirteen years ago and I never met him again till this afternoon. His wife died two years ago and Fritz lives with his stepson, Jimmy, who recently acquired the local inn.

TOM: Ahh! Maginnis'—late Waterton's—Farmer's Arms, Yooringa.

RIGBY: The same.

FURLONG: I'm afraid, Mr. Rigby, the tendency of your moral is to limit, or even explain away, human responsibility.

Furlong withdraws to refresh his bait.

DIXON: Talkin' about morals, it's a moral we ain't goin' to ketch no bloody fish, no matter 'ow we keep off o' swearin'. My idears is mostly runnin' on that thirty-pound fish you caught here, Thompson.

THOMPSON: Strange how the very same thing has been running in my own mind, how little I thought then that I would be sitting here tonight, older and sadder and not much wiser, thinking of all the changes that have taken place since then.

TOM: There is an element of poetry in the suggestion.

(*and then he considers what Steve has said*)

Steve, when was it you caught that thirty-pounder?

THOMPSON: (*after a little thought*) Ten years ago, last May. Coming eleven years now. About three weeks before my unfortunate trip in the canoe.

SILENCE

TOM: (*to audience*) For the next two minutes you could have cut the silence into slices with a hay-knife.

END PART ONE

PART TWO

Immediately follows. The company continues fishing—and all the related and unrelated activity—unfazed by Thompson's revelation.

RIGBY: Where's Furlong? Did he take his rod with him?

TOM: He's gone to roast a fresh bit of possum for bait. He missed the ghastly disclosure.

THOMPSON: No, he was listening all along. But the vanity of things in general is no ghastly disclosure to him, I fancy. He's had his share of trouble; and he's made the right use of it. Not like me.

TOM: You know him, Steve?

THOMPSON: No, I can't say that I do. I met him once, some years ago. But he's a man I'd take to be as straight as a rule.

TOM: He might have a romance in his life, too.

THOMPSON: I wouldn't hint anything to him about it, Tom; he seems very reserved.

SMITH: Both you an' him's the clean spud, anyhow, bullocky. If everybody was like me an' him an' you, the world would be fit for a man to live in, which it ain't, not by a long chalk.

Furlong returns and resumes his place.

SILENCE

FURLONG: 'All things work together for good to them that love God'—Romans 8,28. 'The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever He will.'—Daniel 4, 25. I feel very deeply on this subject, for I myself lived in bondage to Satan for twenty-nine years; and though it has pleased God to call me out of darkness into his marvellous light, I can never recall the wasted time.

DIXON: I never flog over them bloody idears. I'll jist slip across and shove the bloody fire together. May's well treat ourselves to a drink o' tea when school's out.

FURLONG: The real troubles of life are beyond our control; they are sent for our good. Poverty is a severe trial, as I know from experience. Wealth, rightly regarded, is no less a trial—

SAM: (*to Tom*) I know which specie I'd ratherest tackle!

FURLONG: It has been said that man's extremity is God's opportunity. I can give an illustration of this.

BINNEY: I'll be off Harold. Are you coming?

LUSHINGTON: Not just yet, George. Stay a minute. We have a discovery here.

FURLONG: I was married nearly six years ago, and I been a widower for four years.

SAM: 'Bout time for me to travel, Collins. I'll see you in the mornin' as you go past.

Sam 'evaporates up the bank, like Old Nick at the touch of holy water'.

FURLONG: My wife was a Melbourne native. And her only surviving relations were two brothers, both gone up country. I found one of them two years ago, but I have never heard any news of the other.

DIXON: Was that the bugger you was looking for las'year? Long-legged, yeller-bairded galoot of a bullocky, you said, with a bay horse. Country's stinkin' with fellers of that bloody description.

FURLONG: No, Dixon, I found the man you speak of. Laura, my wife, had a weak chest through overwork in her younger days. Young as she was, she was tired out. We had reached the limit of our credit. I had nothing to sell but a collection of books and I parted from these with a regret that seems strange now. Laura grew weaker and weaker. A doctor told us that a change of climate might restore her. He suggested Echuca.

I left Laura in the care of two good women, a widow and her sister, to look for work and a home for Laura. I could find nothing in Echuca, I went on to Deniliquin—nothing. And on my way back I got completely bewildered on the plains.

By the time I reached Echuca again there was a telegram: 'Return immediately, Laura sinking fast.'

I could not beg or borrow the fare until Thompson here found me in a desperate state and set me on my way.

I reached Laura just before midnight. She had taken a turn and there was no hope. But she was restored to me for a few hours longer. Holding one of my hands with both of hers, she seemed to sink into a dreamy state. At last I heard her whisper softly; bent over to catch the words: 'Our father Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come.' That was all. She slowly opened her eyes, and fixed them on my face, and gave one little sigh. A look of perfect repose settled on her face—an appalling tranquillity.

LUSHINGTON: We all sympathise with you, I'm sure.

FURLONG: My friends, if you think this was distressing, conceive what it would have been if I hadn't met Thompson. My poor wife never knew in life, but she knows now whose kindness it was that fulfilled her last wish. Now that I've found you, Thompson, I haven't one personal anxiety in the world. I am a happy man tonight.

LUSHINGTON: And it must crown your happiness to know that your loved one is safe. You are doing well enough now from a worldly point of view?

FURLONG: Right enough. I still owe Thompson twelve pounds, I can pay him half and ask him to wait till I earn the rest.

DIXON: So it was Thompson you was inquirin' about? Why the hell didn't you say a ches'nut horse? Not a bay! Thompson's remarked for ches'nut ever since I knowed him.

THOMPSON: Any other color's unlucky with me.

RIGBY: Furlong is safe— if his Bible is worth the paper it is printed on. All your financial societies, based on usury as they are, will go on to the Father of Usury sooner or later. The Hebrew word for usury—neshek—signifies 'to devour'.

LUSHINGTON: Mr. Rigby, I am entirely with Furlong in reliance on divine goodness; still we must provide things needful in the sight of all men—another way of saying that thrift is an essential of the Christian character. You will surely agree with me in the duty of providing for the future?

RIGBY: No. The only duty I personally recognise is the very momentous one of forwarding the New Order. I hold that a man's best work, cheerfully rendered in compensation for his livelihood, is a primary component of that duty. I hold the idler as being in the nethermost pit of infamy—not the idler under the bridge, the idler in the drawing-room at Toorak or Potts Point.

So, I trust we agree on the naked question of 'thrift'. Honest, cheerful work, for the sustenance and enrichment and enlightenment of the world, we both admit to be a duty—but why tack on to this obligation, the alien idea of accumulation?

I can't express my contempt for the idea of believing in God, and at the same time taking precautions against His providence. The professing Christian is authorised to ask nothing of temporal provision beyond his daily bread. Your professional Bible-perverter will tell you that the passage refers to Spiritual bread. Spiritual rot!

THOMPSON: (*aside to Tom*) He's fairly started.

TOM: This is only a preliminary canter, but he'll start by and by.

RIGBY: I'll show you a paradox. The secular side of life belongs to God, and the spiritual side to man. The earth is the Lord's—Nature's if you will, we won't quarrel over terms. But man's moral nature is his own. The 'gods' cannot disturb your Indivualistic principles, nor my Socialistic fads. Any man may develop his own moral nature, upward or downward. But no man can add eighteen inches to his own height.

LUSHINGTON: Mr. Rigby, I imagine you to possess an independence of spirit which is a very admirable quality; and I presume from your tone that your habit has not been to provide for the future. Your extreme views place you in a difficult position.

RIGBY: Notice how my extreme views release me from the position they place me in? When my right hand forgets the exceedingly little cunning it ever possessed, it will still retain dexterity enough to load and fire a pistol. I object to suicide as I object to any evasion of duty.

I condemn it as I condemn any infliction of distress or loss. But presuppose my last task completed, and my unsettled and solitary life has cancelled any claim to the tributary tear. Didn't I acknowledge that my religious faith was invisible to the naked eye?

An apostle of the New Order, Mr. Lushington, who teaches poor men must himself be poor. Most would-be reformers have stultified themselves by drifting into extraneous personal advantage. My habitual process of thought leads me to settle down into an imperfect performance of duty, confident that I shall never lag superfluous on the pay-sheet.

FURLONG: Thou art not far from the Kingdom of Heaven, Mr. Rigby. But you strike the rock, as Moses did, instead of speaking to it in the name of the Lord. You want for humility and teachableness.

THOMPSON: Yes, he's got a bit of a vacancy there, right enough.

FURLONG: Can we fear that the Almighty arm that shielded our infancy may become paralysed in our age?

RIGBY: The person who anticipates a worthless old age, and provides for it accordingly, ensures the fulfilment of his forecast.

Christians, you quote and preach from Paul, a less exacting taskmaster than Christ. But you daren't follow even Paul: Did you ever hear a clergyman charge his congregation that each of them must entirely forego personal interests, as a guarantee of fidelity to the public good? You never did. Yet Christianity demands nothing less.

LUSHINGTON: It is the love of money, Mr. Rigby, that is condemned. Like most other things, money has its use, and its abuse.

RIGBY: True. Its use is to serve as exchange for merchandise or service; its abuse is to represent wealth. Concede the appreciation of money as property and you open the door to evasions without end. It is not a mere "thus-saith-the-lord". It is an ethical principle that you are bent on subverting.

LUSHINGTON: Do you maintain that voluntary poverty is necessary to salvation?

RIGBY: The man whose chief concern is the saving of his own private soul is nothing better than a skunk. Nor can he develop into anything better through time or eternity. The Satan of spiritual selfishness can never cast out the Satan of worldly selfishness. On the other hand, the man who relegates his own small individuality to its true place in the plan of the universe, he becomes a god, co-operating with his Creator in the only sublime work within our horizon, the elevation of humanity.

THOMPSON: Better elevate himself first.

RIGBY: Steve, I have known and respected your father for five-and-twenty years. Will you read the Encheiridion of Epictetus if I give you the book tomorrow?

THOMPSON; No, I'll swear I won't. The name's quite enough for me. Bad thing to know too much. The true secret of life is to be found in one of Mungo Park's adventures. He was exploring in Africa and somehow found himself so badly left that there seemed nothing for it but to give the whole thing best, and make up his mind to peg out. But then he happened to notice a bit of moss.

TOM: Ah, do tell us that yarn, Steve.

THOMPSON: This moss set him to thinking: The Lord watches over that miserable, insignificant, useless, little excuse for a plant; and, if so, it's a moral certainty that He watches over me. So, he tackled the track again and came out with nothing to complain of.

RIGBY: Are you willing to accept the lesson that your moss really teaches, Steve? That moss fulfilled the little purpose of its little life. It transformed a small portion of crude mineral matter into vegetable mould; it absorbed a certain quantity of carbonic acid gas from the atmosphere, and replaced it by oxygen. That moss accomplished its vocation.

You stand on a somewhat higher plane. Will you bequeath to society a little vegetable mould in the shape of protest against injustice? Will you endeavour to establish equilibrium in the social-economic atmosphere? Only on such terms are you justified in comparing yourself with that bit of moss.

LUSHINGTON: Mr. Rigby, we must at least give you credit for a frank avowal of the Socialistic principle of levelling downward. I admit the property qualification is not the highest that could be devised; still, we can turn the existing classification of society to good account by glorifying God in our lives.

RIGBY: Christianity, on its first point of contact with economics, inaugurates a perfect Socialistic system. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the Gospel's but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life. Is that a forecast of Socialism—or is it not?

FURLONG: The quotation is correct at all events, Mark, ten, twenty-nine and thirty. Parallel passage in Matthew, twenty-nine, twenty-nine. But I always thought it referred to the disciples.

RIGBY: So it does. We are the disciples. When Christ abolished class-servitude . . .

LUSHINGTON: Christ did not even prohibit slavery. He enjoined love to all men, bond and free. Paul, sent the absconder, Onesimus, back to his master, Philemon.

RIGBY: Poor, zealous, devoted, purblind Paul. He couldn't see that Christ abolished every form of obligatory servitude, in His own emphatic and unanswerable way, when He washed His disciples' feet—the special task of a slave—and impressed upon them they should grasp the significance of His action. I don't blame the Apostles, but if we don't know more of the mind of Christ than they did—Paul included—the collection-plate has been passed round to very little purpose indeed.

LUSHINGTON: I cannot see how you identify Christianity with Socialism, or even compare them. Christianity is spiritual, while Socialism is secular. One is a religion; the other is a polity.

RIGBY: Very good definitions. Polity is a clean-cut unambiguous term, but religion..

THOMPSON: (*aside to Tom*) We're booked for it now.

TOM: (*aside to Thompson*) He's off-colour tonight, partly paralyzed for want of opposition, and partly crippled by running on Bible lines.

RIGBY: Religion divested of frill, formalism and fable, is merely the science of conduct. Yet religion is not ethics. Ethics is a moral science, an exact science, whilst religion is an applied science—applied, to conduct. And any belief in the supernatural that fails to control conduct, is of no more moment than a belief in the bunyip. But a belief which leads up to unselfishness, to championship of the lowly and challenge to the overweening, to the living of a clean and useful life—such a belief rises to the dignity of a religion inasmuch as it controls conduct. Are you following me, boys?

TOM: In our own feeble way, Colonel.

RIGBY: If polygamy, treachery, avarice, robbery, and murder be wrong in the world today, these were equally wrong in Bible times. And if usury, monopoly, capitalism, profit-mongering, and so forth were wrong on the Galilean Mount in the time of Tiberias, they are wrong in Australia today. Moral expediency is not an alternative rule; it is an evasion of the rule. Any dissent from this postulate, boys?

TOM: (*aside to Thompson*) Hardly likely. No one seems to be hankering to catch hold of a live wire carrying a thousand volts.

RIGBY: Ignorance, fanaticism, and compromise, have so soiled the word 'religion' that its very sound is apt to repel honest minds, but religion is the bridge between ethics and conduct.

DIXON: Well, I ain't a religious man myself, even if I do look forrid to bein' one; but you, my word, you ought to be a minister o' the bloody gospel.

RIGBY: So I am—bar the adjective—which, by the way, is only too appropriate.

DIXON: Not a proper sin-shifter. You can't chris'n a kid, nor yet say the bloody words over people.

RIGBY: No, Dixon, I don't live on the game.

TOM: Ah! I should have mentioned to you, Senator, that Mr. Lushington is a Clergyman— a fisher of men, as well as of thirty-pounders.

RIGBY: Then I owe you an apology, Mr. Lushington, I beg your pardon, most sincerely.

LUSHINGTON: Not another word, you have inspired me with envy for your abilities.

SMITH: All very fine for you blokes to go fetchin' out your argymints about right an' wrong an' all the rest of it. But what do you think of a man workin' to do a thing that's bound to send him to hell? That's me.

RIGBY: (*aside*) To the point—who is she?

SMITH: It's all through a girl, an' she was worth it, no matter how people might cock up their nose at her, if they knew. There was a girl come into our district, three years ago, an' me an 'er struck up together, an' we were as right as rain for over twelve months, an' nobody would a-dreamed anythin' could come between us.

And then this new policeman come to town—livin' separated from his wife—and before you could say 'knife' all the girls in the district was gone on the blasted hound. He was an ole bloke, too—forty, if he was a day—but these ole married blokes is always the worst. He was just about the ugliest cur I ever did see, with a baird right up to his eyes, but the girls they used to be always blatherin' about what a splendid-lookin' man he was. It didn't trouble me, but I hated him from the first day I seen him.

Today, you'd see 'im grinnin' at a bar-maid; an' tomorrow you'd meet him in the bush with a girl on horseback; an' next day you'd see another girl yarnin' with him across a fence; an' all the girls in the district blazin' with jealousy about the lousy cur—an' him a married man. Nora took no more notice of him at first nor if he was the dog.

One night there was a big meetin' about Home Rule an' a row started between some Orangemen and some Gruffs, an' up comes my lord and grabs me by the collar through backin' up one of the Gruffs that was a friend o' mine! Course, I was bailed that night and got clear with only a caution. And to my surprise, instead of Nora swearin' off at him and spittin' in his face she seemed sort o' taken with him. That grew into a coolness between me an' her.

Course, I'd got a set on the copper, but I had to sing small. After a while I noticed Nora was clean broke off with him, an' they passed one another without a word; an' the copper he sort o' dodged me ; an' presently I got thick with Nora again. But she wasn't the same girl she used to be; all her jolliness was gone.

Anyway, it seems the copper's wife had somebody watchin' him, and suddenly there was a flare-up, an' he had to resign an' went upcountry horsebreaking.

For a couple of months me an' Nora was as friendly as ever until one night I was seeing' her home from a bazaar, an' she says, "Come an' sit on this log, I got to tell you somethin'."

One Sunday she wanted to go to see a dressmaker about twelve mile away, an' him he gammoned he wanted to go the same road on some business, so what does he do but he gits a buggy an' away goes the two o' them—her kickin' herself all the time for lettin' things go so fur—an' comin' back he made out he wanted to go the other track through the bush.

He was a big, strong lump of a man, and she was a weed of woman . . . I seen them drivin' home that same evenin'—I don't deny I was narked a bit extry, but I had no suspicion.

LUSHINGTON: The scoundrel! Hanging would be too good for him!

SMITH: It's all very well to talk, but what could she do without makin' the thing worse—a advertisin' herself as you might say. Never mind, it's all right. or it'll be all right yet. I'm on his track this time. He's booked to go. He's a gift to me when I get him in range. Now, I've said it.

LUSHINGTON: My dear friend, I sympathise deeply with you, but I must condemn your purpose of taking the law into your own hands. 'Vengeance is mine: I will repay,' saith the Lord.

SMITH: Didn't you just say this bloke wanted hangin'? Is the Lord goin' to hang him.

LUSHINGTON: Apart from the stings of conscience, God punishes by the agency of our Criminal Law.

SMITH: S'posen there's a man in a place called Sussex, in England, an' this man shakes a bushel o' wheat for his missis to boil to keep the kids from starvin'—does God give that man seven years' laggin', an then set him adrift, his ankles wore to the bone with the irons, and his shoulders like a soojee bag with floggin'. That was my grandfather. Is that God's style o' punishin' people with the Criminal Law? Don't talk rubbage.

LUSHINGTON: The law was exceedingly severe on offences against property; perhaps, it is too severe, still. It's an unsafe thing to meddle with . . .

SMITH: You'll make me disagreeable an' nasty. How the hellfire can the law be unsafe to meddle with, if God's got any say in it?

Smith withdraws and resumes fishing, Lushington follows him.

THOMPSON: Think he'll marry Nora?

RIGBY: Could anything be less desirable for either party? Nora's honour is an eminent consideration— the sun and centre of a little universe—our friend's personal dignity is a small affair, an insignificant satellite. But, by a self-centred standard of honour he has allowed this moon to eclipse that sun and he will stultify himself by ignoring both. However, single hearted resentment commands respect. Sir, I like a good hater.

THOMPSON: Stolen!

RIGBY: Yes. but I forget where the expression is from. Do you know Tom?

TOM: No.

RIGBY: The inception of law is a stronger evidence of our superior nature than any based on art or science. Why then, Steve, do we hate, and fear, and loathe, this product of our own highest faculties?

THOMPSON: I'm sure I don't know—and what's more, I don't care.

RIGBY: The reason is that such law as we have is founded, not on equity, but on privilege, and the scent of privilege clings round it still, leading us to see the title "law-abiding" as an insult rather than a compliment.

BINNEY: In its accepted sense, it is a compliment. The law is a terror to evil-doers and a praise unto them that do well.

RIGBY: It is easier, as well as safer, for an educated man to rob by permission of the law than in defiance of it? There has never been a period in history when a current system was ageing so rapidly and so helplessly, and a revolution so unmistakenly impending. Give us laws, with a system of mutual polity, and all things are possible to man. That is the Socialistic ideal, Mr. Binney.

BINNEY: You can't make men virtuous by Act of Parliament, Rigby.

RIGBY: You can make men anything you please by Act of Parliament, Tom, provided such Act is sanctioned by the greater part of the national intelligence. On the other hand, you may preach against any social-economic atrocity till the death rattle is in your throat; you may write against it till death paralyzes your hand; but if you cannot enlist the operation of law, your labour is lost. Christianity must be translated into secular law, and the law must be sternly enforced, before it can neutralise the pride and covetousness condemned in theory, yet condoned in practice.

TOM: In the name of the Prophet—bunkum! One would think to hear you talk, that the man of property and respectability is some kind of ogre. Isn't it evident, even to you, that he can eat only three meals a day, and he can wear only one suit of clothes at a time?

RIGBY: If that be true, why, in Satan's name should he be encouraged to impound, and retain to his own use, the equivalent of food and clothes for a regiment of his fellow-mortals.

TOM: The rich man's wealth is his own, to be disposed of as he pleases.

RIGBY: "Isn't the man mine?" asks the owner of George Harris in Uncle Tom's Cabin. And no one can refute the legality of his title. But as surely as the national conscience of America has changed all that, so will the public conscience of the civilised world rectify the abuse you speak of. The rich man's wealth is 'his own' you say. Is the title legal or moral? Legal title is merely a matter of legislation and may be superseded. And the moral title, if it be sound, I have nothing more to say.

DIXON: By hell, you're right. Stick to that bloody argyment, Rigby.

RIGBY: The generations that feel the first pressure of our social-economic transition will doubtless produce a crop of murmurers and mutineers and worshippers of the golden calf.

TOM: And for all time you'll have human nature to deal with.

RIGBY: Human nature is always with us. Though we misdirect its potencies, and crush its capacities with the leprosy of Selfishness or the palsy of Hopelessness. Every child begins life as an actual democrat and potential Socialist.

BINNEY: Socialism quietly overlooks the fact that the variety in minds is as wide as the variety in faces.

RIGBY: Socialism builds upon that very fact. Socialism proposes to avail itself of the very best that each man or woman has to give. Offering a full share in the universal best, with free scope for individual development as cannot co-exist with anxiety for the morrow.

BINNEY: Mr. Rigby, I don't recognise human equality, in its strictest and fullest sense; nor does anyone who has seen the world.

RIGBY: Let us in the first place avoid confounding equality with uniformity.

TOM: Colonel, are we to understand that you State Socialists would concede freedom of entry and terms of equality to the few million colored brothers who would promptly avail themselves of your system?

RIGBY: We draw no colour line, no educational line, not even an an intellectual line. I repeat my argument for the initial equality—an equality that has never been disturbed since the yesterday when their ancestors were civilised men, and ours were howling savages.

Notice how easily the economic question is dealt with in the Gospels. The Gospels are the purest Socialistic literature we have. No man ever made a case against Socialism on Christian grounds, Mr Binney, Socialism represents the secular side of Christianity. The hostility of the

clergy is easily accounted for, they recognise the river which is to clean out the Augean stable of the Church. The tendency of the stable is not to become cleaner of its own accord.

TOM: But why take the hazard of any experiment? Individualism works.

RIGBY: Yes, Individualism works. So does autocracy—yet Parliamentary government has been instituted with advantage. Monarchy works—do we therefore regard Republicanism as unclean? Savagery works—is that an argument against civilisation? Polygamy and polyandry work—do you therefore set your face against monogamy? Individualism works, no doubt, but with intolerable and increasing friction.

TOM: But is Socialism a remedy? If you divide everything today, how long will it be before you require another division, and another?

RIGBY: Let some advocate of Individualism answer that question. This ebb and flow in private fortune, this perpetual division and re-division of wealth is the distinctive outcome, and the just and certain curse of Individualism.

TOM: (*to audience*) The Colonel's denouement was undermined at this point by the distinctive "pluck-swish" of a catch on the line.

FURLONG: I knew I would get him. Dixon, take the wooden hook and watch your chance.

TOM: (*to audience*) In a few minutes, the fish was safely landed and it was a thirty-pounder, as nearly as our carefully concealed disgust would allow us to guess.

FURLONG: Better tether him in the river tonight. We'll divide him amongst us in the morning.

SILENCE—They realise what he has said—they look to Rigby, he smiles knowingly. As Tom continues they collect their gear and prepare to retire or leave.

TOM: (*to audience*) I released the pup and we used his chain to secure the fish. The fish didn't have much room but he couldn't get tangled and he would keep fresh. In tacit unanimity, we furled our lines.

BINNEY: What time is it?

DIXON: Early yet, shove on your billy, Steve.

TOM: (*to audience*) The conversation was forced away to Steve's thirty-pounder, now Furlong's thirty-pounder. Some very good fish stories were told. I told my tale of how I caught half-a-hundredweight of fish with one large fat maggot—I think I set it on the Murrumbidgee this time. Then the party broke up and withdrew or prepared to retire. I contemplated the Colonel as he enjoyed the best smoke of the day—recalling the enthusiastic young Bayard slowly and surely petrifying into the perverse and crotchetty old zealot.

(*to Rigby*) You struck form tonight; I've seldom seen you more insulting to visitors.

RIGBY: Perhaps my conventional pliancy was disturbed by some good news I had this afternoon, or rather news of good to come.

TOM: I fancied there must be some hitch in the sequence of things, I was beginning to despair.

RIGBY: As a Conservative, you have reason to despair. The Socialistic harvest is plenteous, however few the laborers may be. Don't mistake me for an organiser, Tom, I'm merely an agitator. A watchman, imperfectly qualified, I admit, though Divinely commissioned.

TOM: (*after a silence*) Sherriff, did you ever notice that in the 'Shakespeare's plays' there are more women named Kate than anything else? Why is this thus?

RIGBY: I never noticed it but I believe you're right. And those characters are all amiable, or piquant, or both. The wherefore might possibly be found in the hypothesis that the author loved some woman of that name. Now, if you ascertain by historical research, or by the

shorter cut of nomenology, whether this applies to Bacon or to Shakespeare, you'll be doing work worthy of your ambition.

TOM: (*after another silence*) Colonel, what was the name of the original Flying Dutchman?

RIGBY: Van Straaten, originally; but known to British seagulls as Vanderdecken. A profitable and engaging study, I should say, in the couple of years you have to live.

SILENCE

Nnnoooooo!!! Damn you, Tom, why didn't you remind me?

TOM: Remind you of what?

RIGBY: How came you to suggest that name, just now?

TOM: Through wondering how little interest you took in an old acquaintance. I've been thinking of her all evening.

RIGBY: I was engaged to spend the evening with Miss Vanderdecken. You see how I've managed the thing. Oh, hell!

TOM: I wondered to see you leave her so soon, and take it so coolly all the evening. You knew her, didn't you?

RIGBY: I believe I did. I'm certain I did. Talking to her, this afternoon, my mind was in a haze. There seemed to be some memory but I couldn't determine whether it was an actual reminiscence or an occasion of unconscious cerebration. In order to gain time and to get a better grasp of the position, I excused myself for an hour. I intended asking you to post me up a little. I was supposed to return at eight o'clock. But the company and that accursed thirty-pounder . . . What will she think of me now? Heaven above!

TOM: You can apologise to her in the morning.

RIGBY: Of course, I shall, but that doesn't cancel this hideous default. This is the sort of thing that makes me tired of life, Tom.

They settle into silence again.

Do you know, Tom, I fancy I made love to that woman once.

TOM: I don't believe you, Senator.

RIGBY: I can hardly believe myself . . . Yes . . . Kate Vanderdecken . . . Same grey eyes . . . Same bright hair . . . Same soft, slow voice . . . the old forgotten memories are coming back to light. Kate Vanderdecken. I'll never forgive myself. She particularly impressed me this evening as being decidedly, the most engaging woman I ever met. As I came down here, I shuddered at the thought of having such a flower of womanhood for a wife.

TOM: On account of the imaginary other fellow? The thought was unworthy of you, General.

RIGBY: Don't judge anyone else by your own standard. I was thinking of the time I would lose if I lived in such an atmosphere. That is accounted for now. And to slight her after this fashion. Oh hell. I've put my foot in it this time.

TOM: Surely there's some sickness that might come on a person in the evening and go away before morning without leaving a trace?

RIGBY: Oh, shut up. It's dreadful—damnable—beyond precedent, and beyond forgiveness—

Rigby withdraws as Tom addresses audience from his swag.

TOM: (*to audience*) And the unfortunate Major continued to revile himself, whilst I dozed off accepting his atonement for a default which would add some twelve hours to an estrangement of twenty-five years.

Some hours later, I was awakened by a weight across my neck. A stertorous breathing close to my ear, and an overwhelming smell of fresh fish bred a suspicion that was verified when I ran to the river.

Tom moves towards the water's edge to inspect.

The water level had been falling and now, here was the skeleton of Furlong's fish just above the water level surrounded by the tracks of a certain kangaroo dog! I thrashed away all the tracks in the hope that the hunters would attribute the theft to wildlife.

As Tom continues, the others assemble and inspect the scene of the crime silently and then disperse.

Amongst well-bred bushmen, lack of information is always carried off by august indifference; otherwise there would be derogation of dignity.

Tom and Rigby move from the river bank camp-site into the parlour of Maginnis' (late Waterton's), Farmer's Arms, Yooringa and Mrs. Maginnis enters.

The Deacon arrayed himself to wait on his countrywoman. Thompson rode with us as far as the pub on his way to Binney's. Then the General, silent and perturbed, followed me into the front parlour.

Wonderful weather for this time of year, Mrs. Maginnis.

MRS. MAGINNIS: Think we'll get some rain with the change of the moon?

TOM: Can we see Miss Vanderdecken, or Miss Flanagan, please?

MRS. MAGINNIS: They're gone. Went away just after sunrise. I was up early. Miss Vanderdecken heard me and made me wake Sam and send the boss to harness the buggy. She said she had a headache and wanted to get back to Echuca.

RIGBY: I should like to have seen her before she went.

MRS. MAGINNIS: She was expecting you last night. She all but sent Sam down to the river to see what was keeping you.

RIGBY: The young brat never came!

TOM: Oh. Yes he did, Colonel. He was sitting by me when you were diverting us with the history of old Fritz and Mina.

RIGBY: But he never gave me the message.

MRS. MAGINNIS: She didn't send any message, properly speaking. 'Sam', says she, about nine o'clock, 'ain't you going to see Mr. Collins? You was taken with him today.' And the boy said he'd been thinking of going down to give Mr. Collins a few wrinkles about one thing or another. 'Well, when you're there, you might take notice if you see Mr. Rigby; you'll see if he's busy or not. I'd rather you wouldn't speak to Mr. Rigby, nor let him see you.' So in one sense she didn't send him, but she was very uneasy till he came back.

TOM: And did he report himself to Miss Vanderdecken?

MRS. MAGINNIS: Oh yes. She had a long talk with him—or, properly speaking, she sat and listened to him for a good half-hour. He said all hands was fishing, and Mr. Rigby was spinning yarns that a person would go through fire and water to hear. After that, she went to her room, and Miss Flanagan with her and I never seen again until this morning. She came from the same place as you, Mr. Rigby, didn't she?

RIGBY: Yes.

MRS. MAGINNIS: I thought so. She told me, in the course of conversation, she knew a lot of people that you knew. I'm sorry you didn't see again. Well, you must excuse me; this is one of my busy days.

RIGBY: Tom . . . Tom . . . can you suggest any penance that would meet the merits of this case?

TOM: I can. Will you follow my advice?

RIGBY: I'll follow anybody's advice now—even yours.

TOM: Follow Miss Vanderdecken to Echuca. Leave your wagon, borrow Steve's horse, you'll be there almost as soon as she is.

RIGBY: How could I force myself on her after what has happened?

TOM: Apologise, grovel; in the face of Sam's evidence nothing but the truth will serve. Still, you can tell that truth so that your default was owing to a greatness of soul, inscrutable to the girl mind.

RIGBY: I must let the wretchedness and infamy of the transaction die out.

TOM: Wait on the ladies for a couple of days, exchange reminiscences, compare conclusions; in a word, quit yourself valiantly, and let the Lord do as seemeth Him good.

RIGBY: The penalties of this irrational and involuntary fidelity of mine transcend its advantages by a very long way.

TOM: My solicitude is not for yourself, Colonel, I'm thinking of Miss Vanderdecken.

RIGBY: Of course, we must view this from Miss Vanderdecken's standpoint. She is judge, jury and prosecutor and the case is closed.

TOM: I would rather than anything that you took my advice. You're pledged to do so, remember. I was never more serious in my life.

RIGBY: Be sure, she has taken my measure and I have lost the right to protest.

Rigby starts to leave.

By the way, do you know that boy's name? Sam? Sam what?

TOM: Oh . . . yes . . . er . . . Ferneyhurst. No. Brackenridge! You'll find him at the Hotel Echuca. Where you will also find Miss Vanderdecken.

(*to audience*)

On a Saturday afternoon some six or eight weeks later, I was drawn along with the crowd gathering at the Deniliquin Football Ground for the first match of the season. Suddenly, I was greeted by a well-grown lad emerging from the mob in the uniform of Echuca Juniors.

Sam and Tom pursue their different concerns at cross purposes in the following conversation:

SAM: How are you poppin' up, Collins? I suppose you was a bit cut up at not seein' me that mornin'.

TOM: Well, I did feel it.

SAM: Same here. But I reckoned you'd hear the rights of it from Mrs. Maginnis. You was goin' up for a mob o' cattle. Contract tumbled through somehow, I hear.

TOM: Yes, the whole thing was a failure. Where's Miss Vanderdecken, now?

SAM: Went back to Melb'n. What's come o' them two black horses o' yours?

TOM: Gone.

SAM: Sold?

TOM: Shook.

SAM: And your two mates in the speculation. How about them?

TOM: Same box. Cleaned out. Writ with me in sour misfortune's book. When did Miss Vanderdecken leave Echuca?

SAM: Let's see, after a fortnit, I seen her off. Do you know who cleaned you out?

TOM: Pete Davis and Dan Scott—stage names probably. Two smart, up-to-date chaps. Spooner picked them up on his way through from Wagga. Was Miss Vanderdecken in good spirits when you took back to Echuca?

SAM: Miserable as a bandicoot. How did you let them get away with it?

TOM: What took place rests solely between Pete and Dan and the Recording Angel. Our only concern was that our whole plant was gone in a sandstorm. Did the Colonel get back to Echuca before Miss Vanderdecken left?

SAM: No. Just missed by the skin o' your teeth as the saying is. Why ain't you follerin' those coves up?

TOM: I did for some weeks. But you said Miss Vanderdecken stayed in Echuca for a fortnight?

SAM: So she did. Is your mates follerin' them blokes yet?

TOM: The major said he would be back in Echuca in a week or so, did he not call on Miss Vanderdecken?

SAM: He was some days longer 'n expected. Is your mates follerin' them gallus-birds?

TOM: Rory has gone back to Goolumbulla. He has two horses to go on with, and he offered Spooner an' me fifty pounds each to repay our loss. We accepted a fiver each to help us on the warpath. So Miss Vanderdecken was gone before the Deacon came?

SAM: She went away in the mornin', an' he come in the afternoon. Think Spooner'll collar them coves?

TOM: Not merely possible, but a moral. He may have them by this. Did Miss Vanderdecken know the General was coming to Echuca?

SAM: Dunno, Arty did.

TOM: Miss Flanagan?

SAM: I say, Spooner'll give them chaps a matter o' five years without the option.

TOM: What for?

SAM: Horse-stealin'.

TOM: They didn't steal the horses. You're sure Miss Flanagan knew

SAM: Illegally in possession then.

TOM: They're not illegally in possession. Let Spooner alone. He's as shrewd as he's straight, and that's saying something. He has receipts for my two horses and Rory's one; and the rest were bought by himself. If he finds any of them he'll just watch his chance and quietly reshake them. You're sure Miss Flanagan knew that the Senator was coming?

SAM: Yes, I told her. I heard him tellin' Maginnis he'd be going to Echuca in a week, for good. Course he didn't get there for another week. Great ole preachin' we had that night down at the river. Mind you, there's a lot in it.

Things is drawin' towards a change, an' us Socialists is no more responsible for the comin' revolution than the petrel is for the storm it prognosticates. We want to sling the onus of rebellion on the monopolist. As Pompey said, 'Why will you prate of privileges to men with swords in their hands?' Makes me laugh.

TOM: Have you been talking to the Colonel during the last few weeks, Sam?

SAM: Stacks o' times. Me an' 'im's like brothers. Ain't he a man in a thousand.

He didn't come down with the las' rain. Pity that sort o' bloke ever dies. No loss o' time with me now, my thinkin' tackle's goin' like fury.

TOM: How did Miss Vanderdecken pass the time away while she stayed in Echuca?

SAM: On'y seen 'er a couple o' times, though I often seen Arty. Arty used to get me to hire a horse an' buggy an' take the two o' them for a bit of a drive up the river road, where you an' us began to overtake one another, if you remember. I say, why didn't you snap Miss Vanderdecken? She was fair collared on you that afternoon. I could see it stickin' out a mile.

TOM: She knew the Major in the Old Country, didn't she?

SAM: Noddin' acquaintance, likely. Gosh, ain't he a daisy? Knows everything, dash near. Sort o' bloke I'll be when I git fairly goin'. I used to wish I was an ole bloke, now I'm glad I got so much in front o' me. As Paine says, "If there be war, let it be in my time, that my children may have peace.' That's my idea too, I'm thinkin' about my kids.

TOM: Did the Deacon seem to take much interest in hearing about Miss Vanderdecken?

SAM: Well, yes; even if it did seem to make him sort o' melancholy. But you looked as if you was gone on her? Can't blame you—fact, I give you credit. She's a ding-donger. Same time, Arty's more my style. natural enough, considerin' she's the dead spit o' my missus. Though my missus is a lot younger.

Sam dashes off to join the game, Tom addresses the audience:

TOM: The umpire's whistle blew, and Sam was gone to have a welt at the bag o' wind and sneak a goal or two. I resumed my way, reflecting on the unsatisfactory issue of a romance which at one time had seemed to contain all the elements of happiness.

Miss Kate Vanderdecken seemed to me one who paused a moment, tremulous yet trustful, on this great stage of fools, then passed out into the lonely night.

And Jefferson Rigby? From that time, an accession of sadness was observable in his bearing, with an abatement of the cynicism that had lent a fascination to his homilies. Despite his habitual reticence, all this was evident to me.

THE END