BECKE LOUIS

TOM GERRARD

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

"Hallo! young lady, what on earth are you doing here?" and Gerrard bent down over his horse's shoulder, and looked inquiringly into the face of a small and exceedingly ill-clad girl of about ten years of age.

"Nothing, sir, I only came out for a walk, and to get some pippies."

"And where do you get them?"

"Down there, sir, on the sand," and the child pointed with a strong, sun-browned hand to the beach, which was within a mile.

"Eat them?"

"Yes—they're lovely. Jim and I roast them in the stockman's kitchen when auntie has gone to bed."

"And who is Jim?"

"Jim Incubus; I'm Mary Incubus."

"Mary *what*?"

"Incubus, sir."

Gerrard dismounted, and tying his reins to a stirrup, let his horse graze. Then taking his pipe out of his pocket, he filled and lit it, and motioned to the child to sit down beside him upon a

fallen honeysuckle tree.

"What is your auntie's name, my dear?" and he took the child's hand in his.

"Mrs Elizabeth Westonley."

"Ah! I thought so. Now, did you ever hear her talk of an Uncle Tom?"

"Yes, sir," replied the child, wonderingly, "he's a cattleman in the Northern Territory."

"Well! I'm the cattleman, Mary. I'm the Uncle Tom, and I've come to see you all."

"All the way from Cape York! Why! Uncle Westonley says it's two thousand miles from here."

"So it is, my dear," and the man stroked the child's tousled chestnut hair caressingly; "quite two thousand miles," and then as he looked at her pityingly he muttered something very uncomplimentary to Aunt Elizabeth.

"Are you really my uncle Thomas Gerrard?"

"I am really your Uncle Tom Gerrard, and you are my niece Mary. Your mother was my sister, whose name was Mary."

"Uncle Westonley likes you."

"Does he?" and the young man's kindly grey eyes smiled as he stroked his pointed beard. "Good old Ted!"

"Who's Ted?"

"Your Uncle Westonley, of course. Don't you call him 'Uncle Ted'?"

"Oh, *no!*" and the child's big eyes looked startlingly into his,

"I call him 'Uncle Westonley.' Aunt Elizabeth said I must never say 'Uncle Ted,' as it's vulgar, and she won't allow it, and uncle says I must be obedient to her."

Gerrard put out his right arm, drew her to him, and looked intently into her face. In her dreamy, violet-hued eyes, with the dark pencilled brows, and the small delicate mouth, he saw the image of his dead twin-sister, Mary.

"Poor little mite!" he again said to himself pityingly, as he looked at her coarse though not ill-kept clothing, "Lizzie always was a cold-hearted prig, and always will be to the end of her days —even in her moribund moments. How could she let this child wander out so far away from the station." Then he took two or three great puffs at his pipe. "How far is it to Marumbah, little niece Mary?"

"Five miles, sir."

"Don't say 'sir.' Who taught you to say 'sir'?"

"Aunt Elizabeth."

"But you must not say 'sir' to me. I'm your uncle. And you must call me 'Uncle Tom.' Understand?"

"Aunt Elizabeth insists on my saying 'sir' to gentlemen."

"Does she now? Well, my dear, you must never say 'sir' to me —I'll ask Aunt Elizabeth not to insist on your calling me 'sir.' You see I shouldn't like it I want you to call me 'Uncle Tom.' Lots of people call me Tom. Some of 'em call me Tom and Jerry— short, you know, for Thomas Gerrard."

"Aunt Elizabeth says you're godless and wild."

"Does she really?" and the grey eyes twinkled. "That's only *her* way of talking, you see. 'Godless and wild' doesn't mean anything very bad when Aunt Elizabeth says it It only means—well, nothing particular. When you are older you will understand."

"Yes, sir."

"*Uncle Tom!*"

"Yes, Uncle Tom."

"Now, Mary, what about these pippies? Will you let me come with you? I'm awfully fond of pippies—can eat bushels of 'em."

"Yes, Uncle Tom," and the child's face lighted up, "oh! I wish Jim was here too. Are you his uncle, too?"

Gerrard rubbed his cheek thoughtfully. His sister Elizabeth had no children, and he wondered who Jim could be.

"No, I *don't think* I am. When did he come to Marumbah?"

"Uncle Westonley brought him from Sydney about—about six months ago."

"Where is he now?"

"At home, with Aunt Elizabeth. He's been fractious, and is being punished."

"Being punished?"

"Yes, he's locked up in the spare room."

"What did he do?"

"Put a saddle on the brindle bull calf, and tried to make it backjump."

"Did it?"

"Oh, yes, beautifully, and Jim had his forehead cut, and a lot

of blood came."

Gerrard laughed as he put down his pipe, "And what did Uncle Westonley say?"

"Uncle Westonley is away in Sydney," said the child gravely, and as she spoke her eyes filled with tears.

Gerrard understood. "Well, never mind, Mary; now you and I shall go and get these pippies."

From his saddle dees he took a pair of green-hide hobbles, lifted off the saddle with its valise, hobbled the horse, and then holding the child's hand in his, set out towards the beach.

"Now, Mary, you and I are going to have a great old time. First of all, you are going to show me how *you* get pippies. Then we will come back and cook them, and have some tea and some damper as well, for I have both in my saddle-bags, and I have a wood duck too, which I shot this morning. Did you see it?"

"Yes, Uncle Tom; and your gun, too. Jim loves guns."

"Does he, my chick? Jim must be a man after my own heart."

"What's that, Uncle Tom?"

"Oh, I'll tell you some day. Now come along for the pippies. You show me how *you* get them, and I'll show you how *I* get them."

Holding his hand, the child led him down through the wild, sweet-smelling littoral scrub by a cattle track to the beach, where before them lay the blue Pacific, shining under the rays of the afternoon sun. The tide was low, and the "pippies" (cockles) were easily had, for they protruded their suckers out upon every few

inches of the sand. Gerrard, booted and spurred as he was, went into the water, dug into the sand with his hands, and helped the child to fill the basket she carried, and then, realising that she was excited, and being himself determined upon a certain course of action, he walked slowly back with her to where he had left the horses.

"Mary, dear, just sit down, and listen to me. I am not going to Marumbah to-night, and you must stay with me. We shall be there early in the morning."

"Oh, Uncle Tom! Aunt Elizabeth will punish me."

"Don't be afraid, chick—she won't. I will explain everything to her in the morning."

In a few minutes he had lit two fires, and when the coals were glowing on one, and the child was attending to the roasting of the pippies, he was boiling a billy of tea on the other, and laying out some cold salt beef and damper from his saddle-bags.

"Come, chick, you and I are going to have a great time to-night, as I told you, pippies and wild duck, and tea and damper, and after that is over you shall be tucked up in my blankets, and sleep until we hear the bell-birds calling to us in the morning."

"Aunt Elizabeth–"

"That's all right, chick. Aunt Elizabeth will have nothing to say about it. *I'll* settle with *her*. Now, sit down on that blanket—I daresay you're hungry, *eh?*"

"Please, Uncle Tom, let me go home, Aunt Elizabeth–"

"We'll go home, chick, when the bell-birds and the crockets

begin to sing. And Aunt Elizabeth won't say a word to you." He smiled somewhat grimly to himself, "don't be afraid of that. You and I are camping out tonight—like two old mates. By-the-way, where do you sleep at Marumbah?"

"In the little room, just off the saddle-room."

"And Jim?"

"Oh, Aunt Elizabeth doesn't like him to sleep in the house, so he sleeps in the stockman's spare room."

"How old is he, chick?"

The child bent her head in thought for a moment or two. "About ten, I think, Uncle Tom. He is really and truly such a good boy—Uncle Westonley says so, but Aunt Elizabeth says he is godless and an 'incubus.' What *does* incubus mean? I am one too."

"Nothing, nothing very much, little one," said Gerrard, as he held the breast of the wild duck he had plucked over the glowing coals of his fire; "you see, your Aunt Elizabeth doesn't mean to be unkind to you—it's only her way of saying that you and Jim are troublesome at times. And I don't think she will call you or Jim 'incubuses,' any more after to-morrow. Now, let us have something to eat. See, it is nearly dark."

They ate their supper to the murmur of the ever-sounding surf upon the beach, and then Gerrard spreading out his blankets under the shelter of a spreading wild honeysuckle, covered the child over with a sheet of waterproof cloth to keep off the dew.

"I must say my prayers, Uncle Tom." "Yes, dear," he said

softly, "but you needn't get up. Can't you say them lying down?"

"Oh, no, Uncle Tom. That would be very wrong, and denotes laziness, Aunt Elizabeth says. Do you say *your* prayers lying down?"

"Yes, chick," was the prompt response, "generally when I'm lying down at night in the bush, looking up at the stars. And I daresay it does 'denote laziness,' as Aunt Elizabeth says. But at the same time I think it really doesn't matter to God whether one is lying down or sitting up, or on one's knees when we pray to Him."

"Oh, Uncle Tom! Are you quite sure?"

"Dead sure, little woman—as sure as ducks are ducks—especially when little girls are tired."

"Then I'll say my prayers lying down."

She clasped her two little sunbrowned hands together and said the Lord's Prayer, and then paused.

"Shall I say the extrack?"

"The extrack?"

"Yes, the extrack from the Catechism. Aunt Elizabeth composed some of it."

"Oh! she composed some of it, did she? Yes, by all means say 'the extract.'"

The child closed her eyes again, and began very slowly:

"'Before I slumber, O Lord, I comment myself to Thy care and protection, however unworthy and thoughtless my conduct has been during the day now closed.'" ("That's Aunt Elizabeth,"

muttered Gerrard under his breath.) "'I will try hard to hasten my rebellious spirit,—no not hasten, but chasten—I always say that wrong, Uncle Tom—to reverently submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters: to regulate my conduc', and demean myself with all humility; to keep my hands from picking and stealing, to recollect that I may be called this night before, Thee to answer for my many sins and transgressions.' That's all Uncle Tom."

Gerrard listened with the utmost gravity.

"That's all right, Mary; but I think it is a bit too long a prayer for very little girls. Now, by and by, I'll teach you a new prayer."

"A new prayer! Oh, that *will* be nice! Sometimes Uncle Westonley let's me pray for Bunny."

"Who is Bunny?"

"My native bear. I'll show him to you to-morrow. You see, when Uncle Westonley comes to see me at night, after Aunt Elizabeth has heard me say the Lord's Prayer, and the extrack, he lets me pray for Bunny because he is full of ticks, and Jim says hell die. I say 'dear God, don't let Bunny die, freshen and preserve him in Thy sight, and make him whole.' I got that out of a book, and Uncle Westonley says it will do very nicely."

"Couldn't be better, little woman. *I* think it's a grand prayer."

"But, Uncle Tom, Bunny has been sicker an' sicker, and won't eat anything but the very youngest, weeniest gum leaves, and Aunt Elizabeth says he's a hideous little beast. And Jim and me love him to death."

"Don't worry about what Aunt Elizabeth says," and Gerrard bent down and kissed her. "I'll try and cure Bunny for you. I know a heap of things about native bears and ticks, and know exactly what to do."

The child smiled delightedly into his face,* "Oh! Uncle Tom, you are as kind as Uncle Westonley, good-night."

"Good-night, little woman," and then the man laid himself down upon the sandy ground beside her, with a certain resolve in his mind.

At six o'clock in the morning, he rode up to Marumbah Station with little Mary held in front of him. Mrs Westonley, pale-faced, austere, and much agitated, met him as he dismounted.

"Oh, dear, Thomas! Just fancy *you* finding the child and bringing her home! I sent out Toby, the black boy, to look for her, and I suppose he is looking for her still—the naughty–"

"That's all right, Lizzie, don't get into a fluster," said Gerrard placidly, as he dismounted and kissed his sister, "Toby *did* find her—that is, he found her and me comfortably camped for the night. He's coming along presently with my packhorse."

Mrs Westonley turned angrily upon the child, and was about to deliver a lecture, when her brother placed his hand upon her arm and drew her aside.

"Look here, Lizzie, I'm your guest, and I'm also your brother; but if you bully that unfortunate youngster, I'll just get into my saddle again, and ride off without putting my foot over your threshold."

Mrs Westonley's pale, clear-cut face flushed deeply. "I never expected such a remark as this from you, Thomas."

"And I never expected that you would have treated your own sister's child as you have done," was the stern reply; "I found her five miles from here, wandering alone. Have you no love or sympathy in your heart, or compassion for children, because you have none yourself?" and the grey eyes flashed.

Mrs Westonley gazed at him in astonishment, and twined her hands together in mingled anger and fear that this brother—fifteen years younger than herself—should so dare to speak to *her*.

"The child is a great trial–"

"Aye, an 'incubus,' you call her, the poor little mite. But I hardly thought you read novels."

"*I* read novels! *Never!* What do you mean?"

Gerrard drew her inside the house, and patted her cheek, ready to forgive.

"Oh, I did read a book somewhere about a stepmother or an aunt or something of the kind, who was always talking about some unfortunate child committed to her care, as an 'incubus.' Now, that's all I have to say. I *love* the kid already. She has Mary's eyes and Mary's voice, and, *if you* don't want her *I* do. When will breakfast be ready, old girl?"

"Eight o'clock," said Mrs Westonley faintly, wondering if she were awake or dreaming. Who but this handsome, sunburnt brother would dare to lecture her, and then wind up by addressing

her as “old girl”!

CHAPTER II

When Captain Richard Gerrard—the father of Mrs Westonley—came to Australia from India, he first settled in Gippsland, in Victoria. A retired military man, with ample means, he devoted himself successfully to pastoral pursuits, and soon took a leading part in the advancement of the colony. He had married the daughter of an English chaplain, by whom he had but one child—Elizabeth—and when she was but an infant of two years of age, Mrs Gerrard died. For thirteen years her husband remained faithful to her memory, and then did what all his neighbours regarded as a very sensible thing—he married the daughter of a neighbouring squatter, and sent his child to England to be educated. His second wife was a beautiful, vigorous, and well-trained woman, mentally and physically, and although her parents were English, she was a native of the colony, and, naturally enough, took the deepest interest in all that concerned the station, the advancement of her husband's interests, and the colony in which she was born. Two children were born to them, a twin son and daughter, and as time went on, Captain Gerrard's station became one of the best in Victoria, and the "R over G" brand of cattle brought "top" prices in the Melbourne market.

After completing her education in England, Elizabeth Gerrard returned to Australia. She was a remarkably handsome girl, but cold, even to chilliness, in her manner, especially to her step-

mother, for she had much resented her father's second marriage. The six years she had spent in England seemed to have entirely changed her character and disposition, and when soon after her return, Edward Westonley, a young squatter, who was the owner of Marumbah Downs, fell violently in love with her pink and white beauty, and she accepted him, even her father, although he loved her—was secretly pleased.

Marumbah Downs was over a hundred miles from Captain Gerrard's station, and there Westonley took his bride. He was a cheerful, somewhat careless man, very "horsey" in his tastes, and fond of good company. Both his father-in-law and Mrs Gerrard liked him greatly, and the two children by the second marriage, Tom and Mary, gave him their affection the first time they saw him.

The boy Tom grew up like most Australian-born boys of his class of life and surroundings, and before he was twenty years of age, was managing one of his father's stations in Queensland, and managing it prosperously. Soon after he had taken charge, he heard from his father that his twin sister Mary was to be married to a local medical man—a Doctor Rayner, who had been her steady admirer since she was a girl of fifteen.

"It will be a very happy union," wrote Captain Gerrard to his son, "of that I am certain, and although he's too young a man to have much of a practice for some time, he'll get along all right. And even if things do go against him, it won't matter to him and Mary—I'll stand to them. Mary is writing to you by this mail."

Then after alluding to some business matters in connection with his various stations he went on to say. "Westonley comes over to see us now and then—Lizzie never. Poor Westonley! Lizzie has crumpled him up altogether, although when he comes to see us he is the same cheery Ted of yore, and he, Rayner, and I had some grand kangarooing together when he was here last. Lizzie, during the past five years has become more and more crotchety, and has given herself up to 'religious thought *and* work,' as she calls it, from which I surmise that her's is a reign of terror at Marumbah Downs. She has built a little tin-pot chapel in which there is not enough room to swing a cat by the tail, and had it opened a few months ago by some swagger curate from Melbourne—poor old Preston, the Scotch parson at Marumbah township not being considered good enough, and having incurred her wrath by openly stating that when he had a cold he took whisky toddy at bedtime! then the silly woman—who rules poor Westonley with a rod of iron—had a notice put up in the men's quarters that all hands, from the head stockman down to the black boys, were to attend service every future Sunday morning and evening, Westonley—whom she wanted to conduct the service—bucked, and said he could not make an ass of himself before his employés, and the next day the entire crowd—stockmen, fencers, sawyers, etc.—rolled up to the station and gave Westonley a week's notice, and the poor fellow had to effect a compromise, they agreeing to come into the 'Chapel' and let Lizzie read them a chapter 'of suthin' outer the Bible,' if they could have the rest of the day for

their usual Sunday recreations—euchre or kangarooing. I never thought Lizzie would turn out to be a crank, but a crank she is, and I'm afraid Westonley is not at all a happy man, though he yields to her in almost everything.

"Your mother has not been at all well for the post six months. She will be very lonely when Mary leaves the house, and you must come to us for a month or two next year; 'twill cheer her up. She doesn't want Lizzie—neither do I; she'd depress a dead bull calf, by just looking at him."

And then within a twelvemonth, came the tragedy of the Gerrard family.

Captain Gerrard, by Dr Rayner's advice, decided to take his wife to Sydney to consult a specialist, and Rayner went with them. They took passage on a coastal steamer named the *Cassowary*—a small paddle-wheel vessel of three hundred tons, old, ill-found, and utterly unable to cope with the savage easterly gale that met her as she rounded Cape Howe, and doots north for Sydney.

A fortnight later, Mary Rayner, as she was putting her two months' old baby girl to sleep, was called from her bedroom to see a stranger in the sitting-room. He was a stockman from a station seventy miles away on the coast.

He silently handed her a letter, and then turned away, She opened and read it. It was from die Police Inspector of the Cape Howe district, and in a few sympathetic words told her that the *Cassowary* had been lost near Cape Howe, and that every soul

on board but one seaman and a child of four years of age had perished, and that her husband, her father and her mother had been buried three days previously.

She never survived the shock, and when Tom Gerrard made his long journey down from North Queensland to Victoria, to comfort and aid his loved sister, he found that she had died a month before.

It took some months to settle up Captain Gerrard's affairs. He had made a will devising his head station to his wife, together with (less a certain reservation) the sum of ten thousand pounds. His two other stations—one in Central Queensland, and the other in the Far North of that colony,—he bequeathed, the former to his "dear daughter, Mary Rayner" and the latter to his "son, Thomas Gerrard, together with such moneys as might be at his (the testator's) death, lying to the credit of the two stations." Then—and here came the sting of the "certain reservation" to Elizabeth Westonley—to his "dearly esteemed son-in-law, Edward Westonley, of Marumbah Downs, I give and bequeath the sum of one thousand pounds, to be by him used in the manner he may deem best for the benefit of the Marumbah Jockey Club, of which for ten years he has been patron. To his wife (my daughter Elizabeth) I bequeath as a token of my appreciation of her efforts to improve the moral condition of illiterate and irreligious bushmen, the sum of one thousand pounds, provided that she first consults and has the approval of my wife Eleanor, as to the manner in which the said money shall be expended."

Then, as if to show that despite this gentle sarcasm towards the cold-hearted daughter who had never forgiven him for his second marriage, and had so long alienated herself from her stepbrother and sister, he still bore her a parental affection, he added another clause (also with an unintended sting in it) to the effect that if Mrs Westonley should have issue, male or female, five thousand pounds was to be invested for her first child, to be paid upon coming of age, "also the like sum for the first child of my beloved and affectionate daughter, Mary Rayner."

"Poor Lizzie!" said Tom Gerrard to his brother-in-law, Westonley, after the contents of the will were made known, "she won't be pleased at this, I fear, Ted."

"She won't, Tom," replied Westonley frankly, as he placed his hand on Gerrard's shoulder with a kindly gesture, "but, between you and I, she has nothing to be angered at. I am pretty well in, and if I died to-morrow, she would be well provided for. And I don't think—I'm not disloyal to my wife—I don't think that she was quite as kind as she might have been to your mother and to you, and to poor Mary."

Of course the death of Mrs Gerrard simultaneously with that of her husband, somewhat complicated matters, for she had made no will, and was evidently not aware of the nature of that made by Captain Gerrard; for she was of too gentle and kindly a nature to have permitted him to have written anything that could have aroused a feeling of resentment in the mind of his first-born child, although that child, from the day she returned from

England had treated her with unconcealed hauteur and coldness.

At last, however, matters were finally settled, and Mrs Westonley, although she did resent most bitterly what she called her father's "wicked will," consented, at her husband's earnest request, to take charge of and educate Mary Rayner's orphan child.

"It will be a disgrace to us, Elizabeth, if we send the poor child to strangers," Westonley had said to her, almost sternly. "Tom, although he is a bachelor, would be overjoyed if we let her go to him."

"He is most unfitted to have the care of a child," said Mrs Westonley, icily; "from his conversation I should imagine he would be a most *decidedly* improper person."

"But he means well, you know; but, like your poor father, he's a bit too outspoken and rough. And… and Elizabeth, we have no children of our own, and you will get to love the poor little one."

"I will make no guarantee as to conferring my affections upon a child whose disposition may prove to be utterly unworthy of the tuition and Christian training I have undertaken to give her —at your request," was the acidulous reply.

Westonley groaned inwardly, but made no answer.

A few months after this conversation, Tom Gerrard made a short visit to Marumbah Downs to see Westonley and his dead sister's child. He had just returned from the little bay near Cape Howe, where the *Cassowary* had been castaway, and where his father, mother, and Dr Rayner had been buried, together with all

the other passengers and members of the crew whose bodies had been washed ashore. After dinner, he, Westonley, and his step-sister, were discussing Captain Gerrard's will, when just then there came in a neighbour of Westonley's—a squatter named Brooke—who was one of the executors. Mrs Westonley received him rather coldly, and when Tom Gerrard began describing to him the situation of the place where his father and mother were interred, she listened with an ill-concealed impatience.

"Well! Mrs Westonley," said Brooke, stretching out his spurred and booted feet, "your father and mother died together—as they lived, hand in hand, and heart to heart."

"The late Mrs Gerrard was *not* my mother."

There was a dead silence, and then Tom Gerrard rose, and looked his step-sister in the face with undisguised and bitter contempt.

"No, thank God! she was *not*, but she was *mine*, I am proud to say."

Then he held out his hand to Westonley, "Good-bye, Ted, I'm leaving."

"For heaven's sake, Tom!… Elizabeth, you forget yourself! Oh, I say, Brooke, don't let him go."

But Tom Gerrard, his heart aflame with anger, pushed Brooke and his brother-in-law aside, went to the stables, saddled his horse, and rode off to the Marumbah township, fifteen miles away, and next morning Westonley received a note.

"Dear old Ted,—You and I will always be the same old pals.

I know you will be kind to Mary's little one, and will write to me from time to time, as I shall to you. But I can't forgive Lizzie. You will say I write in anger. *I do*. And yet I am a man quick to forgive an ordinary affront, even from a woman. You understand, old boy. TOM."

And so for many years, Tom Gerrard kept away from Marumbah, till his step-sister and Westonley wrote, and urged him to visit them.

CHAPTER III

Breakfast was served punctually at eight o'clock, and Tom Gerrard, whose equanimity was now quite restored, took his seat opposite his sister with a smiling face, and in a few minutes, under the sunshine of his genial manner, Mrs Westonley, much against her own inclination, began to thaw, and presently found herself chatting quite pleasantly with him.

"I've sprung myself on you two or three days before you expected me, Lizzie, but I'm sure you don't mind."

"Indeed no, Thomas. I am very glad I wish Edward was here, but the mailman may bring me a letter from him this morning. He said in his last letter he would be sure to return home by Saturday, and to-day is Thursday. But what brought you here so quickly, Thomas?"

"Well, I was very lucky in getting a passage in one of the new Dutch mail steamers, instead of having to wait for the slow old *Eagle* so I reached Melbourne a week earlier than I expected. Then at Melbourne I caught the steamer for Port Albert, just as she was leaving. At Port Albert, instead of waiting two days for the coach for Marumbah, I bought a couple of horses, a gun, and some other gear, and came the ninety odd miles comfortably, instead of being shaken to pieces in one of Cobb's awful coaches."

"But what an unnecessary expense, Thomas. The two horses–"

"Oh! the whole thing, gun and all included, didn't run into fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds! Oh, Thomas! And your coach fare would have been but three pounds! You really are dreadfully extravagant."

"Not at all, Lizzie. I shall not lose much in the end. Ted will buy the horses, and all the gear from me. I think I can jew him into giving me something for them, even if it is only thirty quid."

"Thirty what?"

"Thirty quid—thirty pounds. Now my dear old Lizzie, don't pretend to be shocked at the word 'quid.' You know you've heard all the colonial expressions—and poor dad used them pretty frequently."

"Indeed he did, Thomas—too frequently, I'm afraid."

"Ah, well, Lizzie my dear, it doesn't matter now. By-the-way, doesn't little Mary breakfast with you?"

"Oh yes, usually; but this morning I told Janet to give her her breakfast in her bedroom, then after she has made herself presentable she can join us. I'm sure she and that dreadful boy Jim will get you to inspect their 'cubby house' down on the river bank in the course of the day. Sometimes Edward makes me quite cross by the way he yields to their stupid whims. He actually spent a whole day in helping them build their precious cubby house."

Gerrard laughed: "Good old Ted—just as much of a boy as he was twenty years ago! But who is this youngster Jim?"

"Oh, I quite forgot to tell you about him when we wrote to you.

He is another of Edward's extravagances. You will remember that when the *Cassowary* was lost, the only survivors were one seaman and a child of four years of age. Well, about eight months ago, when Edward was travelling to Sydney in the *Balclutha*, he —as he always does—made the acquaintance of every seaman on board. One of them, a quartermaster, turned out to be the man who had been washed on shore from the *Cassowary*. Of course Edward was very much interested, and the man, whom he says is a very respectable steady person, told him that he had taken care of the child, who was his fellow-survivor. Well, the end of it was that Edward went to see the boy, and brought him home with him. He *will* do those extraordinary things."

"Who were the boy's parents?"

"No one knows. Coll, the quartermaster, said that there were a great number of steerage passengers on board, and that he remembers seeing a young woman and her husband with this child, whom they called Jim, but what was their name was never ascertained. It was believed that they were newly-arrived emigrants, for no inquiries were made from any quarter about them, and so Coll, who seems to be a very kind man, took the child to his own home, although he has quite a large family, and actually did not want to part with him. Of course, Edward, as usual, went to extremes, and gave the Coll family fifty pounds."

"It was a generous action, Lizzie," said Gerrard gravely, "and shows him to be a good fellow—and a Christian."

Mrs Westonley looked at her step-brother in surprise. "But,

Thomas, you don't seem to understand. These Coll people are really very poor—the father, I suppose, earns about seven pounds a month as quartermaster, and there are nine children. I think it was ridiculous of Edward giving them any money at all, considering the fact that he was lightening their cares by taking this boy, Jim, off their hands."

"Ah! Lizzie, we don't know. They may have been very fond of the kid—in fact they *must* have been, or they would not have kept him for six years, when they could have sent him to the Government Orphanage at Parramatta."

"I think that is what they should have done."

"No, you don't, Lizzie. You would not have let the youngster go into an Orphanage had you known of the matter. You have father's heart, Lizzie, under that pretty blouse of yours, although you pretend to be so cold, and put on the 'keep-off-the-style'—even to me."

"I'm not cold-hearted, Thomas."

Gerrard rose from his scat, and in another moment, Mrs Westonley found herself in his arms, and seated upon his knees.

"Now, look here Lizzie," and he kissed her, "I'm going to do my level best to please you, for you are my sister. I daresay I have done many things to displease you, but I love you, old woman, I do indeed. And whatever I may have said in the past I 'take back' as we bushmen say, and I want you to give me some of your affection. I know you have tons of it concealed under that prim little manner of yours, but you are too proud to show it. And see,

Lizzie, old girl, I'm not really the reckless scallawag you think me to be," and he stroked her hair, and looked so earnestly and pleadingly into her eyes, that her woman's heart triumphed, and she leant her head on his shoulder.

"I never thought you cared for me, Tom," she said "and I daresay that I have been to blame in many respects. Edward is one of the best husbands in the world, but he is careless and all but irreligious, and I cannot—I really cannot change my nature and be anything more than politely civil to the friends he sometimes brings here—they are rough, noisy and bucolic. I am always urging him to leave a manager at Marumbah and retire from squatting altogether. I do not like Australia, and wish to live in England, but he will not hear of it, although we have ample means to enable us to live in comfort, if not luxury."

Gerrard smiled as he gazed around the handsomely furnished room, and, mentally compared it with his own rough dining room on his station in the Far North.

"I should call this a pretty luxurious diggings, Lizzie," he said; "there are not many such houses as Marumbah Head Station in Australia."

His half-sister shrugged her shoulders. "You should see some of the country houses in England, Thomas. And then another reason why I dislike bush life is the utter lack of female society."

Gerrard raised his brows. "Why, there are the three Gordon girls at Black River station, only ten miles away; they certainly struck me as being graceful, refined girls."

"Mrs Gordon is not a lady, and makes no secret of it. Her father was a fishcurer at Inverness, and before that a herring fisher."

"But she speaks, acts, and bears herself like a lady," protested Gerrard.

"It doesn't matter—she is not one. How Major Gordon, who comes from an old Scottish family, could marry her, I cannot understand. She was a nursery governess, or something like that."

"Yet Gordon seems a very happy man, and the girls–"

"The girls are all very well, although too horsey for me. I cannot tolerate young women bounding about all over the country after kangaroos, in company with a lot of rough men in shirts and moleskins, attending race meetings, and calling the Roman Catholic clergyman 'Father Jim' to his face. It's simply horrible."

"Well! what about Mrs Brooke and Ethel Brooke?" asked Gerrard; "surely they are ladies in every sense of the word?"

"I admit that they are better than the Gordons, but Ethel Brooke is a notorious jilt, and her mother has absolutely no control of her; then Mr Brooke himself is more like one of his own stockmen in appearance than a gentleman by birth and education."

Gerrard looked up at the ceiling—then gave up any further argument in despair. "I'll tell you what you want, Lizzie," he said, cheerfully, "you want about six months in Melbourne or Sydney."

"I detest Melbourne; it is hot, dusty, dirty, noisy, and vulgar."

"Then Sydney?"

"Of course, I like Sydney; but Edward never will stay there more than a week—he is always dying to be back among his cattle and horses."

"I'll try my hand with him, and see what I can do with the man," then he added,

"Now, let us get on with breakfast. Then we'll see this cubby house, and I'll diagnose the bear's complaint."

As soon as breakfast was over, Mrs Westonley left the room to put on her hat, and Gerrard stretched himself out in a squatter's chair on the verandah to smoke his pipe. Presently he heard his sister calling, "Jim, where are you? I want you."

"Yes, Mrs Westonley!" came the reply in a boyish treble, and the owner of it wondered what made her voice sound so differently from its usual hard, sharp tone.

"Jim, come here and see my brother. He, you, and Mary, and I are all going down to the cubby house."

Suppressing a gasp of astonishment, the boy came to her to where Gerrard and she were now sitting.

"Thomas, this is Jim."

Gerrard jumped up and held out his hand.

"How are you, Jim? Glad to see you," and he smiled into the boy's sunburnt face. "By Jove! you are a big chap for a ten year old boy. What are you going to be—soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor, eh?"

"I did want to be a sailor, sir; but now I'm going to be a

stockman."

Gerrard smiled again, and surveyed the boy closely. He was rather tall for his age, but not weedy, with a broad sturdy chest, and his face was almost as deeply bronzed as that of Gerrard himself, and two big, honest brown eyes met his gaze steadily and respectfully; the squatter took a liking to him at once, as he had to his sister's child.

"Well, Jim, I'm going to stay here a week, and you'll have to tote me around, and keep me amused—see? You and Mary between you."

"Yes, sir."

"Any fish in Marumbah River?"

"Lots and lots—two kinds of bream, Murray cod, jew fish, and speckled trout, and awful big eels."

"Ha! that's good enough. Got fishing lines and hooks?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then bring 'em along. Where is Mary, Lizzie?"

"Here she is," and Mrs Westonley brought her forward, the child's eyes dancing with pleasure; "she was too excited to eat any breakfast, until I insisted. Thomas, they'll worry you to death. You don't know them."

Gerrard threw his feet up in the air, like a boy, and rapped his heels together—"I'm fit for anything—from fishing to riding bull calves, or cutting out a wild bees' nest from a gum tree a mile high. Oh! we're going to have a high old time. I say, Mary, where's the invalid Bunny?"

“In the saddle-room.”

“Then come along, and I’ll prescribe for the poor, tailless gentleman,” and he jumped to his feet. “We shall not be long, Lizzie—are you ready?”

“I shall be in ten minutes, Thomas,” and the children looked wonderingly at her, for she actually smiled at them.

CHAPTER IV

A few days after the return of the owner of Marumbah Downs, he, with Gerrard and the black stockman, Toby, were camped on the bank of a creek about thirty miles from the head station. They had started out at daylight to muster some of the outlying cattle camps, and now after a hard day's riding were stretching themselves out upon the grassy bank to rest, whilst Toby was lighting the fire in readiness for supper. On the top of the bank the three hardy stockhorses and a packmare, were grazing contentedly on the rich green grass, and lying at Westonley's feet were two beautiful black-and-tan cattle dogs, still panting with their exertions. The camp had been made in a grove of mimosa trees, within a hundred yards of the clear waters of the creek, which rippled musically over its rocky bed as it sped swiftly to the sea. It wanted an hour to sunset, and already the hum of insects was in the air, and a faint cool breeze which had been stirring the green graceful fronds of the mimosas, and wafting fleecy strips of white across the blue dome above, had died away.

In the thick foliage of a cedar tree on the opposite bank, a pheasant and his mate were hopping about, uttering their harsh, rude notes; then came a whir and whistle of wings and a quick passing shadow overhead as a flock of black duck sped over the tree tops to some sandy-banked, reed-margined pool near by.

Westonley, a big, bushy-bearded man, raised himself on one

elbow, and watched them disappear; then he called to Toby to take the gun and follow.

"What's the use of 'em, Ted?" said Gerrard, as pipe in mouth, and with hands clasped under his head, he gazed upwards to the sky. "There's two scrub turkeys in the saddle-bags; don't be such a beastly glutton."

"You mind your own business, my little man. You like scrub turkey. I don't. Give me a black or a wood duck, freshly killed, before all scrub or 'plain' turkeys in Australia. And move yourself, you useless animal, and get one of your turkeys and pluck it while Toby is getting a duck or two. Wonderfully intelligent nigger is Toby. I've never yet known him to fail in getting me a duck if there was one within a mile. I say, Tommy, d'ye like crawfish? This creek here is full of 'em. We'll get some after supper."

"All right! I'm with you there," said Gerrard, as he pulled out two scrub turkeys from the saddle-bags, and then seizing one by the legs, he took aim at the broad back of his friend, and the fat, heavy bird struck him fairly in the middle of it. The big man never moved, except to carelessly put his hand out behind, and taking the turkey, began to pluck it.

"Tommy," he said, presently, "d'ye know how to make crawfish soup? It's grand!"

"Can make it as well as you can, sonny," replied Gerrard, as he sat down and began plucking the other bird.

"Fearful lot of cubs at the 'Union' now in Sydney," said the

older man, meditatively. “Hate going into the place. Met the two young Arlingtons there the other day, and asked ‘em if they were going home to the station. ‘No jolly fear,’ said one of the cubs —they have just come back from college in England—‘we’ve had enough of Portland Downs and bullock punching, branding, and all the rest of the beastly thing.’ ‘But you’ll go and see your father?’ I asked. ‘Well, I don’t think so, you know, Mr Westonley,’ drawled the elder cub, ‘it’s a beastly long way, and takes such a devil of a time to get there—fourteen hundred miles by steamer is no joke, and we have to be back in England in five months. So the governor is coming down here to have a palaver with us.’ It hurt me, Tom, to hear these two youngsters talking like that, for Arlington is over seventy years of age. And they were good lads until he sent them to England to college with more money than was good for them. And it has done them harm—made cads of ‘em,” and he viciously tugged at the wing feathers of the bird he was plucking. “Your father used to say that Oxford and Cambridge turned out more good men, and more moneyed snobs into the world than all the other colleges in the universe.”

“Daresay,” said Tom Gerrard, carelessly, as he began a surgical operation on his turkey. “I have heard my father say that old Arlington, who was one of the best of the old time squatters, made a mistake in sending those two boys home with unlimited money and credit. I suppose they’ll turn out rotters.”

“Most likely. And Arlington—by thunder, can’t that old fellow of seventy ride through scrub—thinks that they will take his

place on Portland Downs when he dies, and be a credit to the colony. *I* wouldn't have 'em on Marumbah as jackeroos, at a pound a week. But yet there is good stuff in them, Tom, and good English blood—the best in the world. Hallo! this turkey has eggs; just the very thing for the crawfish soup to-morrow."

Presently two shots rang out in quick succession.

"Toby has got on to 'em," said Westonley; "how do you cook black duck, freshly-killed, sonny, when you're camping out?"

"Grill 'em."

"The whole carcass?"

"Yes."

"Well, you must have degrading, greedy customs up in Queensland. Why, the only part—but there, I'll show you presently when Toby comes back. Tommy!"

"Yes."

"This sort of thing is all right, isn't it?" and the big man waved his great arm vaguely around his head.

"Yes, it's as fine a bit of country as there is anywhere in Australia," replied the younger man, who knew how devoted his companion was to Marumbah. "In fact it is all good country on Marumbah. I wish my run was half as good. Still I've nothing to grumble at. There are five thousand cattle on Ocho Rios now, and it will carry another two thousand easily."

Presently Toby appeared carrying three ducks, which he handed to his master, who felt them approvingly. "They're all right, Toby. Go and look to your fire. Now, Tom, my son, I'll

show you the only way to fix up a black duck quickly, and correctly as well." Plucking the thick coating of feathers off the underneath half of a bird from the lower part of the neck down, he made a deep, sweeping curve with his sheath knife, removed the entire breast denuded of plumage, and then threw the rest to the dogs. A second bird was done the same way, and the two portions were then skewered through with a piece of hard, green wood, sprinkled with salt, and handed to the black boy, who soon had them frizzling merrily over a glowing fire.

Gerrard nodded approval. "Quick, but wasteful, old man. You would never do for a cook in a well-regulated household." Then cutting off a large piece of the turkey, he skewered it in the same manner, and hung up the rest for Toby to eat.

Night came swiftly, and, as the two friends ate their supper, and drank their strong "billy" tea, the stars came out, and the heavy dew began to fall upon the grass. Spreading their blankets under the mimosas, they lit their pipes, and with their saddles for pillows, began to discuss various matters—the past day's work, the price of fat cattle in Melbourne, the late drought in South Australia, and such other all-important subjects to Australian pastoralists.

Then Gerrard, after describing some of his experiences and troubles with the wild blacks on Cape York Peninsula where his station, "Ocho Rios," was situated, said:

"By the way, Ted. That was a curious thing that you should come across that youngster Jimmy, just through having a yarn

with a sailor on board the *Balclutha*."

"Very curious; no—it's something more than that Tom. It was as if the Power above had directed it. This man Coll was one of the quartermasters, and only mentioned the *Cassowary* in the most casual manner to me as we were passing the place where she went ashore. 'I was in her, sir,' he said in the most simple, matter-of-fact manner, 'and me and a poor little boy about four, was the only ones as was saved.'

"'Good heavens!' I said, 'you are the one man in the world I wanted particularly to meet I went especially to Sydney, but could not find any trace of you except your name in the shipping office where you had been on the *Cassowary* as an A.B. And I advertised in all the Australian papers for you and the boy, but you seemed to have vanished off the face of the earth.'

"'It's very easy to explain, sir,' he said. 'As soon as I got to Sydney, I went to the Sailors' Home, taking the boy with me. There was hundreds of people wanted to take him, but I was too fond of the kid to give him up to anyone. I suppose it was wrong of me, seeing as I have a big family of my own, which was then living at Newcastle. But I knew the old woman wouldn't make too many bones about another mouth to feed.'

"Then he went on to say that being afraid the boy would be taken from him by some of the many people who wanted to adopt him, he slipped away with him one night from the Sailors' Home, and took him on board a collier schooner, whose captain he knew, and who was leaving Sydney on the following morning for

Wellington, New Zealand. The skipper of the vessel consented to take Jimmy away with him, and then bring him to Newcastle on the return voyage—the collier belonged to, and always loaded at Newcastle—and hand him over to Mrs Coll. This was done, and in a few months, although Coll was continually asked by people what had become of the youngster, he always told the same story—the boy had been adopted by a family with plenty of money, whose name he was not at liberty to reveal, etc.

"Then, of course, I told him that I was the son-in-law of Captain Gerrard, whom he remembered perfectly well, as also your mother and poor Rayner. We had quite a long talk, and in the end I succeeded in wresting a promise from him that if 'the old woman' was agreeable to parting with Jimmy, he would also consent.

"I went to Newcastle with him and saw his wife, who brought the boy to me. He was quite decently dressed, and got into my heart right away… And I thought that Lizzie would like him too." His voice dropped, and he ceased speaking for a few minutes.

"Well, I had a hard struggle to induce the worthy woman to give him up, but in the end she consented. Then I talked about little Mary, and how happy the two would be together, and that it would not be natural for two children who had been rendered orphans by the same dreadful calamity to be separated. The poor creature's face was streaming with tears when she at last consented. 'It's no for the sake o' the money I pairt wi' the bairn. It's little he costs me, an' my own children will be sore at heart for

many a lang day after he goes!'.. But she recognised that it would be wrong of her to refuse—and so the matter was fixed up."

"Good old Ted!"

"Well—keep this dark from Lizzie, old man—I gave 'em a cheque for two hundred and fifty pounds."

Gerrard's clear laugh. "Poor Lizzie! She thinks you gave them fifty pounds only."

"Just so, just so—you see, old man, Lizzie isn't a bit mean—and she doesn't know that I am as well in as I am, so I told her a fifth of the truth. I said that fifty pounds was a great help to a hard-working man with a large family."

"Cunning beggar!"

"Then, as Coll struck me as being a downright, straightforward man, who had a pretty stiff pull of it to bring up and educate his children decently on seven pounds a month—seaman's wages.—I got him a berth as wharfinger to a steamship company at twelve pounds, and he was made as happy as a sandboy, I can tell you: Lizzie knows that much, for I told her. And she lets the youngster write to the Colls now and then."

"Does she?" said Gerrard, dryly. He could not help it. Then he sat up, and re-filled his pipe.

"Ted, old chap, I like that youngster. Let me have him and take him to Ocho Rios with me. I want little Mary most, but know you won't part with her, and even if you would, a cattle station in the Far North is no place for a girl. But let me have the boy. I'll be good to him."

Westonley made no answer at first. Then he said slowly, “I’ll tell you in the morning, Tom. Good-night.”

CHAPTER V

Soon after sunrise, as the two friends were drinking their morning tea ere they started back for Marumbah, Westonley told Gerrard that he had decided to let him take Jim away with him to Ocho Rios.

"He is provided for in my will, Tom, but you must never let him know it. I think it is a mistake to let youngsters know that they will have money left to them some day."

"Quite so, Ted. And I am sure that you will never regret letting me have him, and I will bring him up as if he were my own son. There is no school within two hundred miles of Ocho Rios, but I think I am quite capable of giving him a decent education."

"Little Mary won't like it, Tom. She is passionately fond of him, and will cut up very rough over the parting, I fear."

"Poor child! But, of course, she will see him again in a few years. I can see, that next to you, Jim is her 'dearest and best.' If I were a married man, Ted, I would ask you for her as well. Every time she looks at me with those big, soft eyes of hers, I see poor Mary again, and when she speaks, hear the soft sweet voice again."

"She is a lovable child, and, look here, Tom, old man, I'll tell you something that has made me grizzle in secret for many years —Lizzie doesn't care for her. I don't mind her being a bit sharp with the boy how and then, for he's a terrible young Turk at

times, and I'm too easy with him; but little Mary is such a gentle, soft sort of kid, that I wonder how anyone could possibly help loving her. But, somehow or other, Lizzie doesn't. Still, within the last few days—ever since you came in fact—she has been a bit warmer in her manner."

Gerrard nodded. "Lizzie will come round to like her in time, Ted, And, I say, old fellow, since you have been so open with me, I'm going to say something to you that you perhaps may not like, and think I'm an interfering ass. But, 'honest Injun,' Ted, I mean well—like a good many other idiots do when they meddle with other people's domestic affairs."

"Go on, sonny," said the big man, quietly, "you never talk rot."

"Well, it's this. Lizzie is simply fretting her life out at Marumbah, and I think that, in a way, you are to blame. She does not like living in the bush, and does not seem to care for the people hereabout. I had quite a long yarn with her the first day I came to Marumbah, and although at first she tried to be the stiff, austere lady with me, I wouldn't have it. Made her sit on my knee, and all that, you know, stroked her hair, and pinched her pretty little nose."

"Tom, if I didn't know you better, I would call you a liar."

"Fact! You know as well as I do that she has always looked upon me as a black sheep. But she is going to change her mind about me, and I'll bet you a fiver that before I leave Marumbah, I'm going to be 'Tommy' to her, as I was in the old, old days."

Westonley's sun-tanned face flushed with pleasure. "Tom, I'd

give half of all I'm worth to see her and you friends again. I know how bitterly she affronted you years ago."

"Oh! that is all forgotten, old son. I was to blame for going off in such a silly huff. I behaved like a bear. We men don't understand women, Ted, and make hideous fools of ourselves. And that brings me to what I wanted to tell you—which is, that you are a blazing idiot."

"Tom, whatever you say, and whatever cheek you give me, I will take it quietly, although I could knock you out in four rounds," and Westonley thumped Gerrard affectionately on his back with his great hand. "Now, I know I'm a thundering ass but I'll be as meek as a lamb to you, you black-faced, under-sized little beggar."

Gerrard laughed. There was a difference of four inches in their respective heights; Westonley being six feet two inches. He knew by the inflection of the big man's voice that he had become a much happier man within the last ten minutes, and the knowledge of it gave him a great satisfaction.

"I may not be as big as you," he said, "but if I was the same shape, I'd go to a bush carpenter, and get him to trim me down with an adze." Then after this jest, he resumed seriously. "Well, Ted, it is just this. Lizzie says that she likes Sydney but you do not, and that you will never stay there for more than a week at a time. Now, that isn't doing the square thing by her. You and I as well, never think that the many years she spent in England gave her a taste for many of the refinements of civilisation—

pictures, high-class music, especially Churchy music, and all kind of things like that, which are always dear to a highly-educated and naturally clever woman, Now, when she married you, and settled down to a station life, she gave up a good deal, and as the years go on, she feels it more and more, and no woman in the world can always be an angel, you know, although we tell 'em so when we ask 'em to marry us. Do you follow me?"

"I'm listening for all I'm worth, my son. If we were in a room, you could distinctly hear the wall paper adhering to the wall."

"Well, now, as I was saying, that isn't fair to Lizzie. What is the use of her going to Sydney for a week? Just as she is beginning to enjoy herself, and feel something of the life she had in England, you drag her back to Marumbah to your beastly bullock punching."

"But I don't want her to come, Tom. I've always urged her to stay there for three months—or six, if she liked."

"Bosh! What pleasure would she have in being there alone; for although a woman may have lots of women friends, she's practically alone if her husband isn't with her. Tumble?"

Westonley nodded. "Go on, Tommy, go on to a dead finish. I am beginning to see I'm in fault."

"Of course you are. And if you don't give her a long change in Sydney, and stay there with her, you'll feel sorry for it; she'll become a religious monomaniac, and go in for High Church, auricular confession, and an empty stomach on Fridays. She's got a turn that way, remember. A conventual education in a High

Church school in England isn't a very healthy preparation for a girl who afterwards marries a hulking, horse-racing, hard-riding Australian squatter."

"What am I to do?" asked Westonley.

"Take her to Sydney next week. We'll all go together, little Mary included, and I'll stay with you for a couple of months. I'll stand half the racket."

"Shut up! Do you think I can't run Lizzie, little Mary, and myself without you chipping in?"

"All right!" and Gerrard, secretly delighted, but showing no sign of it, went on placidly: "you see, Ted, you have a good man in Black" (head stockman at Marumbah). "What he doesn't know about cattle isn't worth knowing, and there's no need for you to come tearing back for mustering, and branding, and attending to things generally. D'ye think that if you died to-morrow the cattle would go into mourning, and would refuse 'to increase and multiply'? No one in this world is indispensable, although everyone thinks he is, and that, when he pegs out, the Universe is going to fall into serious trouble. Now, that's all I have to say. Are you satisfied I'm talking sense?"

"Sonny, it's all right. I'll do any blessed thing you want, although I hate the idea of leaving Marumbah to loaf about in Sydney for six months," and the big man gripped Gerrard by his pointed beard, and tugged it affectionately. "I can see that I have thought too much of myself and too little of others."

"Not a bit; you were only thinking of Marumbah. Ted, old

man, I think I'll come back next year, and well see the Melbourne Cup together, hey?"

"Its a deal! If you don't come, I'll–"

"Kick me when I do come. Time we were off home, fatty."

Just about midnight, as Gerrard lay on his bed reading, he heard a low sound of sobbing from little Mary's room, which adjourned his own. He rose quietly, stepped to her door, and gently opened it.

The child was in her nightdress, leaning out of the window, with her hands outstretched to the night.

"Oh Jim, Jim, dear Jim! I wish Uncle Tom had never come to Marumbah. He must be a godless and wicked man to take you away from me when I love you. I hate him, I hate him!"

Gerrard went back to his room, lit his pipe and walked out on to the verandah, and paced slowly up and down, thinking.

"I wish I had 'em both," he said to himself.

CHAPTER VI

The charming little town of Bowen, on the shores of the beautiful harbour named Port Denison, was in the zenith of its glory and prosperity. There were certainly other towns in the north of Queensland—Mackay for instance—which enjoyed the advantage of being nearer the capital, and so obtaining more consideration from the Treasury; but Bowen, although six hundred miles from Brisbane, was the most thriving town in the north, and affected a haughty indifference to her rivals for supremacy, such as the "sugar" growing towns of Bundaberg and Mackay to the south, and the vulgar, upstart, and newly-founded Townsville to the north.

"With our matchless harbour, surpassed only on this island continent by that of Sydney," said the Port Denison *Clarion*, in one of its inspired and lofty-languaged leaders, "we can regard with a serene, yet not discourteous or contemptuous indifference, the statements of our esteemed, though hasty contemporary, the Mackay *Planters' Friend*, that Bowen may yet find that the newly-founded hamlet of Townsville on the shores of Cleveland Bay will ere long usurp the claim of beautiful Bowen to be the natural *entrepôt* for all that vast extent of territory to the northward and the westward of Port Denison, and which, ere many decades have passed, will, through its marvellous agricultural, pastoral, and auriferous resources, add not a jewel but a confiscation of

blazing and lustrous gems of the most priceless value to the already glorious crown of that noble lady upon whose Empire the sun never sets. Townsville is simply a collection of humpies and shanties built upon an ill-smelling mud bank. We have personally satisfied ourselves that unless some enterprising British capitalist can convert the only available possession of Townsville (which is mud, and bad mud at that) into bricks, which, perhaps, may be used for the minor classes of buildings which must of necessity soon be built for the accommodation of the poorer classes of working men who, in their thousands, will soon be established in Bowen, Townsville will no more prove a factor towards the development of this great country of North Queensland than the numerous alligators in the Burdekin River will be employed by the municipality of Bowen as paid scavengers, and be provided brass badges, dust shovels, and other such implements to denote their vocation. As for the other assertions of the editor of the *Planters Friend*, we, with all kindliness, should like to point out that the *Friend* is the organ of the Sugar Planters; it sees nothing beyond Sugar; Sugar is its God, its Mokanna, and (incidentally) we may remark that Rum is a product resulting from the manufacture of the saccharine plant, and we fear that many samples of this aromatic liquid may have found their way into the editorial sanctum of our esteemed and valued contemporary in Mackay. At least, we judge so when a dirty, ill-smelling mud bank is compared with one of the most noble evidences of God's handiwork—Port Denison!"

To such a courteous reproof as this, the *Planters' Friend* would invariably make the same reply in the form of a leaderette of ten or twenty lines, enclosed in a square of black to denote mourning:

"Our esteemed Bowen contemporary has 'got 'em' again. We are sorry we cannot #do any more than again, in the most kindly spirit, urge him to try the Dr Jordan cure, an advertisement of which will be found on page 3. We have personal knowledge of a case of the rescue from utter wreck and degradation of one of the brightest intellects of the present century by the use of the Jordan system; and as the price is but trifling, it should be within easy access of our squatter-adoring contemporary."

To these vaguely-worded, funereal-encompassed remarks, the *Clarion* would retort:

"No one who believes in the trite but, nevertheless, all-powerfully true assertion that the Press is the Archimidean lever which moves the world, cannot but regret the unblushing statement of the editor of our esteemed contemporary, the *Planters' Friend*, that he has been the victim of a soul-destroying, home-wrecking, and accursed habit, which that gifted American, Colonel Robert Ingersoll, has, in words of fiery eloquence, called 'the treacherous, insidious murderer of home and happiness; the Will-o'-the-Wisp that draws honour, genius, and all that is good into its fatal, deadly quagmire.' To the assertion that our valued contemporary is 'the possessor of one of the brightest intellects of the present century' (as he so modestly informs us) we do not cavil at for one moment. But even the patients under the

Jordan (American quack) system may have relapses; and, when the *Planters' Friend* can calmly publish two columns of leaded matter insinuating that a mud bank on the shores of Cleveland Bay is to become the leading port of North Queensland, we can but regretfully infer that the Jordan cure is not entirely satisfactory, and that even the 'brightest intellects' suffer terrible and deplorable relapses."

These journalistic amenities were accorded serious attention by the society of Bowen, which, by reason of the many Government officials established there, considered itself very exclusive. The majority of these officials were connected with the law, for Bowen was the proud possessor of not only a resident judge, but also a new courthouse of such ample dimensions that the whole population of the town could have been accommodated therein. How the numerous barristers, solicitors, and the smaller legal fry lived was a mystery. Perhaps, like the mythical French town whose population supported themselves by doing each other's washing, the legal gentry of Bowen existed by performing each other's clerical work. Next in numbers—though not in social standing—were the Government officials connected with the Harbour and Lights Department, and "The Jetty." The Jetty was one of Bowen's triumphs; was over a quarter of a mile long, cost twenty thousand pounds to build, and was costing four thousand pounds a year to keep in order, and enable the staff of engineers, inspectors, etc., to dress in a gentlemanly style, and maintain their prestige as officials

of higher importance than the Customs officers, of whom Bowen was provided with six, all dressed very becomingly, and all more or less related to members of the Queensland Cabinet—as a matter of fact it would have been a difficult task to find any male person in the Government service in Bowen—from His Honour Judge Coker to Paddy Shea, the letter-carrier, who was not connected with, or did not owe his position to a member of the Ministry. And Bowen revelled in the knowledge that Brisbane and the Legislature dared not refuse Bowen any reasonable request, for already there was a dark rumour concerning Separation—the division of the colony into North and South—and the *Clarion* had warned the "inert and muddling Government" of the colony "that unless the just and courteous request of the telegraphic staff of the Bowen Repeating Office for a punkah is acceded to without further circumlocution, the growing movement in favour of Separation will be openly advocated by this journal. Already (of this we have private knowledge) has Lord Kimberley expressed himself astonished at the heartless refusal of our benighted Colonial Secretary and Treasurer to grant the insignificant sum of two hundred pounds to the necessitous widow of Samuel Wilson, who was killed by being run over by a trolley on our beautiful jetty. Does the Colonial Secretary know the meaning of the word Nemesis? Let him ponder!"

The appearance of Bowen at this time of latent agitation for Separation and open and undisguised animosity to the

"upstart collection of humpies on a mud bank in Cleveland Bay," was pleasing in the extreme. Wide, tree-planted, grassy streets, kept scrupulously clean, handsomely-built bungalows, enclosed in gardens containing tropical and sub-tropical plants (the residences of the officials and their families), a court-house and other public buildings of such size and ornate construction that they surpassed those of any other town in the colony, except the capital; an environment of back country grateful to look upon, and a harbour of surpassing beauty.

The editor of the *Clarion* despite his inflated leaders, was a thoroughly sensible man, who fully recognised the potentialities of the port, and yet saw that it was doomed to sink into comparative insignificance, and that the "collection of humpies on a mud bank" was to be the future capital of the Far North. But he struggled on gamely. He was a genial, merry-hearted old bachelor, who had once loved his paper as a mother loves her one child, and had spent his capital of two thousand pounds in trying to keep the town alive as long as possible. A refined, highly-educated man, he was obliged—after two years' bitter financial experience—to resort to the type of journalism prevalent amongst Australian country newspapers; otherwise he could not have made a living. But he despised the very people for whom he was apparently fighting so strenuously, and often savagely reproached himself for having turned aside from the straight path.

"Thank Heaven, I'm not married!" he said to himself one

evening, as throwing himself down upon a couch in his bedroom at the Queen's Hotel, he began to glance through a bundle of exchanges which he had brought from the office, and in a few minutes a smile spread over his face, as he read the following in the Rockhampton *Bulletin*:

"The Bowen *Clarion* is making a game effort to bolster up that little tin-pot township with its *coterie* of highly-paid, useless officials, who for six years past have battened on the public revenues. It was the misfortune of a representative of this journal to be obliged to spend two weeks in Port Denison not long since, and his terse description of the spot and its inhabitants deserves a place in the guide book of the colony which has yet to be written. Bowen is a delightfully laid-out town on the shores of Port Denison. It is inhabited by some six hundred people—mostly official loafers and spongers of the worst type. The community consists of boozy squatters, snobbish wives of snobbish officials, anaemic old maids, obsequious tradesmen on the verge of insolvency, and two respectable and hard-working persons—the latter are Chinamen. The 'tony' society of Bowen is about as lively and intelligent as that of a decaying Cathedral town in the old country. The atmosphere of matchless snobbery and vulgarity that pervades Bowen can be perceived by the passing voyager many miles out at sea."

"By Jove! he's not far wrong," commented the editor, as putting down the paper he took up another, and had just ripped off the the cover, when the chambermaid tapped at the door, then

entered with a card.

"The gentleman wishes to see you particularly, sir."

He took the card from the tray, and read,

THOMAS GERRARD. Ocho Rios.

beneath was written, "Urgently desires to see the editor of the *Clarion* on business of importance."

"Ask him to come in, Milly," he said as he kicked a chair into position.

CHAPTER VII

"How do you do, Mr Gerrard?" he said, as with outstretched hand he met his visitor at the door. "I am glad to meet Ted Westonley's brother-in-law at last. How is he?"

"Very well, indeed, when I last saw him," replied Gerrard, as he sat down, and Lacey rang the bell.

"I have not seen him for ten years," said the editor. "Ah, here you are, M illy! What will you take, Mr Gerrard? You must excuse my rig" (he was in his pyjamas); "but it's so infernally hot that I always get into these the minute I'm back in my room. When did you arrive?"

"Only an hour ago, in the *Tinonee*."

"Going back to your station, I suppose? By the way, aren't you —or is it Jardine?—who is the 'furthest north' cattle man?"

"Jardine; but his station is on the east side. I'm on the west; the Gulf side, between the Batavia River and Duyfhen Point."

Lacey looked admiringly at the well-knit figure and handsome, tanned face of his visitor. "Well, the climate up there can't be as bad as it is painted. I never saw a man look better than you do."

"Oh! the climate doesn't hurt me now. I've had my share of fever of course; so has everyone on Ocho Rios. The niggers are our chief trouble."

"Ah! no doubt. By the way, Aulain, of the Black Police is

down here on sick leave. He'll be glad to see you."

"And I him. He's a fine fellow, isn't he?"

"A whiter man—or a better gentleman—never put foot in a stirrup. I've got to like him very much. And he thinks no end of you. Says you're the best scrub rider he ever saw."

Gerrard laughed. "'Praise from him is praise indeed.' All I can say is that I have never seen anyone who can go through scrub or thick timber like Randolph Aulain. Where is he staying?"

"Here—at the Queen's. He's had a terrible time with fever, and can't do more than sit up. We'll go and see him presently."

"Oh, yes! But I want to speak to you on a matter of some importance first. That is why I have ventured to come to your hotel. I did go to the *Clarion* office, but just missed you."

"I'm only too delighted to see you, even if you were not Westonley's brother-in-law. You know that he and I were at Rugby together, and then at Oxford? But, before I say anything else, when does your steamer leave?"

"This afternoon at four o'clock; but I am not going on in her. I'm in somewhat of a hole, and I felt sure you would assist me."

"Indeed I will. I'm not flush. This blessed rag of mine doesn't pay, but I can raise a hundred from the bank here."

Gerrard laughed. "No, not that, Mr Lacey. I'm not 'broke,' and it is not money I want. At the same time I appreciate your generosity. Ted has often told me you would do any mortal thing for a friend in need." He paused, and then began, "Mr Lacey–"

"Drop the 'Mr' please."

"Well, then, Lacey, I want your advice and assistance. Do you know any decent family here who would take care of a boy of eleven years of age for about a fortnight?"

The editor of the *Clarion* tugged thoughtfully at his long, white moustache for a few moments. "Yes, I think I do know of such a family. I used to board with them when I first came to this infernal hole. Their name is Woodfall. The father is a dairyman here, and a very decent hard-working man. His wife is a thoroughly, good honest woman, and they have no children. I think they would be suitable people; and I'm sure would look after the boy very well. Where is he?"

"On board the steamer, just now, waiting for me. I'll tell you how I'm fixed. The youngster is an orphan who was living with my brother-in-law at Marumbah. I took a great fancy to him, and as my sister did not care much for the young 'un, though Ted did, I persuaded Ted to let me have him to 'father.' I should have liked to have had my poor sister Mary's little girl—you know that my sister died soon after her husband and my father and mother all went together in the *Cassowary*—but, of course, I couldn't bring her away from civilisation—there's no white woman within two hundred miles of Ocho Rios." Then he went on telling his host the history of Jim, from the time Westonley had brought him away from Newcastle to the present. Lacey listened with interest.

"Well, a few weeks ago in Sydney I met a Mrs Tallis, a widow. Her husband was a squatter, and died a few months ago in Sydney."

"I knew him. His station is called Kaburie—it is between here and Mackay—and is a rattling good cattle run."

"Yes. She wants to sell it. I suppose the poor little woman doesn't like going back to the place now. However now I'm coming to the point I've an idea that it might suit me as a breeding station, and told her I would stop at Bowen, and go and look at it. Now it would suit me very well if I could leave my *protégé* here for a couple of weeks, as the young scamp has managed to sprain his wrist on board, and so can't very well come with me, though I should like to take him very much."

"The Woodfalls will take him, I'm sure. And I will look after him as well. Now, will you come and see Aulain for a few minutes? Then I'll take you up to Mrs Woodfall."

Aulain, a strikingly handsome, slightly-built, olive-faced man, with jet-black beard and moustache, was delighted to see Gerrard.

"Hallo! old 'Tom-and-Jerry,' I'm glad to see you again. Sit down and tell me o' the wondrous sights o' Sydney and Melbourne. Heavens, man, I wish I could get away down South for six months."

They remained talking for half an hour, during which time Gerrard told Aulain the reason of his stopping at Bowen.

"By Jove! old fellow, I shall be glad if you buy Kaburie, for you'll have to put in some of your time there, of course, and I've applied for a removal from the Cape York District to Port Denison. I'm sick to death of nigger chasing in the Far North,

and want to be somewhere where I can feel I'm not entirely an outcast from the world, with no one to talk to but my own black troopers, any one of whom would put a bullet into my back if I turned rusty."

"Oh, well, I think it is pretty certain I shall buy Mrs Tallis's station. I like Ocho Rios very well, but now, since this last trip of mine South, I feel as you do—I want to be a little less out of the world. I might, perhaps, sell Ocho Rios, and fix myself at Kaburie. If I don't, I'll put a manager there, and keep the place going, for I have a great belief that there will be some rich gold discoveries in the Batavia River country before long—and thousands of meat-hungry diggers means pots of money to a cattleman."

"I'm certain, too, that there will be some big fields opened up that way soon," said Aulain. "In that valise of mine, there under the bed, are three or four ounces of alluvial gold which my troopers and I washed out in one day at the head of a little creek running into the Batavia."

"Place with a hunking big boulder standing up in the middle of a deep pool, with a lot of fish in it?" queried Gerrard.

"Yes; but how the deuce did you come across it? I've never seen a beast of yours within fifty miles of it—the country is too rough even for cattle—and I thought that my troopers and I were the first that ever saw the place."

"When were you there?"

"About a month after you left Ocho Rios for Sydney."

"Well, my dear little laddie, I was there a year ago, camped there for a couple of days, and did a little washing out—with two quart billy cans for a dish."

"Get anything?"

"Seven ounces, sonny; mostly in coarse gold too."

Aulain whistled. "And you never went back there?"

"No! I never had the time for one thing; another reason was that it would not have paid me to have left my station for the sake of a few hundred pounds' worth of gold, and thirdly, although I know a little about alluvial mining, I don't know anything about reefing—wouldn't know a gold-bearing reef from a rank duffer, unless I saw the gold sticking up in it in lumps. And there are several parties of prospectors up in Cape York Peninsula now, and some of them are sure to make their way to the Batavia River country in the course of time. If any come to my place I'll give them all the help I can. I'd like to see a really good gold-field discovered near Ocho Rios; it would mean thousands of pounds to me."

"Of course it would. But, I say, Gerry, old fellow," and here Aulain paused. "Will you do me a favour? Oh, no, hang it!" and he stopped suddenly.

"What is it, Aulain?"

The Inspector's sallow face flushed. "I don't think it is fair to ask you, as it will perhaps affect your interests."

"Don't be an ass! What is it?"

Lacey rose, thinking that Aulain hesitated to speak on account

of him being present, but Aulain begged him to stay, and then said:

"Well, I'll tell you what it is, Gerry. Will you keep it dark about that little creek up there; for six months anyway."

"Certainly, I will."

"You see, Gerry, it's this way. I'm sick to death of life in the Black Police, and as soon as I get over this fever, I think I'll resign and try my luck at mining. I can't live on my salary, and I have no backstair's influence in Brisbane to get me anything better in the Government service; and only this morning I was thinking of that very place where we both got gold. There are reefs all about the head of that creek, and every one of them carries payable gold. And so if you will keep it dark I stand a good chance of not only getting the usual Government reward of five thousand pounds for the discovery of a payable gold-field, but can peg out my reward claim beforehand."

"My dear old chap, I shall be only too pleased. And, look here, why not send in your resignation right away, and then after I've finished this business at Kaburie, come away with me. There will be a steamer here in a fortnight, which will take us to Somerset, and from there we can get to Ocho Rios in one of the pearling luggers. We shall find plenty of them lying up at Somerset at this time of the year, and it will be a better and easier way of getting to my place than having to buy horses at Somerset, and travelling a hundred and fifty miles across the peninsula."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.