

X, a puncture on the milky page, standing at the front of the word ‘xylophonist’, she analyses it until it turns into more than a letter, in her mind, becomes the Roman *numeral* that from today denotes her age, and she hopes that, if her life were ever to be recorded as a sprawling biographical novel such as this in her hands, ‘*Edward Pepperwood*’, she might be able to pinch the pages of the years she’s lived so far, to hold them apart, and still see a hefty tome to come, thick with grand adventure and such zany characters as those that populate the world of titular Pepperwood, he an indentured xylophonist, a pauper-cum-street-performer in smoggy, fictitious London (for how’s Caroline to know it as a real place?), she freshly a ten-year-old on a southern sheep-run, a pastoral princess, and the next event in *her* journey is the rise of proper boredom towards the early ‘Pepperwood’ pages, their scenes too difficult to picture, giving cause for doubt they’ve *really* been crafted by one of the world’s finest storytellers (by reputation), and so amidst magpie calls she closes the thing, climbs out from a blanket much too heavy for the summertime, creeps between the sleeping bodies, her impulsive quest being to check the *other* birthday gifts on her mind are real things and not the figments of a dream, and indeed she feels the profoundest relief to find most of these in a pile beside the snoring Yabby Quinn, the rouseabout and ex-con she wouldn’t like to wake, and soon she has her new medallion and a punctured dollar in her grubby hands, feeling them as cold and true, and then the featherweight book ‘*Eureka*’ and her new ‘*Modern Atlas*’ – magnificently heavy, like it really *is* a planet – and then her new broken telescope, which creaks protest as she extends its length, points it towards the commemorative portrait of herself, yellow-framed, gifted yester-eve by the crummy amateur Benson Cummins, featuring Caroline’s likeness ahead of a Dashvale backdrop, and owing to the telescope’s broken mirrors it offers only very slight magnification, the sort of view that might have been possible had Caroline simply taken two strides forward, albeit it marginally improves an appraisal of the painting’s myriad inconsistencies, which, ironically, are similar to those of an atlas, many of painted Caroline’s own edges, own coastline, bungled by a shoddy estimation of curvature, and blank, uncharted ocean showing in places where really there are archipelagos of sunspots and, most unfaithfully of all, a blatant whitening of painted Caroline’s skin, about as brazen as any cartographer’s decision to arbitrarily colour nation-states purple or orange or green, and although Caroline appreciates Cummins’ efforts she’s wise to this last change, wisening to its reasons, and hence she wonders, in turn, how Dashvale’s only recognised portrait artist would choose to present Bardella, her Wirrawung mother, who is this moment asleep beside John Dash in an un-marital bed, perhaps lying closer as an effect of their night of heavy drinking, all the adults of the run still woozily asleep, a condition Caroline manages to avoid, maybe, by being legitimately still child, and at this hour, at this time of morning, she also shares youth with the calamitous, mutating day itself, a guest that shall pass by as far more than an ordinary square on a calendar, a westward leap of the sun, and one that will make a greater deposit than just a swift stroke amidst the tallies etched on hut walls by

shepherds, for in fact the effects of this fledgling day will be expanding, here, for a century to come, and there's youth, as well, in the posture of the final gift, the most precious, visited as part of Caroline's inspection, a mottled grey pony roped to the outside of John's storage shed, its juvenile breath quickening on Caroline's approach, the distrust in a lacquer gaze suggesting it knows this 'girl' as its new owner and finds such a commitment unconscionable, and in truth Caroline now isn't sure she's quite up to a relationship either, even though this animal truly *is*, more or less, everything she's hoped and begged for over months (disposition aside), and due to their wariness of one another, the most intimate action she can perform is to lift the shoddy telescope again, to point it at this pet, and although her view is hardly any closer, she's interested in seeing the individual parts in rimmed isolation, the flaky tail, mane, splotched flank, hooves, flared nostrils, fiery underground gaze, each so different it can be fantastical to reflect on how they ever combine to make a unit – though maybe this says more about *units*, after all – and from the way Caroline stands with her barely helpful looking-glass so tight against her face, a stupider animal observer, not the pony, might figure it an actual attachment, fastened to her head, a God-given extension useful for selectively distracting a person from the wider world, which in this case keeps Caroline unaware of the approaching boy, dressed only in shorts, who's walked around the edge of the crystalline billabong where among others he'd spent the night, and who arrives with,

MIANGO

What's his problem?

causing Caroline to jolt, of course, and to knock the tin, -scopic shaft against her brow, which fairly pisses her off, so she doesn't reply to Miango until she's able to fake a tone suggesting she'd known he was coming all along, upon the words,

CAROLINE DASH

She's a girl. And just new. She's a very valuable present from my father.

, and meanwhile Miango's got next to her, so that he might study the animal, too, might squint with bemusement because *he's* always been the better with horses out of the pair of them – Caroline is superior at fishing – and because the hostile *size* of the gift is difficult to fathom, leading the boy-witness to ask,

MIANGO

Why did he give it to you?

CAROLINE DASH

*Because today is my birthday. What have *you* gotten me?*

, a cruel comment from her, because she knows his empty pockets and hands, and she hasn't seen this former companion, this erstwhile best-friend, for several months since her father's ban on consorting with any of the Wirrawung, owing to sheep thefts, such that now there's uneasiness yawning between them, and when Miango steps closer to the pony, hand outstretched, it's really Caroline, in a way, he means to pacify, although she reacts to this gesture primarily as a brag of horsemanship, a suggestion *he'd* be the more comfortable owner of 'unnamed pet', and defensively she snaps,

CAROLINE DASH

I think you need to go, Miango. You can't be here, like this...

, which burns him as betrayal, embarrasses him, reduces him to a pair of shoes or an old doll she's outgrown, and rather than speaking protest his tactic is to sulk away in such a shoulder-slumped, droopy-eyed style Caroline may be pushed to reconsider, and yet she's already grown too proud, she knows the loss of face that comes from a reversal, so she allows his departure, permits his disappearance into a familiar sweeping view, perhaps her *only* familiar view, given this august country has provided the setting for practically her whole life, places like Melbourne, Sydney, Van Diemen's Land mythical and hidden in her future, however she *has* seen illustrations of these during tutoring with Adelaide Howard, they've pushed her into moods of deprivation, in contrast to Miango, who's mostly been consigned to the same landscape for a life up 'til now, but who feels no restlessness towards such features as the well-worn path around the billabong, the grassy plain, the knotty swathe of ironbark forest where he disappears in pursuit of a plot, the day maturing by several hours, the world and Sun spinning a little further, as per the Copernican bent, before Miango re-emerges with a reed-carry sack containing a waddy stick, wildflowers, a yellow rock, and a seashell necklace that had hitchhiked from the coast on a hawker tray, all of which he fearlessly brings back to the homestead, for in Caroline's earlier question he's reflected perhaps there'd been a concealed invitation to contribute to her birthday haul, to restore their friendship via gifts, and yet she's gone by the time of this Wirrawung Magi's return, her pony as well, and Miango's chest tightens upon recognising that his plan has faltered, that he's been seen only by Mrs Howard as she sits scanning one of the books she yesterday presented to Caroline, Poe's '*Eureka*', beneath a wet breeze from hanging sheets, bloomers, underwear, her headache bouncing just like the washing-line and the manic prose, bouncing harder when she sees Miango, so she rushes inside for the help of Bardella, better for this sort of thing, somewhat of an envoy, who's soon striding at the Magi with,

BARDELLA

You can't stay here, boy. Caroline is away, too.

, which he'd well-figured, and he's racing away before Bardella needs to implore again, hastily dropping the carry-sack at the last spot he'd seen Caroline – beside the storage shed – whereas her true location is somewhere on the bald shepherding plain with her father, commanding John, taking first tentative steps astride Lucinda (working title), and in fact they won't make a return in time for those ditched birthday gifts to meet their recipient, instead the rouseabout shall have intercepted them, shall have pocketed the necklace, shall have felt the world jar entirely in the moment he clutches a rock that's quite a different yellow to his filthy hair, turns it quickly in a sweaty grasp, scratches it, lifts it to a widened eye, and by the accompanying waddy stick he makes assumptions about a curator, casts a rapid glance around the home, decides himself unnoticed, then moves amidst the grip of late-afternoon light, the rock in his own, towards the mauve billabong where grey-haired, sloppy-breasted, spear-displaying Bobbie Wirrawung looks for bream at the water's edge, keeps his gaze determinedly undersea, even as Yabby Quinn accosts with,

YABBY QUINN

Ever seen another of *these* in the hills around, good Sir?

, and to this and similar pleas he adds a kind of flapping, swooping his arms not so much for Bobbie's comprehension as to dance an impression of urgency, like the old man *needs* to respond, on threat of the ear-bashing continuing into the eve and, more seriously, the threat of the pistol showing at Quinn's hip entering the fray, and the implication of that piece eventually looms enough for the grey elder to abandon fanciful hopes of a folkloric billabong monster arriving to shut the white man up (in its jaws), and once he's taken his own look at the rock, and has placed it, the pair are on an laboured quest into the ironbark hills – specifically, towards a mount the twilight's effect has named Blue Hill – and Miango's somewhere behind them, careful not to impede, but increasingly distressed at the effect his choice of rock looks to be having, Bobbie leading the reformed Vandemonian towards virtually the place where that present had been lifted, stopping at shortening intervals for deep breaths, for crouching to right his giddiness, and the breaks are good, too, for Quinn catching-up to his own excitement, his garlanded delusions, his thoughts of capitalising thoroughly on the curse of his transportation, and yet these same pictures are still wafting madly in the moments Bobbie, near the crest, a little further down from Miango's point of extraction, gestures to sparks in the earth, blazes amongst irrelevance that are the colour of decorative Corinthian columns, chalices, engagement rings, the occasional pirate's tooth, yet nothing about their *value*, of course, the old man is to know, he's content instead to leave the sparks fixed, until Quinn urges, a little forcefully,

YABBY QUINN

Could you pick one *up*?

, and he mimes this, too, until Bobbie accedes, using the base of his spear to loosen earth, bending to gather, Miango afraid for him behind a close-by ironbark trunk, but slightly comforted by the wide smile on the blonde ex-convict's countenance when he's got *another* in his hands, which he turns and cradles like a piece of his own vitality, or a child, stepping away, lifting it to the darkening day, chuckling a little, for it's about the size of what might buy him the costume of a gentleman, and he looks about to give a miner's *shout* from glee until he remembers himself, until he spins again to grey Bobbie, who'd relaxed, and declares,

YABBY QUINN

You're not to tell *anybody* about this, Bobbie. Understand?

, but sadly this is beyond the old man's English, the first white ghosts having appeared in his seventh decade and, aside from a female linguist, 'til now keeping far enough apart for him to avoid their tongue, for him to here only have recourse to nod unconvincingly, understanding the strain at the end of Quinn's line but not its import, and Quinn's too paranoid to accept this, turns more specific with,

YABBY QUINN

If you tell Mr Dash about these rocks, I will kill you.

, and Bobbie sees the stone being gestured, recognises 'kill', nods awkwardly again, sees Quinn mime the sealing of his own lips with a finger, sees the marauder's other hand reach for his pistol, draw it away from the hip, sees the barrel ascend until its void, its hole, is on a course for a sagging chest, and the gun keeps on this target, enjoying its power, and for unnecessary emphasis there's,

YABBY QUINN

Bang!

, a quickfire word, a guttural sound to shock, which hits Miango, as well, and which, though no bullet has been fired, there kills Bobbie Wirrawung, worms invisibly into his heart and causes it to stop, causes a hand to go to his chest in an attempt to lift whatever's rested there as surely as a nugget, but it won't do, he's stooping, going to his knees, his belly, he's groaning, can't breathe, and he's looking across to Miango, who he'd well-known was supervising in the forest, and so draws the boy out of the hiding-place as a hapless attempt to help, because Bobbie's not making sound by the time he's got skin on him, his old face freezing, never relaxed, and therefore Miango's nudging won't do, Quinn stepping forward, pausing, not doing much either, indeed the white-man's largely lost movement himself, and he watches ridiculously until he sees the boy Miango's sphere of concern enlarge, even

as he stays crouched beside an idol, his eyes looking searingly to the villainous rouseabout, and then swimming, with poor concealment, to the spear that's gone dead beside its master, could be reanimated, and on threat of this Yabby *does* properly cock the pistol, blasts an actual shot into the air, *BANG*, which pushes galahs from the trees, which hurls the Wirrawung boy into running, which precedes Yabby himself shuddering a little, tucking two nuggets into his coat, fleeing in another direction, and in this way a new world *has* finally been repulsed, similar to the birth of the universe speculated by the author of '*Eureka*', which Adelaide Howard's still reading at the washing-line, its difficult argument mercifully interrupted by the gun-echo at Blue Hill, and on the floodplain the sound gees Caroline's pony briefly into starting, as well, and twists John's neck with concern, but then it fades, is largely forgotten by all besides those closest, and once Bobbie's body is recovered there isn't anything to corroborate the pistol-shot had much to do with it, his skin notably soft and unperturbed as its painted with funerary ochre, no blemish as he's eventually curled into the earth beside his own forebears, covered by a mound, the ringside trees of the forest clearing struck to denote that place's significance, and as such, in the early weeks, crossing into 1852, what's most obviously new to the Dashvale surrounds is periodic wailing, a smoking ceremony the local Protector-cum-anthropologist visits for the purpose of documenting, and yet other elements are duly congealing beyond the boundaries of local maps being consulted, urged-on by the thrust of the great unutilised material, the most valuable stuff in the world, a party of four prospectors arriving with what they believe is the necessary gear for extracting it, though they truly need little more than a penknife to take the early nuggets they've been alerted to, with the caveat they might share with their informant the 'finder's reward', the mooted prize for discoverers of fresh goldfields, a sum the four arrivals could easily and dishonourably keep for themselves, or *ignore* if the amount of gold beneath the hill hints at being prodigious enough, and so their activity on the Dashvale fringe, the plucking of golden pieces and storage of these in matchboxes, is done with some secrecy, without ecstatic shouting, with only small amounts of pranging and tree-felling, with modest campfires, with just the occasional gunshot to denote the end of a possum, a kangaroo, a false shape that's teased by the night-time from the vantage of their tent, and with just occasional barking by one of the ruffians' betrothed, loose-jowled mastiff towards a bird, or a passing Wirrawung woman, or Stephen Howard and his advancing mare, one afternoon, when the station manager resolves to learn what's developing, forces his horse through the forest to get to the slope, finds, after all, four thick-bearded, neckerchief-wearing diggers, four sores of the colony, gathered in the vicinity of their makeshift dwelling, two of them chipping at a progress pit with shovels, one clutching prayer beads, virtually asleep, the last sitting on a stump, lusting after the golden contents of his matchbox like they're confectionary morsels, then looking up to Stephen, almost drunkenly, and asking where *he's* come from, which the manager of the nearby station responds to honestly, prompting,

BORIS STREFELSKI

And you truly never knew this was here, then?

, and he rattles the matchbox for emphasis, like Stephen might want to *try* one of the pieces, or try finding his own, a motion that underestimates his loyalty to John Dash, and which merely stirs the retort,

STEPHEN HOWARD

How did *you* know it was here, more's the point?

BORIS STREFELSKI

A digger's intuition. Must've whiffed it up this nose.

, and he appropriately flares his beak, smiles underneath, the tooth-rot within the beard matching his confectioner's posture, and then he rocks back, scratches his face, stands as his mastiff barks again, imposingly enough that Stephen's only further words are,

STEPHEN HOWARD

When it is you see Quinn, tell him he's a mote. And set for hellfire.

, to which the marauder doesn't deign to reply, figuring he's done enough, on behalf of the others, to ensure this neighbour won't think of returning, and yet their jig is up, and Stephen's downward passage becomes the very opposite of a trend, the Blue Hill next host to a team of Crown surveyors entrusted to officially mark a goldfield, word of which attracts more prospectors, their tents, severe tree-felling, the staking of constrained claims, a cacophony of unabashed chipping as the fever takes hold, and perhaps what's most significant is the arrival of those who might administer to that sickness, such as a blacksmith's forge for sharpening equipment, several merchant's stores, a tailor for ruined garments, a preacher who'd like to practice on an easy flock, a small police presence, and soon enough there's a hundred tents, so many that Benson Cummins, the crummy artist, can easily disappear amongst the afflicted once he absconds from Dash's run, so many that the site requires a Commissioner Woolley – a proper, commanding gravitational force – supported by two meagrely-paid assistants and a hardly-paid native police force, the latter group a small body of uptight men in blue coats, carrying sabres, riding the animals that'd terrified their parents just a couple of decades ago, serving as special objects of curiosity to the Wirrawung, to Miango especially, and even to Caroline, who is quickly roused by the presence of the new world, who at first may only *hear* it – its metal and gunfire and crude language – from her bedroom, and who resolves to get closer once there are sudden midday opportunities, over the weeks Adelaide Howard contends with an illness, thus Caroline elects to spend her spare time on futile, surreptitious attempts to coax Snowflake (working

title) up the hill, on eventual ascensions with only the lifeless company of her ‘telescope’, and then, having reached some kind of vantage, on pointing that ‘companion’ at a goldfields scene, trapping *one* picture in its ocular frame, submitting it to oft-imperfect analysis, such that she’ll leave with memories of an over-dressed, high-society woman drifting about with an umbrella despite blaring sunshine, or a policeman chaining and lugging a digger with enough violence to suggest this one’s performed a terrible crime, or a man with a hacking cough, or another with a pustular eye infection, both visitors to a bush-hut selling snake venom, according to the animal of its flag, or the hastily established school-tent (first enrolment: seven) and its pupils who’d appeared as restless to learn as she, or the advertisements for Holloway’s Pills, which must be *real* ‘cure-alls’, else the signs wouldn’t say so, or those stores where men *chiefly* shop for vegetables and only incidentally for whatever alcohol’s added swiftly to their flasks on payment, or a portly, egg-domed, curly-haired military-man taking leave of a summer that’s stretched to autumn by writing furious letters in an spacious canvas dwelling, or the long queues to pay other superior types for mere slips of paper, or the efforts, once the easy gold has been exhausted, to plunge mine shafts into the hill itself, and the conveyance of buckets of washdirt to be sifted in weird rockers beside convenient creeks and waterholes, laying bare the welfare of gold is to be treated much the same as that of an infant, and because of all the foreign languages, Caroline will have mistaken, during her extraordinary surveys, pleasant conversations for arguments, she’ll have mashed the English speakers together – the Americans, Irish, British – and have done another mash for Danes, Dutch, Prussians, Persians, a Portuguese, deciding, in this way, it’s a two-mash town, and suddenly she can’t help from lying awake thinking of it, eardrums attuned, never considering revisiting the tome at her bedside, ‘*Edward Pepperwood*’, because it’s dull, because the nearby megalopolis of two-hundred or so presses *bigger* than London anyway, indeed she’ll occasionally flinch, lying in the dark, as diggers returning to distant tents fire their guns as a nightly ritual, or as she recalls maybe seeing Miango, that day, making his own evaluations elsewhere on the perimeter, though she won’t have gone to him, and obviously never broaches such encounters, saying only to Bardella, down on the paillasse beside her bed, things like,

CAROLINE DASH

Why do they fire the guns, at this time?

BARDELLA

There are spirits in the dark they’re afraid of.

and

CAROLINE DASH

*How *long* will they be up there for?*

BARDELLA

As long as it takes them to find all the rocks.

CAROLINE DASH

Until the hill is brought to the flat?

BARDELLA

I don't know, girl.

, Bardella getting sharp out of fear, and feeling distant to Caroline by the girl's fascination with all the plunder, causing her to defer to Adelaide Howard for mothering once that woman has recovered from the worst of her shingles and the tutoring sessions begin again in earnest, held atop a tall dining table in the yard, although this commitment makes it harder for Caroline to abscond for the sort of 'goldfields gazing' that explains her unread books, her unlearnt spelling and arithmetic, all of which Adelaide infers are only symptoms of unsupervised laziness, and which lead now to stricter adherence to the homespun curriculum, the tutor not considering the *easiest* way for implanting in the girl the lessons of politics, history, numeracy, *the world*, would be to take her up the hill on a sanctioned excursion, and yet Adelaide might be too stubborn and ill for such an exercise anyway, her spirits perhaps not revived until the afternoon a man with a bald-top and brown hair like spaniel ears, a writer of furious missives, rides across the plain on his own reluctant stallion, conducting a survey *beyond* the area of the diggings, attesting he'd like to learn something about the Wirrawung – the Protector's successfully recommended the gold-source be called 'Wirrawunga Hill' – and also the nearest sheep stations, to which Adelaide, impressed by his sabre and ill-fitting coat, leans away from a lesson on the planetary order and says,

ADELAIDE HOWARD

I'm sorry, Sir, I never did catch your name.

, so he reveals,

REDMOND HARVEY

It is Redmond Harvey. I'm supposed to attach 'Assistant Commissioner' to that, as well. In the home country, however, I confess I'm only a penpusher.

ADELAIDE HOWARD

A 'man of letters', is it? Not the one who wrote '*Perseus*'?

REDMOND HARVEY

In fact, that's also me.

ADELAIDE HOWARD

But it couldn't be! When was it you joined the military?

REDMOND HARVEY

At twenty-one. *Before* any literary pretensions, actually. I was something of a midshipman during the Mexican's war of independence. We spent six months blockading a Spanish castillo.

, and Caroline watches Adelaide blush, for she once read '*Perseus*', half enjoyed it, but more to the point she recalls it being a sensation across England, and now she sees that Harvey's distinctive face – his plaintive, poochy appearance – is one she might recognise from some old, gushing article or another, and she decides to be only too happy to abandon her astronomy class so she might lead a tour of the homestead, without John, and once the squatter has *later* returned from errands, there's bush tea on the school table, and the quasi-celebrity commissioner asking many questions about the Aboriginal neighbours, the history of the sheep run, and the problem of its *name* by way of,

REDMOND HARVEY

Will you now regard this as a sort of extension of 'Wirrawunga'?

, which the owner corrects with,

JOHN DASH

No. For ten years, we've called in 'Dashvale'.

, delivered firmly, and perhaps on this evidence of a place named after *oneself*, the assistant commissioner diagnoses John with hubris, knowing it well, and he moves slyly to injure his host by twirling milk into his tea, clinking the china, and asking how, for ten years, they had all managed to avoid the proximity of easily extractable *gold*, a query that indeed sours John's mood, and leads indirectly to Adelaide explaining her word-of-mouth belief that an ex-rouseabout's 'discovery' preceded the poisoning of a decrepit Wirrawung man, and then there's Stephen's retort – in the custom of denying murders of Aboriginals – that such an accusation is probably an overreach, and despite the seriousness of their talk, much of Caroline's attention drifts to the newcomer opposite her place at the table, suspiciously evaluating his childlike expressions and incidental ringlets as he progresses to asking whether the *billabong* would be suitable for a swim (and he's warned against it), and to later making the revelation he's a *friend* to the author of '*Edward Pepperwood*', which does

nothing to improve Caroline's estimations of either that bedside tome *or* Harvey, so it's doubtful she'd have even been impressed if he'd also bothered to mention his status as a correspondent to the same author's magazine, '*Domestic Chronicle*', scribbling hefty accounts of gold rush phenomena on free afternoons and entrusting these to the Indian and Atlantic oceans for distant publication, hereby submitting his travelogues to six month voyages *of their own*, his pre-dispatch ritual being triumphant readings aloud to himself, within the privacy of his tent, booming on ideas such as,

REDMOND HARVEY

One of the many responsibilities I am given – as the colony is truly in such a whelm of confusion its serious roles are delegated to any amateur who has wherewithal – is administering receipts and processing the gold escort that is delivered each week from these fields to the capital. The men who consign gold therein are making the calculation their wealth is safer at the city treasury than hidden amongst furniture and saddlebags about their bush lodgings. The risk to this, however, is the spectre of highwaymen. And I very much intend the term 'spectre', for although it is occasionally proven there are real bushrangers who stalk the vital roads, who commit abominable sins, the very fear of them, I divine, leads to such flighty riding from the escort crews that their risk of crashing is seriously heightened. Even if the accident be minor, there is no guarantee of a frightened team trawling every nearby shrub for an escaped gold-sack before they might hasten away.

, and

REDMOND HARVEY

The mild southern climate they tell you of in Britain is, I have evidence now to say, only an 'advertisement'. Even on the shoulder of summer, the weather is agreeable for thin slivers of morning and evening-times, the heat otherwise of such an oppressive character that it dries the mouth completely and wavers tauntingly upon its reflection by our denuded terrain. I have heard stories of birds exploding in trees from heat – apparently one of sunlight's 'natural' effects in this land.

, and

REDMOND HARVEY

I perceive a great many of the men here are so completely besotted by a quest for fortune they'd never think, once gaining it, of 'saving'. A significant number, I sense, visit these hills having already blown vast treasure they had found in other places on frivolous Melbourne celebrations. There is a clear demarcation, too, between those who make a success of Wirrawunga Hill and the men finding it more of a toil, going so far as to determine their meeting spaces. Many happy with themselves retire in the evenings to the vicinity of a teatime shanty beside the main commissioner's camp, whereas those with

no successes to report, comforted by others with the same news, often meet at a coffee tent owned by a sly entrepreneur, 'Barnes', further down. I have paid more visits to the latter, my judicial title yet to sever a connexion with the ordinary émigré. I do feel they have made a kind of 'Sisiphan Society'. For all their complaints about luck and the delicate business of miners' rights, they always wake the following mornings with hope restored, happy to press their same boulders as before, only so that identical disappointments might clobber them in the head by the evening, once again.

, and, capitalising on his interview at the Dash's,

REDMOND HARVEY

I have it on eminent authority that the local Aboriginals, the Wirrawoong, are a leisurely and superstitious people. As luck would have it, they also seem good-humoured, save for incidents that have arisen due to their quick preference for mutton. Indeed, the fact these folk are close to sufficient by only the fruits and fauna of the *bush*, leads to wondering whether their interest in sheep-flocks, and in being chased by the shepherd's crook (or worse), is merely mischievous. I observed this week a curious interaction between a local Wirrawoong, a boy, and a man on horseback who belonged to both a different tribe and the native police. The boy was calling up to this black policeman as though he were a role model, asking that he might join the adventure. And yet his 'older brother' kept on, pretending not to notice, like the young 'un were only a source of embarrassment. I must say the scene depressed me somewhat.

, and

REDMOND HARVEY

The unclosed food and waste of this shanty village seems to give great encouragement to a kind of 'bush fly' that was already suited to the climate. As all Europeans are quite unfamiliar with this animal, it is the scapegoat of many an affliction around these parts that is of dubious origin. I have heard the fly is originator for a kind of pustular sore men are getting around their tear ducts or on the membranes of their noses. In addition, the fly is blamed for the especial territorial-ness of most of the dogs about, the slanty postures of children, women's yellowing toenails, widely-reported nightmares of being buried alive or trampled, and the foul taste of some suppers (perhaps from invisible layers of eggs). My own experiences with local bugs have it that my chief opponents are a type of beetle that likes to gather on these very pages in the evenings as I write. These jostle in extraordinary numbers, as though each specimen hopes it shall be the one I choose to describe and thereby convey, as an eternal idea, to home readers.

, although the beetles and he would be disappointed to know such submissions to the magazine are largely going unpublished, not because of any shipwrecks, rather due to the editors at '*Domestic Chronicle*' tiring of trying to fit them in, to whittle their overblown impressions into something that matches the small frame of '*A Prospector's Plight*' (never mind that Harvey, on landing in the colony, had dodged his column's banner and taken up government employment instead), and his case isn't helped, as well, by certain *personal* frustrations the esteemed author and friend has grown towards him, so that it might be said Harvey's literary reputation is overall struggling, fading in London without his presence and hardly rooting itself in his new clime, the average blow-in digger not having read his famous poems, possibly from being in *chains* at the time those achievements were published, so when Harvey gets greeted as 'Perseus!' as he's riding between the sites of reported mining disputes, it's most likely the title of his masterwork is being delivered ironically, with only his form as a bumbling commissioner in mind, the sort that holds himself with little authority, regularly overselling the experience of his youthful sojourn in the Caribbean, struggling with the prospect of harsh decisions hurting his standing, being known to solve arguments about the placement of a mineshaft by fining *both* aggrieved parties, for instance, and releasing a would-be horse pilferer without charge (conditional to him completing chores relating to the top camp's same animals), and consoling the victim of a real theft that *Wirrawunga Hill* shall be the thing to pay due compensation (even though this is after the alluvial gold has been sapped), and encouraging proper observance of the Sabbath by approving the early release of penniless licence-evaders from his camp's prison and otherwise doing little more than writing to his England-bound wife after ridiculous cold water baths, and, on regular visits to the Barnes' thriving coffee tent, claiming noise complaints and enquiring,

REDMOND HARVEY

Isolde, would this sometimes be a knocking-house?

, to which, in defiance of the obvious harlots sitting close to ruffians, under stars, the proprietress gives,

ISOLDE BARNES

Of course not, Commissioner.

, and a cup of her most reliable brandy that he'll swiftly down, then twist his gaze elsewhere about the premises preferred by Irish and others down on luck, men whose faces show the trend of poor yields, who ache from digging shafts revealed to be worthless (*'shicers'*), who couldn't stand to sit at the rival, more optimistic grog-tent-cum-brothel, and because his sub-commissioner's bed is close-by, Harvey often lingers here at the Barnes' to watch a dreary musician or a performance by Aphrodite Kingsley, who's infamous in the daytime for delivering improvised alcohol direct to mining sites, and

in the night for presenting rotating soliloquys from another penpusher's *Antony & Cleopatra*, employing a pharaoh headpiece and blue eyeshadow, the crowd favourites being those evenings she, the Egyptian queen, learns she's been cornered by Octavius' armies, will be humiliated in Rome, and so holds an asp – a poor, once-venomous snakelet discovered in the local bush – to her chest, gasps, considers staying, then collapses tediously to the dirt of a makeshift stage, clutching the place of the bite, her last tiny motions preceding rapturous applause, time after time after time, exacerbated by their lusty regard for her, many of the audience, given the paucity of women in this part of the country, having an idea that Aphrodite's the most alluring woman in the world, many elevating her beauty to the same unlikely standard history has awarded her recurrent character, and whilst Harvey finds himself as drawn to Aphrodite as others – guiltily so, in fact – he's saddened by her repetition, believes it's simply because Wirrawunga Hill hasn't yet been visited by copies of other titanic works that feed off a tragic death, so he devotes some of his ample spare time to writing his own remembrances of great monologues on loose sheets, misquoted Desdemona and Juliet and Medea and Lady Macbeth, and characters from his own unproduced works, the likes of Helen and Queen Elizabeth I, all of these populating his 'sub camp' lodging like a flurry, most of the pages sealed in envelopes and passed-on with excessive gravitas to Mrs Barnes, who pushes them upon her star reciter in turn, in the interests of keeping the peace with the authorities, even though, whenever Harvey is away, that coffee tent is increasingly a venue for a reverse sentiment, with discontent fermenting under the press of the licence system and its heavy-handed policing, men arriving at the Barnes' almost nightly with tales from the lock-ups, and the split lips, gashes, crook shoulders, torn clothes to corroborate, the violence overwhelmingly performed by versions of those redcoat troopers who now patrol the colony, many of them ex-miners who vent their own barren experience on the goldfields, their miserable luck that had prompted turning to the steady but unglamorous income of police work, buttressed, at least, with the commission to be had from snaring licence-bludgers, those crucial permits, by the government's wisdom, applying to not only *diggers* but anyone living in a goldfield's reach, and yet the crucial injustice that rankles, that gets traction at the Barnes' while fluky, contraband grog drowns the sorrows, is the fact all this imperiousness falls upon a body that's unrepresented, men without suffrage, all such rights in Victoria exclusive to the land-owners, folks like Dash, and it's foreign democrats who capture the imagination best on these subjects, none keener than the man who'll often rise on a eucalyptus stump hours after Cleopatra or Juliet or Desdemona have left the stage – their actress generally needing to revive, following such roles – and who, loosened by the whiskey and its additives, launches into speeches such as,

LEOPOLD BAGGS

Friends, what is freedom? It is, as a man, to have empowered choice, to pursue our wants wherever these don't harm another. It is the *true* license that all must have, God-given, and without it we're in stagnation, our souls fouled and discolored. The fight for freedom is *exactly* what has brought things

to bear in my country, and so I see it should be here. If the only means we have to protest the assault of men and the unjust collection of a cost that hopes to drive citizens back to the city, the factory, the plow and the yoke is to appeal to our government and pray for benevolence, then I'm saying let us *appeal* this time in such a way as we can no longer be ignored.

, always saving his most impactful lines 'til the end, guessing correctly it takes a few moments for some to realise a *serious* speech is being made, as distinct from baseless rants and gambling announcements, and sometimes at the end of a Leopold Baggs oration there'll be a pregnant silence, the crowd waiting for an *addition*, then seeing they oughtn't upon furious clapping by Baggs' digging partner, Andrew Macauley, a Scotlander, who'll generally be a kind of bodyguard close to the tree stump, and a fraction after him dozens more shall be showing Baggs approval, a few stumbling to their feet, applauding, belching, whistling, or letting off a pistol, affirmation perhaps even being shown by Paul Schreiber, the third man of the digging party, Macauley and Schreiber companions and allies since their voyage to the Antipodes, Baggs making them a trio the night he'd been a surprise on the road from Melbourne, striding in to the originals' camp as a kind of 'dandy highwayman' they might've shot if his frilly white shirt and braces hadn't made him appear so ridiculous, if it weren't for his accent, if it weren't quickly clear he'd been trudging ahead of a bullock team, his own luggage possibly demanding most of the load, and yet it seemed he did *mean* to be shedding those obvious pretensions – it was only that he'd had so many to begin with – and his Yankee restlessness had been immediately impressive to Macauley, so he was added, so he was implored to head not for Heathcote as he'd planned, but Wirrawunga instead, and soon after they'd arrived he was growing a beard, dressing in the appropriate moleskin trousers, flannel shirts, a Quaker-style hat, doing his darndest to discard signs he was the son of a luminary, the graduate of a Boston military college, the diminutive brother of a Mexican War hero, retaining only a locked luggage trunk for the excesses of his former life he wasn't happy to sell or discard in a rubbish pit, this trunk kept beneath his improvised bed frame in a tent they'd all worked to erect at the outskirts of their El Dorado, near the base of the hill, and from a gold-seeking perspective things to this point had fallen vastly short of their ideals, a back injury to Schreiber and his subsequent unsuitability for haulage making him into the perennial tent-keeper, the man whose job it is to guard their equipment, to make rank porridges and stews the other two won't dare criticise, lest they have to cook themselves and abandon some of the gritty luxury of prospecting, of discussing high-minded notions like 'human rights' or 'the pursuit of happiness' or the exquisite form of Aphrodite Kingsley as they work their claim beside one another, progressing through the easy soil, the gravel, the virtual concrete, the granite, until their hole is deep enough for a windlass and Baggs standing alone in the cool underground, piling a bucket of washdirt for Macauley to lift and filter through at a waterhole with their cradle, continuing this system for as many weeks as it takes for both to agree they've been devoted to a shicer, which is always more disappointing to the Scot, because Baggs feels, in his innermost being, in his resilient *soul*, that whilst he's at these

diggings to win independence, same as everybody, it's of a different kind, it's that at twenty-six years old he really means to separate himself from his upbringing, for if it had ever only been about *gold* he might've simply gone to California, he might've ignored his misgivings about that ill-gotten territory hosting a closer rush, he might've bitten his tongue rather than objecting to the spoils of his brother's war, and yet instead he's at a 'virgin' continent, hoping to imprint himself on the land more than take from it, and he's had revolutionary speeches brewing since the moment he saw the canvas shanties on the Yarra River, maybe even since a point on the boat *over*, and they continue taking shape whenever he sits and kicks over the voids of their shafts, waiting for Macauley to return from a waterhole, and he'll be filtering inspiring sentences as surely as that Scot sifts dirt, their distant cradle sliding to and fro like a tide over pebbles, and there'll be speech-drafting, too, whenever it's Baggs' turn to queue for several hours for the renewal of their mining licences, incrementally advancing on Commissioner Woolley's tent, pockets containing 90 shillings or a fossicked nugget that's the equivalent, and, like a demagogue, he'll collect any fresh complaint that's brought to him or he overhears – a bruised wrist, a night trapped with *proper* felons, a redcoat who *spits* like a cobra – and by hearsay he'll collate stories from diggings faraway, reports of grog tents being razed by a demonic police captain and captives getting beaten to the verge of disability, or one of a man scrambling from the threat of a licence check and falling down a disused shaft, to his death, all of these to be later regurgitated from Baggs' eucalyptus stump, Macauley reliably near the feet that cover tree-rings of more than a hundred years, not really needing to *listen* to anything that's being professed to wildly agree with it, his enthusiasm a small part of the reason that *more* are drawn to the cause, that soon there might regularly be hundreds at the Barnes' coffee tent, swooning over the possible eradication of mining taxes, the possibility of their *enduring* on an arduous goldfield a little longer, none enjoying the speeches more than Isolde and her recent husband, and yet all the while Baggs continues to fine-tune his rhetoric, realising that to say,

LEOPOLD BAGGS

I know it has been only two years since we recognized this state as 'Victoria'. But we ought to bid her the same *adieu* as a George once had to contend with.

, will too greatly discomfort much of the crowd's English multitude, those who might detest the taxes but love their Union flag, and that to one night announce,

LEOPOLD BAGGS

How might the Commissioner Woolley like it to be chained and pummeled in the manner that's been the experience of many of *us*?

, doesn't quite capture the true *direction* of ill-feeling, more of it going towards the troopers and the governor in Melbourne, and, finally, that to go so far as to say, on an evening the whiskey reigns stronger than most,

LEOPOLD BAGGS

In human history there might never have been a leap toward liberty as grand as what we mean to organize here.

, is a bridge too far, not only a foolish attempt to reserve himself a place as an Australian 'founding father', but an underestimation of the crowd's historical literacy, most of them knowing to put at least the Israelites' stroll across the Red Sea, out of Egypt, in a higher category, and indeed humility is something that Baggs learns to add to the persona, he comes to understand that as a proper demagogue, preaching to a mass of pissed, disenchanted miners, he shouldn't create too much distance between them and himself, which goes to explain his reaction on a certain morning in the wintertime, as others are cutting down saplings to burn for warmth, increasing the hill's bald moonscape a little further, and he's down in a pit as Macauley waits overhead, Baggs driving into slightly damp earth until the moment he discovers, unfortunately, exactly what their goal is supposed to be, a couple of golden currants poking out of the muck, perhaps an ounce each, lustrous but not so much that the Scot might recognise them when he says, peering,

ANDREW MACAULEY

You alright, chum?

, and Baggs whips upwards, claims,

LEOPOLD BAGGS

Just an odd maneuver in my stomach. I'm alright.

, a deceit he'll afterwards reflect upon as an *instinct*, something *encountered* in himself, rather than the outcome of any deliberation, arrived at in a fashion that mirrors how he blithely stumbled across the problematic nuggets themselves, and he's sure not to include those currants in the next bucketful he submits to Macauley's interrogation, he pockets them instead, estimating they're an amount that could get their entire trio mining licences for several months, or several horses, or perhaps good wine and several magnificent meals, and for some time, with Macauley gone cradling, he sits in the sunshine at the shaft opening, breath becoming a thing in the air, mud dewing his beard and dripping into his boots, and he wonders *why*, exactly, he'd done that counter-intuitive thing, why he hadn't been jubilant, and yet, not being able to say for sure, he keeps doing it, as in, when his partner returns,

when he discovers *more* gold in the privacy of this shaft's shadows, he *continues* pocketing rather than reporting the pieces, and he *hopes* that what he's sending up won't produce anything of interest by the cradle, and over the next few evenings, whenever Macauley and Schreiber are discussing something intense outside their temporary home – the Prussian monarchy, for instance – Baggs will be inside hiding expensive rocks in the luggage trunk beneath his bed, hoping the silhouette on the canvas doesn't give him away, and the gold keeps coming for almost a week, but when Macauley suggests, having seen none of it himself, that this particular claim looks a shicer, even before it's bottomed-out, Baggs happily agrees, packs it in, as his partner shakes his head, mystified, because he *had* presumed this hole would at last join them with a proper lead, and when they set up at a spot very close by, Macauley *still* trusting his auriferous bearings, Baggs gets to about the same level as with the previous effort, below the granite, before he's upon an even *more* prodigious amount, such that he has to find ways of *distracting* Macauley, so that all of it might be cleared without his noticing, saying something like,

LEOPOLD BAGGS

Humor me, Andrew. How would you describe her eyes?

, causing his partner to launch into stupid, pacing descriptions of Aphrodite's orbs of heaven, seas of understanding, galactic pearls of lacy clams, or her interchangeable swirls of sapphire, jade, topaz, zircon (because even during her sly grog 'deliveries', he's never checked those eyes' *actual* colour), or perhaps it's her navel, her bottom, or her legs, or perhaps Macauley will be tricked into leaving the site entirely, heading to fetch another tool they'd forgotten, for instance, always too trusting of Baggs to suspect him of doing anything nefarious, and inside himself the conman debates how wicked his deceptions have really turned him, for he's sure, after a time, after probing self-study, that the behaviour is all to do with his new obsession with humility, or, at least, the kind of humility which in time could turn him grandiose, for what he's afraid of isn't at all about *sharing*, but is their mining success alienating him from the 'down and out' of the coffee tent, is a fortune which might now equate to houses, great artworks, esteemed marriages (or this divided 'tween three) disrupting the bigger prize of the affinity he's won, the vast majority at Wirrawunga Hill never knowing such successes, and a democratic rebellion unlikely to congeal around a leader who's not representative, who'd surely be considered 'lucky' more than 'persistent', and indeed their blessed run *is* making Baggs slightly embarrassed, even as he keeps it secret, given their treasure's grown to an extent he can scarcely contain in that luggage trunk, requiring his packing the thing carefully, and he becomes anxious of leaving Schreiber alone during the days with the responsibility of tent-minding, out of fear that man'll go lazy from thinking he's only guarding three cots, rusted equipment, revolutionary books, a wonky chimney, and might wander complacently away for periods and leave their *real* valuables prone to a burglary, *or*, worse, might go digging through the boxes beneath Baggs' humble

bed himself, out of spite or boredom, and catch an approximate thirty ounces of duplicity, catch the American out, indeed Baggs often worries about his secret being somehow already known by an observant neighbour, by Macauley who's too admiring to say, by the birds, by the Sun, by the god he doesn't place much stock in, perhaps even by as random a figure as a recurrent Englishwoman who, one time, while he's sitting guilty and alone at the edge of their latest claim, offers in too cheery a voice,

ADELAIDE HOWARD

Good morning!

, as she strides past with a recurrent Aboriginal girl in tow, the youngster clutching a telescope, a newspaper, a pot of jam, and appearing wide-eyed, nothing about herself, whereas all of Baggs is by now attention to 'image' and its tenuous maintenance, such a fraught endeavour that he has thoughts of hastening the action, cutting to the chase, and each time he now mounts the stump in the evenings for more rabble-raising he knows things must be coming to a head, either that trunk overflows with gold in such a way there can't be another hiding place or he capitalises, finally, on an inciting incident and the rebellion is begun, and in fact the god he's keeping at arm's length is proven more sympathetic to the latter, to mutiny (however in Their own roundabout way), the first key development(s) being those announcements that are one morning abruptly pegged to the goldfield's remaining trees, Macauley, on the typical walk to what he doesn't know is a massively enriching claim, bending close to a flyer on an ironbark and reading the *new* governor, in Melbourne, is presently *reviewing* the licence issue and, whilst this is ongoing, shall be pausing the collection of fees, which lifts purple Scotch hands to their head in amazement, which explains the cheering being shot into the fog across the settlement, which makes Baggs, behind him, invisibly crestfallen, though his face shows a grin, and yet the *reverse* inconsistency will be in that American just a day later, once those first signs have been ripped down by the commissioners and a team of troopers, replaced with updates that lay-out an opposite directive, a change of plans, the mining licences to proceed as before, the government exposed as hesitant and brittle, and although there's of course howling across Wirrawunga and by Baggs at the news, there's unprecedented energy in him, too, and that night he goes to the coffee tent meaning to whip things up incredibly, waiting politely, however, until Aphrodite's performance is through, her first 'original' role, incidentally, where she acts the character of 'Roberta', a forlorn, old-country wife, dressed in a bonnet and mismatched society gown, mourning,

APHRODITE KINGSLEY

To dearest, I write with a heavy heart. I do suppose this intention will shock you, with our communication hitherto amiable – my own act of inking it I find shocking enough – however I must

submit to ask for a separation. I cannot give a reason any surer as to concede the flame which had burned bright in me for marriage has lapsed, not simply due to the geographic distance between us this last year. Forever there shall be in my mind fond remembrances of that which we have shared, and of the love we had managed, and yet I cannot foresee from my current frame of reference these being added-to. It is right that you continue to forge a life in that colony without my encumbrances, as

I do the best at advancing here my own, all the while burdened with a formidable pain from this decision. It is apparent to me I do not deserve the attentances of the husband you have been, else my amorous feelings, the flame, would never have been vulnerable to the douses of loneliness and time. I pray you think of sending me no further support, your manful acceptance of this request being all that should do. I cannot close without admitting your last letter, especially the floral sketches contained therein, did cause me much joy and reason to be missing you. I was pushed to recalling our courtship walks through the heath, although the flora of the countries does appear vastly alternate, as too the different minds of the ever grateful, Roberta.

, leaving it as just a short performance – perhaps she’d sensed the hungry schedule of protest talk to come – where she’d sat at a prop table reading a page faked as freshly written, and where she’d done enough to push tears along the cheeks and noses of many a patron who’s experienced or feared such marital abandonment in recent times, although never via the lips of one popularly decided so beautiful, and thus, to a small extent, for a few short hours, Aphrodite’s punctured the swell of gold fever, and even though she hadn’t concluded by curling into a death pose on-stage, there are still comments it was her most *affecting* performance to date as an undercurrent to Baggs’ later trumpeting such things as,

LEOPOLD BAGGS

For so long we’ve gathered here for angry words but, I tell you, in the coming days they’ll *mean* something! We have reached a juncture to *act*, rather than waiting for invisible hands to lift us. We can and must be our own saviors!

, to the heaving crowd, and because of the tangle it’s hard to make out whether Harvey, the assistant commissioner, is in attendance on this night, although either he obviously *isn’t*, and the government’s most reliable, most regular, most proximate *spy* on the Barnes’ coffee tent therefore misses his opportunity at reporting an impending rebellion, or he *is*, but he’s so embarrassed at the mistake of giving Aphrodite an unopened letter from his overstretched wife as though it were a mere play-script, so heart-sore from what he’s heard, that he’s not particularly attuned, leaves early, misses Baggs’ call to arms regardless, and in either case, the next day, while licence hunts by redcoats proceed in earnest, while twenty arrested martyrs are shut into custody, while a secret donor comes good with funds for a desperate order of pamphlets and continues a quiet procurement of ammunition

and arms, Harvey sits alone in his tent at the sub-camp, reading aloud some of his writing, which is *not* a response to that separation request (maybe he's really missed the letter), is only another report intended for '*Domestic Chronicle*', where it'll never even appear, and as he speaks to himself he's being scrutinised, from a fortuitous mound of earth, by Adelaide and Caroline, the girl clutching the unnecessary beef shanks they've bought at a butcher's, the tutor exclaiming,

ADELAIDE HOWARD

See how he reads his work, Caroline, to check for mistakes? That's what I'm always advising *you!*

CAROLINE DASH

Could he just be enjoying it?

ADELAIDE HOWARD

Perhaps that, too. I'd pay to be reading whatever he's got.

, both of them merely speculating, of course, for there's no way of knowing *exactly* what Harvey is on about, given he's a silent performer in the false privacy of a sparse abode, but were Adelaide's payment accepted and they ushered close enough, they'd hear the creator of '*Perseus*' announcing such sentences as,

REDMOND HARVEY

Tonight our Sisiphyians are in a true state of agitation. The debacle of a reprieve to their licence fees and then, one day later, the governor's change of heart, has caused exactly the level of indignation Woolley and myself predicted. I was involved in delivering the news by pegging unhappy flyers to suitable posts, and I was made miserable, for all my writerly pretensions, I perhaps have never touched pages of my own that could stir such strong emotion. I can only imagine, this eve, the extent of the mood at those Sisiphyians' usual meeting cave. There is both regret and a gladness in me I am not present to check it. And yet, for all the lofty utopias I have heard them describe, there should be no doubt their boulder wobbles out of their collective grip, and by morning they're disorganised prospectors again. As we know, to have different energies at opposite poles of a day is common to all people.

, and Harvey's lack of concern towards the fact many extra diggers are firing pistols into this night's air could, ironically, be due to his absorption in documenting, or due to his belief the shooters are only engaging in their habit of checking nobody's tampered with their piece while they've been 'out of tent', regardless it's not until the morning *does* arrive with a vibe of rebellion lingering, with instructions Harvey urgently proceed to the main camp, that he begins to suspect his underestimation,

knowing it for sure when he recognises a sea of diggers, more than a *thousand* droplets thick, marching towards them at Woolley's base, predominantly armed with guns, but, when they're close, knives and crude glass affixed to spears also become discernible, and Adelaide remarks to Caroline, after they've followed the great writer towards this seeming denouement,

ADELAIDE HOWARD

My dear, I think we may have accidentally stumbled upon Mr Harvey's *demise*.

CAROLINE DASH

How do you mean?

ADELAIDE HOWARD

There's about to be a war!

, spoken excitedly, and the 'w' word pushes Caroline to thinking of old lessons on the Battles of Waterloo and Trafalgar, and they might both keep their spot because they're at a safe distance and Adelaide not quite in her right mind, the whole diorama far enough away to potentially be viewed as just a theatre scene, although Caroline uses her telescope to reduce more than a *thousand* actors into only a few, first centring on the assumed 'boss', the one she doesn't know as 'Commissioner Woolley', who's very tall, with a moustache above both the cigar in his mouth and his notably bare chin, and he's moved just beyond the boundary of his key government camp to meet the pack, with Harvey alongside and only a dozen nearby troopers and police to bolster authority, the 'boss' pulling solemnly on that cigar until the edge of the diggers' mass halts maybe ten paces away, the distance of a duel, and there's barking from one of the rebels that Caroline can't properly decipher or pinpoint with her looking-glass, but it's a Bostonian yelling,

LEOPOLD BAGGS

We're here to get the release of the twenty men dishonored by your stupid policies! And we'll take them by force if we must!

, and from Caroline's vantage, although she hasn't found him, Baggs is a backward-facing head, a Quaker hat with a bright red ribbon tucked into its band, and he stands right at the front of his sea as its suitable figurehead, his trousers showing a pistol handle to the authorities, but he knows he only needs the numbers behind to be taken seriously, and he finds his heart not beating as emotively as he may have feared, likely because he's *dreamed* of a moment such as this too many times before, although he perhaps hadn't ever anticipated the *assistant* commissioner being the one to answer his first demand, Adelaide tensing her ear canals, two hundred yards away, as she sees Harvey beginning

to speak, and she assumes she's just beyond the range of the most eloquent de-escalating sermon ever offered, when in fact it's only,

REDMOND HARVEY

Let's think rationally about all of this, shan't we? I don't believe we're as opposed as you men want to say. Now, I assure you the ones you're so concerned by aren't coming to any serious harm or penalty. We're constituted of the same stuff, aren't we? So, all of us, let's not lose our...

, and a certain quivering of his cords betrays fear, and it's clear he's not had much of an effect, especially with a rogue agitator blurting,

DAVID HOBBS

Same stuff? No, Percy, you're a bloody tyrant!

REDMOND HARVEY

I'm a tyrant? Who said that?

DAVID HOBBS

You're a *pack* of bloody tyrants!

, this qualification settling Harvey somewhat, for he hadn't minded the rough language so much as being singled-out, his self-regard pitifully low at this time, and with his own attempt having done little more than delay the implied coup, he steps back, Baggs wondering if *now* is the time for the insurrectionary cry that would trigger manoeuvres they've discussed for swarming the compound, freeing the prisoners, establishing a libertarian island, their effective battalion's package of tactics largely devised by others but drawing upon a few Baggs retains from military college, and yet before any pivotal shout, he feels the weight of the moment slide towards Woolley, tallest of the key players, looking *composed* by way of his cigar, who says,

THOMAS WOOLLEY

Remember there's a big pack, here, and some people will certainly be killed in an affray.

, matched by,

LEOPOLD BAGGS

Woolley, there's a catalog of men who've died from the status quo.

THOMAS WOOLLEY

Is that really correct? And even if so, wouldn't this alternative be worse?

LEOPOLD BAGGS

If it realizes freedom, we couldn't think that.

THOMAS WOOLLEY

But you are free, aren't you? You're free to walk off this field, or to engage in a less oppressive pursuit...

DAVID HOBBS

Bloody get on with it!

LEOPOLD BAGGS

It's about representation, too. How else are we to fulfill our needs, at present?

THOMAS WOOLLEY

Do you think you're Chartists, then, or republicans? I hear strains of *both*.

, this tedious back-and-forth doing much to drain hunger from the crowd, to establish Woolley's intellect, to remind he's not an entirely unreasonable man, even as he's been acting on behalf of one definitely so, but what nobody can discern, save for Leopold Baggs himself, is the more crucial back-and-forth occurring at the site the American would describe as his 'soul', between inner voices urging confidence about an obvious strength of numbers, violent action for grasping a revolution that looms ahead, and other mental advocates wanting the preservation of *all* lives, concerned for each man who's generously followed to this camp in the first place, a great number of them clutching pistols Baggs has financed himself, and this whole spiritual situation, he already feels, is undermining the cave containing what he knows of 'freedom', threatening to collapse it, for whilst he may be 'freest' when allowed to exercise desires, he hasn't thought much of what he *is* when contrasting desires meet like this, are perfectly balanced, his interests in being significant, independent, remembered, equalling his one sudden, thicker regard for not owning hands painted by unnecessary blood, and as his high-minded self tries resolving this standstill, beneath a veneer that's also at an impasse with Woolley, he feels a proper 'victory' getting away, he speaks hundreds of angry words, but knows until that intractable tension is overleapt he won't be making the proper call to action, the planned shout of,

LEOPOLD BAGGS

Huzzah!

, its prospects growing evermore remote as the dialogue with Woolley becomes some forty minutes of dense emancipatory ideology, others interjecting and Caroline's telescope flitting in search of,

ANDREW MACAULEY

You should be with *our* cause, by the sounds, Woolley!

, and

ALESSANDRO PRIVITELLI

You're a puppet, Commissioner!

, and

DAVID HOBBS

Just hand over our prisoners already, you charlatan!

, until the commissioner, finally, with Harvey alongside as a skittish echo, thinks he's moved them towards a sagacious solution, which is that rather than any armed siege on the government camp, rather than any loss of life, the prisoners will be tried here and now, Woolley hinting at outcomes being favourable, and after so long on their feet, Baggs is aghast to detect his crowd's collective attitude hints towards assenting, making it appear a battle cry would no longer be met with much enthusiasm, in fact not *all* of the pack does remain for the eventual 'mock trials', many draining away, the keenest half of the mob-men settling around the shade of gum trees while an unqualified goldfields magistrate takes-up a hastily arranged table and cushioned armchair, fakes impartiality as he hears the cases of each detainee delivered from the lock-up, all of them answering the charge of procuring from under the earth's surface without expensive papers – preposterous a few years ago, and it shall be again in a few years hence – the first man, a nervous Canadian, giving the excuse he'd missed his licence payment through grieving the death of a non-existent cousin and, as forecast, the magistrate takes pity on what he sees is probably a lie, the Canadian is discharged, and his awkward walk back into the bosom of ruffians met with cheering that should've been reserved for an *actual* victory, thinks Baggs, who's barely moved from what *had* been the forefront of his army, as many of his complementary bullets are shot skyward in excitement and in the interest of reminding the magistrate to repeat the dose, which isn't necessary, the second prisoner swiftly released after explaining he's been recovering from a terrible bout of dysentery (no medical certificate), the third only having to say that he'd spent the last week searching for a horse, the fourth that his valid licence had been stolen by an absconding tent-keeper, the eighth that his valid licence had become so

drenched with mud as to disintegrate, the ninth that his valid licence had been required for the emergency patching of a wound, the eleventh that he becomes gravely anxious by the necessary act of *queuing*, the thirteenth that he'd made an embarrassing error with his calendar, and the fourteenth that his memory has gone poor since a bite from one of those bush-flies, Caroline not hearing any of these reasons from her vantage – another mound of dirt expelled by mining – only following the vague pattern of navy-coated police bringing forth men from a fearsome box, standing beside them during a terse exchange with the one Adelaide's described as the 'magistrate', and then giving a light shove to signify each defendant might rejoin the crowd even though not *every* arm of the law's happy about it, and yet just when the monotony of this ritual is such that Caroline and Adelaide might think of turning away, there's the sharp, frightening recognition of 'defendant number eighteen', a straw-haired miner in the usual moleskins and striped flannel who claims he'd only arrived at Wirrawunga Hill the previous day – in fact, a half-truth – with intentions that are different to prospecting, and when he'd been asked for his name by a magistrate keen to expedite the whole sham, 'number eighteen' had lifted his head and declared himself,

YABBY QUINN

Gareth Quinn.

, the Dashvale spectators not needing to hear this, of course, to make a gasp, to fly back to remembrances of this man, his crime, and yet Adelaide will be so scolded for even bringing Caroline near an insurrection that the Quinn sighting won't move either John Dash or Stephen, and in the *present*, Caroline's thoughts go to Miango as much as they do Bobbie Wirrawung, and she's perplexed at needing to remove her telescope from the bowl of her gaze to appreciate the full extent of the *celebrating* that's heard when Quinn, too, walks free, and among his first actions, in liberty, is to seek out Leopold Baggs, the one he's heard was leader of the revolt, and to *thank* him, as though he hadn't been in far worse prisons as a convict, as though the task of arming and agitating more than a thousand men had always been intended for *his* benefit, never mind the other prisoners or the free-state delusions, an entire sea must've been precipitated for the cause of a man no-one really *knew*, who'd wandered into this goldfield with a dog a couple of days ago not to look for the *stuff* but rather 'the Strefelski party' (long gone), the group that'd promised him a share of their 'discoverer's reward', that'd left him with a purebred box terrier as an assurance they'd return, yet hadn't, because the reward was never honoured and they were already travelling with a perfectly good mastiff, however Quinn's despondent sense he'd been taken advantage of is now being helped by the triumphal atmosphere he associates with his release, and as things begin to move on, as the action fully dissipates, there are others approaching Leopold Baggs to reassure him the avoidance of a siege probably *had* been the right decision, and of course he's hardly in a frame to explain his state of shock, his earnest belief that no decision was ever made, *inaction* not the same as a choice, in this

case, for it was really that those competitors in himself couldn't untangle in time, and so time *itself* became the determinant, the hungry companion to everybody's lives moving on of its own relentless volition, deciding things as it wanted, that the riot would be successful in the sense of freeing prisoners but not the colony itself, and Baggs' deferral, his ugly *submission*, for a long while makes him feel as though he's time's mere passenger, helpless to stop its call on his destiny, the clocks ever-rotating, the globe ever-orbiting the sun in the same direction from this southern hemisphere's perspective (*anti-clockwise* in his homeland), and at least it all drags him away from that morning he'll review as containing his greatest humiliation, and for the same long while he accedes to do little more than bury his mind and afflicted soul in time's care, coming up for air, perhaps, several weeks hence at the Barnes', noting how he's sitting with Macauley and a newly legal cup of yellow whiskey, no longer making speeches from the tree stump even though he's mockingly called upon, and noting Aphrodite's no longer performing either, having begun a Victorian tour of soliloquies, gaining confidence from her acclaimed 'Roberta' character, and then Baggs goes back down again, comes up weeks later to find himself climbing the ladder of a new mineshaft, a true shicer, into the light of day to *still* cough-up his tattered licence to a policeman who enjoys the irony, while Macauley tells the man,

ANDREW MACAULEY

We've been already checked three times today by others. Is this being treated as a sport?

, the cop not saying much, and Baggs endeavouring to do the same for as long as it takes to be allowed falling away again, into the same shaft, into the stream of several more weeks until he lodges, remarkably, amongst a Sabbath congregation standing on a rise that makes a natural amphitheatre, the crowd absorbing the shtick of Wirrawunga's resident preacher, a man named Vernon, who as an evangelist ignores the regular sequence of 'ordinary time', instead strives to perfect, like a vaudeville performer, his delivery of favourite gospels that he believes best respond to the moral decrepitude of a gold rush, especially today's, from 'Matthew', where Jesus asks,

VERNON

What would it profit a man to have gained the whole world but lost his soul? It's so a beautiful line, I should say it again. WHAT WOULD IT PROFIT A MAN...

, although Baggs imagines interjecting to ask, facetiously, for advice for the man who's lost *both* the whole world and his soul, who's racing through the days, who's captive in a carriage, unable to lob such a request anyway because now he's ducking into that vehicle again, and it drags him for *months* until he finds himself reading a newspaper with a headline about a *real* rebellion, titled the same as Poe's manifesto on the universe, staged hundreds of miles away, with *real* lives lost, a *real* island

briefly installed, *real* progress made, and when he sets the paper down, inside the store, he knows a merchant's eyes watch him for jealousy, and those of people mingling around do the same, so he confirms all their suspicions by not buying the thing, marching *outside* the store into the bastardised canvas 'Bond Street' of this settlement *outside* history, and when a tailor calls across the way, cheaply,

PIERRE LEFEBVRE

To Ballarat for note-taking, Leopold?

, he'd love to turn and choke that man with his own measuring tape, or at least *retort* as much, but he's still in a phase of passivity, recuperating, so he immerses again, holds hands with causation, trusts, is led another month down the line, awakens in the year 1855 on a summer night, supptime, and is welcomed by a flurry of bush-flies, bugs, and an argument between Macauley and Schreiber about the possible health impacts of their poorly-cooked chuck, Macauley's knife, all the while, pointing out a thick reservoir of blood in his own piece, the embarrassment from which pushes Schreiber into saying,

PAUL SCHREIBER

What are *you* good for, Andrew? You talk like I'm such a let down, but how's your work on the cradle? I bet, with all the time we've been here, you've let through Midas' *palace*.

, and he snatches their plates without giving his partners any chance at continuing, moves to toss the meat in a nearby pit that's abandoned, has become a bin and latrine, and as he tantrums, he doesn't spare Baggs, the fact the American apparently hasn't said much not saving him from,

PAUL SCHREIBER

And has there ever been reprisals from the fool who donated all those guns, Yank? You know, the man *you* must've let down so badly...

, but Baggs is away before he might actualise shoving Schreiber into that abyss of food scraps and shit, instead he loosens, returns to soullessness, bounces without resistance all the way, sadly, to his *last* evening at Wirrawunga Hill, when Schreiber, ironically, is his opponent again, when they're both at the Barnes', drunk enough for skipping pleasantries, and the Prussian searches for his blue by standing on a bench, gesturing to a large audience of patrons and taunting,

PAUL SCHREIBER

Go on, Leopold. Which one is it you owe an apology? Who paid for the arms?

, then Schreiber points suggestively at several men who all shake heads, although there *does* seem to be an interest in how Baggs will reply, *which person* he might nominate as the jibbed benefactor of a small fortune, and Macauley's not properly present to defend his deity, has virtually passed-out as another victim of the grog-flood surging stronger since the Barnes' got their liquor licence, and sensing he's speaking for the wider crowd, Schreiber comes close to Baggs' face, turns him alert by winds of rank sausage breath, rouses him from hibernation, lifts him back into the mechanism of his full self, and so it only takes several more minutes of being goaded to give a *name* for the American to finally admit,

LEOPOLD BAGGS

It was *you*, you fucking gibface. And Andrew. And myself.

, a revelation that wants more explaining, of course, so he rattles off about his phase of deceit, enjoying how Schreiber's former sneer is affected by news a very tidy treasure stash *had* been secreted away from their claims, to prevent its influencing a grander cause, and eventually *had* been employed for all the things their incipient revolution lacked – pamphlets, extra guns, powder, ammunition – spread thin by the needs of a thousand men, Baggs telling the story similar to his old rants, hurling his own defiant wind in the Prussian's direction, and he's comforted, at least, that Macauley is slumped in a way that shows he can't comprehend any of it, and having heard the whole tale, Schreiber's response appears to be an attempt to *punch* his traitor into a similar state, for there erupts a brawl whose level of violence might only be seen at the Barnes' at fortnightly intervals, Baggs trying to make a cage for his face with his own elbows, kicking back occasionally, Schreiber belting him with all the pent-up rage of a reluctant tent-keeper, so that there won't be an end to it unless others intervene, ten patrons answering this call, most of whom had previously been enjoying the spectacle, but not Redmond Harvey, who's now the *actual* commissioner, since the hero Woolley's been relocated, and who *still* often visits this tent, though its far away from his new address, to ask the proprietress in a voice more hushed than before,

REDMOND HARVEY

Are you *sure* this isn't sometimes a knocking-house, Isolde?

, and every time she mistakes his tone, passes an extorted glass of booze, and he doesn't quite have the gall to clarify he'd whispered as a prospective client, bruised by what's now the unavoidable fact of his separation, its certainty confirmed by several letters since that one a dramatist now carries around the colony, and from this sadness he's been looking for every form of distraction, including, here, the need to rescue Leo Baggs from what's become a boxing tent, putting an arm around his

shoulder, rushing him into the night, and rather than issuing any fine when they're in light rain and cooler air, just a handkerchief to dab a single gash on the American's brow, and the solemn advice,

REDMOND HARVEY

You ought to leave.

, from one Mexican sympathiser to another, although Harvey perhaps hadn't intended the *extent* to which this would be followed, with Baggs, by the next morning, having disappeared from Wirrawunga Hill entirely, having recovered his ability to make an adamant *choice*, all of his desires apart from not hurting Macauley pointing in a fresh direction, and so he must make peace with leaving his greatest support to find his cot, on waking, empty of a body yet burdened instead by an unlocked luggage trunk (deliberately left), which still has a pile of dandy American clothes and the small remainder of the fortune Baggs last night admitted to, equivalent to four or so ounces, maybe enough for a good wagon, a few horses, an expensive banquet, and none of these prospective conversions shall appease Schreiber, who wanders in from spending the night elsewhere, sees the pithy offering, and for the Scot's benefit launches into his own retelling of the betrayal, which finishes at,

PAUL SCHREIBER

Imagine how our *lives* would be different, Andrew. He's properly screwed us.

, and Macauley's headache, disorientation, abiding *faith*, tempers with,

ANDREW MACAULEY

How would they be different, really, Paul? Genuinely, tell me the ways.

PAUL SCHREIBER

All manner of ways! I might have some property in Melbourne. Or I'd be keeping a decent business, maybe a restaurant of my own. And with your share, probably the same! You could've even had enough for making a proposal to that woman you were always at us about...

ANDREW MACAULEY

...and being turned down.

PAUL SCHREIBER

Who would know? But you'd have tried, Andrew. You would've been free to waste that gold however you'd wanted, rather than a *swine* never making it *yours*, just doing the same on your behalf.

ANDREW MACAULEY

Is 'waste' the word, though? Do you wish we'd have charged the camp? Do you actually wish we'd had *our* Ballarat? I'm sure there would have been many more than thirty dead...

PAUL SCHREIBER

Perhaps. But we might've had a few minutes of showing something for our labour.

, at which point Macauley rises from his cot, massages his temples, stands at the open flap of their tent, as he notes the previous night's rain sluicing the hills, and bird-song, and the crack of branches, the grip of air, the virtual absence of *mining* that denotes another Sabbath morn, and he says,

ANDREW MACAULEY

You know, there's little credit for those in history who get to a certain point and decently capitulate, rather than picking 'doom'. There'll be monuments at Ballarat, for sure. But let's also have a plaque here, I think, at the spot where Leo opted-out.

PAUL SCHREIBER

You talk so much horseshit, Andrew. Really. You go get a tracker, then, and hunt your hero down for a fucking medal. What cursed luck it was ever crossing paths with *you two*.

, and this here dissolves their partnerships entirely, the proffered gold (after another bush mass about 'gaining the world', et cetera) being traded for coins, divided squarely, and Schreiber wastes a small amount of his own on requisite materials for constructing an *effigy* of the one he won't get another chance to clobber, the one who's fled the coop, which relies mostly on some of that man's ridiculous, leftover clothes to get an impression right, and the addition of twine, orange paint, clumps of straw, a carrot, and flour bags (thrillingly reducing Leopold to his very *surname*) to build the heft of a body, and once the scarecrow's finished, it's lifted across slopes of mud, set-up in the vicinity of the Barnes' tent for the enjoyment of afternoon card players, and is eventually set alight despite the challenge of damp conditions, Schreiber sitting closest to his creation, enjoying the heat, actually, yet the intense representative melt, shrivel, collapse of this figure who might truly torment him for *years* doesn't console the designer as much as he may have hoped, and the laughter the effigy had first won is replaced somewhat by *shock* at its ugly demise, Schreiber staying nearby as it becomes, basically, a sputtering fire on moist earth, and he yells for others to add fuel which might keep it going, a small number responding with branches, men who in their own way are still disappointed by Baggs' leadership, but most now avert from the scene, especially Yabby Quinn, who remains somewhat grateful for his rescue from the lock-up, for his dramatic ascension into the realm of good favour, and

so has spectated the scarecrow's demise with discomfort, but no protest, as he's simultaneously gone about burning he and Alessandro Privitelli's money in a game of euchre, the contest actually between four men who all share the same dwelling, Quinn having decided to *remain* at Wirrawunga after the excitement of his arrival, and an invitation from these others who'd minded his bull terrier and came to appreciate it during that day in custody, his major challenge now being to hold his nerve about his old record in the district, which he's managed well so far, even tricking himself into a degree of pride at being pivotal to what's virtually now a *town*, with several of the dominant buildings, including the Barnes', transitioning towards brick structures, with the area around the government camp increasingly organising into streets that are named after great thoroughfares overseas, and the early foulness of the overcrowded settlement somewhat abating, and thus he's found it quite *pleasant*, even, to live largely in devotion to that dog, to work right through the daylight hours, slowly accruing more pebbles of concentrated *value*, cleansing himself, ironically, by dirt and sweat and the others' coarse brags about their pasts, discussions densely populated by noblewomen they haven't really seduced, - men they haven't really met or killed in a knife-fight, Quinn himself building up a particular narrative of being transported for assaulting a proctor that had cheated him, rather than for only stealing a necklace, and having wandered overland since his release to such distant points as Brisbane (where he'd been assistant to a famous botanist) and South Australia (a notorious sealer), when in fact he'd spent almost two years in nearby Sandhurst, although if he's ever sick of the lying he might allude to having been the one to first *discover* gold on their exact hill, knowing the others will react with predictable, joking amazement, too softened by their accumulated fantasies to take him seriously, and yet sometimes, for his conscience, Quinn shall confess a whole true history to his *dog*, when they're alone, when he must be some kind of god to that snub-nosed animal for rewarding food, for birthing thick clouds of tobacco smoke outside the clamp of their tent, and despite the most serious details of what he reveals, Quinn shall feel comforted, irrationally, by the way in which his new pet maintains anxious attachment, doesn't judge, doesn't tear him to pieces, and as he manically, relievedly, rubs hands along this dog's flank after each divulgence, he pledges to return the same loyalty, such that on *this* late-afternoon, this autumn Sabbath, Quinn is thinking of his animal, the joy of its appearance, as the four men begin a return to their nearby shanty, which has been pitched right at an edge of things, somewhat protecting a flank in whose direction the goldfield might soon grow, and they're moving downhill to get there, all of them – Quinn, Privitelli, one called 'Crisp', another called 'Russo' – in a fine mood despite the decent money that's changed hands through cards, Quinn's shoddy strategising ensuring Privitelli's loss, and instead they prattle-on about such optimistic ideas as meeting mistresses or wives, the upshots of Eureka, the possibility of a vote, the possibility they may all remain in the Antipodes and never have to re-face troubles left behind, their moods suggestive they're all in the early stages of friendship, are reaching for camaraderie, Crisp even whistling an old band song between lips studded by a cold sore, and this tune only ceases when they're a hundred yards from the tent and it's clear the barking they've heard must be *Quinn's* dog, straining at the end of a generous

tether, still angry and unsettled once they've properly made it back, the others dipping inside the 'home' to check nothing's been taken, Quinn sitting on a post to pat and calm his pet, keeping this vulnerable posture right up until he's surprised by a familiar Aboriginal boy, until he reacts to say,

YABBY QUINN

Put it down, now. Come on.

, because the youth's holding a pistol, pointing it right at him, tracking the ex-rouseabout who gets to his feet, keeps one hand for restraining his barking dog by its rope and spreads his other arm as a sign of surrender, even though it's clear the boy can hardly be deterred from shooting, what with them sharing not a heap of conciliatory language and the kid steeling himself beneath a mop of hair, his thin coat ballooning and deflating at the chest, legs poised carefully in shorts, right arm outstretched, and Quinn's tent-mates don't yet have their own weapons, Privitelli and Crisp standing shocked at the entrance and Russo rummaging for a revolver, gets it, so he hurries back to the stand-off, the boy needing to act in a matter of seconds if the murder is to be done, the pistol itself becoming a character now, of course, and in the 'praying' corner of his mind, Quinn desperately appeals that this be *his own* Colt he's confronted by, that Miango, minutes ago, has slipped into the tent and looked for the same weapon he'd last seen on a calamitous day two years before, because if so, when the finger's permitted to pull the trigger, as it is *now*, there should only be a,

GUN

Click.

, because this morning Quinn had left the chamber empty of cartridges, paranoid about a person coming to tamper with his weapon, and the sound produced is pathetic enough that most of the urgency evaporates, Russo hearing it just in time to avoid his own shot, the other two spectators keeping their place and laughing with nervous relief, which Quinn wishes they wouldn't do, indeed he leaves his arms wide, out of respect that the boy has, for some reason, not yet conceded, and the terrier's furious barking acknowledges he's still a threat, too, as he tries the trigger again, with the same result, with his face now showing a sheen from sweat, with his teeth clenched, and none of those men moving to intercept him as he makes doubly sure, from ten yards away, that the Colt's aligned with the place that would be Quinn's heart, and changing tact says,

MIANGO

Bang!

, an angry word, as aggressively pitched as it could've been in a young voice, and Miango pauses for a few moments to evaluate whether this trick's had any effect, the pistol shaking wildly in his hand from fears it hasn't, indeed the only change in Quinn is his sigh once he recalls what's brought on the idea, once he's mentally transported yet stays thoroughly rooted to his spot, the others also transfixed by the curiousness of it all, nothing moving except the dog tugging on a leash Quinn keeps tight and Miango's mouth, which speculates, again,

MIANGO

Bang!

, and Quinn looks across so miserably to the kid who means to kill him that Miango gets a thought he's doing a *favour*, and repeats,

MIANGO

B-a-n-g!

, *this* time, finally, the ex-rouseabout making a jolt, hands rising to his left chest, loosening the dog's tether, clutching at the *heart* beneath a thin flannel shirt, skin, a ribcage, and Quinn's mouth makes gasping efforts, too, rapid and shocked intakes while he falls to his knees, all the while massaging the afflicted breast like he hopes to *move* it, impossibly, and he then looks *angrily* over to Miango, as if he can't *believe* what's happened, as if he knows he's finished, and he gets to the stage of laying in the dirt, his bull terrier more concerned by its owner's health than a need to maul the assailant, Quinn's gasps fading in their urgency, indicating acceptance, eyes going wide, like they've seen too much, have overflowed from confronted sins, and there's one more croak, a puff of last life, before Quinn actually freezes – as much as it's possible with a dog licking his face – and before Miango throws the gun away, terrified of its effect, bolts through the nearby trees, taking terrain that means he's quickly lost from view, and as Quinn regathers himself, craning cautiously in prone position to check the boy's really gone, three of his witnesses break into hearty applause – a fourth, behind her looking-glass, not so impressed – those tent-mates laughing again and congratulating with,

ZACHARY CRISP

Bravo, Gareth!

ALESSANDRO PRIVITELLI

Are you *sure* you never saw Aphrodite as Cleopatra?

, Quinn waving this all away as he stands and cleans himself, saying,

YABBY QUINN

Enough. That's stupid. Stop, please.

, like they're idiots for not realising they'd been watching a scene from a *bigger* drama, and their champion actor rubs his chest (sore from being grabbed so hard) and guiltily reflects on the elements he'd stolen from the three *real* heart attacks he's borne witness to (one in a Manchester alley, one in a road-gang, Bobbie Wirrawung), resisting Crisp's suggestion they let the bull terrier loose to see if it might chase that kid, who'd after all had *murderous intent*, although Quinn responds that he considers the matter finished, ironically just before a *second* attempt on his life is made, a rock abruptly flying past his temple – narrowly missing the *dog*, too – having travelled by an arc that must've begun in the trees, the missile ominous enough that Quinn rushes towards the tent for shelter, plucks the thing off the ground as he goes, sees it has no obvious gold flecks, is about the size of an apple, is heavy enough that if it'd struck him in head, cast just slightly more accurately, his only epiphany would've been what happens after death, and *this time*, with nerves more fraught, Quinn assents to his dog running free, shoved in the rump by Privitelli to start it in the direction the rock had come from, and those three tent-mates charge the same way after it, expecting to come to a boy who hasn't given up on his goal, but instead it's an Aboriginal *girl*, wearing a school-type dress, attempting to bunt the terrier away with a pygmy telescope whose faulty mirrors are *fixed*, actually, when it's flung as she's apprehended by Crisp and Russo, those men grabbing her at the wrists, pulling her away from the easy shroud of the forest while she cries,

CAROLINE DASH

Miango!

, but her co-conspirator has fled an opposite way to get to Peg(asus) (working title), Caroline's pony, and is already riding out of earshot across a plain, weaving between shrubs, just as in their plan he should escape to the world *beyond* for as long as a safe return to a district where he's committed *murder* might take, not realising at this urgent stage he's entirely innocent of such thing, and that Caroline, who he'd accepted leaving behind, now faces her own judicial consequences, is done resisting being dragged to the government camp by Quinn's protectors, is presented to a police captain, her terrible crime explained, and her person deposited in its own partition of the main lock-up, that fearsome box she recalls from the aborted riot, where she now sits, feels other eyes that are frustrated by the barriers, listens to the confused rattling of a man who's chained, suggesting his dangerousness, and although she was told by the captain that Commissioner Harvey will ultimately be the one to deal with her, although she assumes her many times watching over this person with Adelaide will've shown *some* detail to appeal to, she still gets frightened by the *length* of the waiting,

given the sky's now darkening, and there can be no doubt of those on the sheep run looking for her, her father probably ruining this period where it'd become easier for her to roam free again, given her tutor had been declared incapacitated, shingle-brained, but those trips to spy distantly on Harvey now appear useful and at least have taught Caroline the delay in his arrival will be from obsessive scribbling in the commissioner's tent, him tucking his spaniel hair behind ears so it won't be a bother, reading back his own work to himself and feeling impressed, and on *this* night his distracting task is indeed a personal letter to the progenitor of 'Edward Pepperwood', one of several sad messages he's had to compose since accepting separation from Roberta, and he's scanning the piece aloud as something like,

REDMOND HARVEY

I must admit to insecurities, Chas, that you have come to think lesser of me. In my pathetic mind, you're believing I wilfully ignored my responsibility to send Roberta remittances from the colonies, although these were never my intention to shirk. I suppose it was the harsh circumstances and my difficulty finding work in early months that meant this act of matrimony had to be excepted, despite the moral strain. One of my worst fears are that flourishes in Roberta's writing, mostly her choice of a cascading 'sign-off', show the clues of your help with drafts. I pray you might chastise this as paranoia. I do not mean to diminish Roberta in such a way, rather to testify my appreciation of your style. The great problem with being so far from you all, I pine, is the slowness of communication. I did the 'miss' in missive and in some fashion lost track of one letter from Roberta, this ensuring I did not learn of her intentions to part with me until a year afterwards. It is horrendous to consider that – in the best, ordinary circumstances – I would not even have known her mind was so resolved faster than six months after the fact. In this land, I am left hearing of how you all 'were' multiple seasons ago, but I am entirely denied how anybody 'is'. I learn of feelings people have held towards me 'once', and am left to divine what sentiments there could be in the present. It is much like looking at a constellation (sadly, my favourite doesn't appear in these skies) and knowing each glow arrives in one's eye having set-out eons ago. I have dutifully accepted what Roberta wills, and yet a fresh fear is that, if ever I make it back to England alive, all those I have loved even platonically shall have grown too far away from my point to meet with again. Probably this concept has come to me by the thesis in 'Eureka'. Remember Poe was America's greatest supporter of 'Perseus', so I owed him the favour of reading even something so denounced...Rawlings? Yes, what is it? Can you...

, Harvey pausing as he overhears a small dispute that seems to involve the sentry outside the camp, a man named Rawlings, but when he can't decipher it, keeps reading,

REDMOND HARVEY

As you know, Poe believes himself the first to write of a universe which spreads apart until exhaustion, which one day shall rush in on itself again. I mourn the fact I am so a creature of this first epoch, all my impulses similarly towards expanding my influence and body of adventure tales. Chas, I now sometimes wish I had never flung myself so apart. I miss the drama revues and dinners and drafting in the 'Chronicle' office. I miss what it was to have everybody's best wishes. Oh, that there were means for all of us to change direction, to take the attitude of the late-stage and crush back to England, back to the minds we all had when about to leave, when we saw 'gold' without its full consequences! It is the anticipation of a thing, we now know, that is the greatest joy. Make Roberta into the dentist's daughter again, you a man I should like to know, myself a poet curling toes at the pool-edge of 'Perseus'. Award us all our old energy! This place where I have been is encumbered by a mouthful for an appellation – 'Wirrawunga Hill'. With all these reflections in mind, I am thinking of supplanting it with a name of my own, and perhaps now have the authority to do so. The name is 'Dashvale'. In other words: so long our happiest selves! Six months forward, as you read this, it shall be across all of our signs. Know that I shall be writing to you again before a reply, so that, in the mysterious sky of awareness, you may always have a beam named, Redmond.

, and he shakes bugs from the page and his hair, goes finally to check what the matter is with that sentry Rawlings, shuddering a little as he turns and he sees his own bed, recalls its expanse once held Commissioner Woolley *and* that man's travelling wife, then pulls a coat around himself, lifts a lamp, trudges across the night camp-ground, forgetting the business of a girl in the lock-up, and when he finds Rawlings barely outside the gate, the somewhat 'green' redcoat reports,

SAMUEL RAWLINGS

I attempted moving him on, Sir, but then I factored he doesn't really mean any harm.

, so Harvey lifts the lamp higher, and though it's being attacked by more bugs, there's enough light for seeing a weary Scotsman, Andrew Macauley, not particularly sensitive to his onlookers, huddled with a branch, maybe ten paces away from the entrance and marking the soft clay that's the ground with a very thick version of an X