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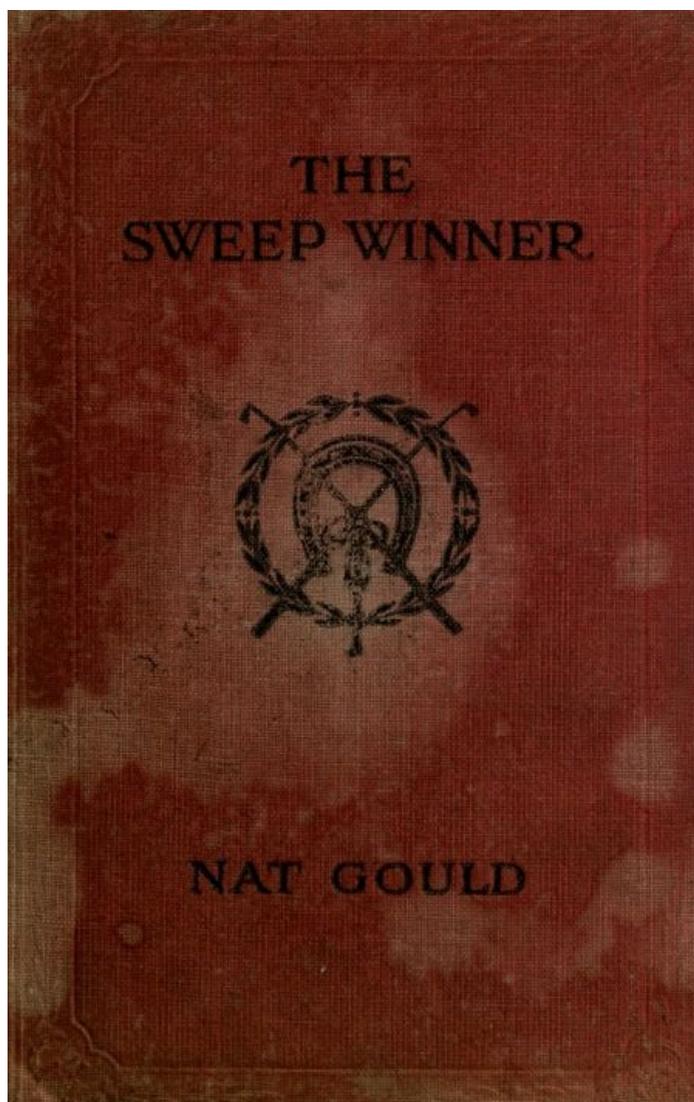
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The Sweep Winner

**The
Sweep Winner**

By
Nat Gould



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*Readers are requested to note that all the characters in this story are purely fictitious,
and the names are not intended to refer to any real person or persons.*

TO THE MEMORY OF MY SON
CAPTAIN HERBERT R. GOULD, M.C., R.A.F.
FLIGHT COMMANDER, 18TH SQUADRON
Killed in Action on the Western Front, August, 1918

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The Sweep Winner

CHAPTER I

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THE GLITTERING WIRE

A man on horseback shaded his eyes with his hands as he looked along the glittering line of wire which runs for hundreds of miles between New South Wales and Queensland, and forms the great rabbit-proof fence, of which he was one of the keepers.

The blazing sunlight scorched all things living. Not a blade of grass was to be seen. The baked ground gasped with thirst. The slight breeze was like the breath from a huge furnace.

The wire was hot and dazzling. Millions of glimmering specks and hundreds of thousands of electric sparks danced on it in revelry. Merely to look at the shimmering wire blinded the eyes. The horse turned his head away. He was dried, shrivelled, mere skin and bone. Yet he was strong, enduring, capable of going long journeys; an heroic beast, fighting a terrific battle against tremendous odds; a faithful companion, a true friend—always reliable. There was a mute appeal in his puzzled pathetic eyes, which questioned why such things were; why he should be rewarded for his efforts with a parched throat, an empty stomach, and a hot skin.

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The man dismounted, carelessly placing his hand on the wire, then snatching it back quickly, with a sharp oath.

"Everything burns in this cursed country," he muttered.

The horse rubbed his nose against the man's arm.

"Ping, old fellow, it's hotter than hell. Thirsty? of course; so am I. We'll have to thirst until we reach the next hole."

The man was strong, well-built, six feet high; even the hard life had not sapped his strength. His dark hair, moustache, and beard, gave him a sombre appearance. His eyes shone fiercely under bushy brows. His face, hands and arms were tanned a deep brown, as also was his chest, where the shirt opened from the throat. He was no common man. His speech was not that of the keepers of the fence, or the bulk of them, for there were many and strange beings on these hundreds of miles of wire line. The majority were old boundary riders, stockmen, tank sinkers, fencers, teamsters. In another class were criminals, convicts and men whose hands were against their fellows; who were dangerous sometimes, when they scented betrayal, or suspected they were being tracked. The man looking at the mirage in the distance belonged to none of these classes; he stood out alone. They knew it, and gave him a show of respect, when they met him, which was seldom.

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There must have been some weighty reason for him to bury himself in this solitude, and to accept an occupation from which any educated man must shrink. He wanted to be alone. He could not have come to a better place. Boonara, the nearest bush town, was fifty miles away from where he stood, and a dozen less from his hut.

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He descended upon Boonara at night, and waited for it to wake up. When it did, surprise was visible on every face as one by one the inhabitants looked forth from their habitation. The surprise was genuine. It was long since a man of this stamp had entered Boonara. He was amused at the people, and wondered if there was one respectably clean inhabitant. Then he remembered the scarcity of water and pardoned the dirt. He was not clean himself, but he felt wholesome. His body had been cared for as much as possible during the week's tramp.

He soon became acquainted with the Boonarites. They gathered round him, and questions were levelled at him. It was quick firing to which he responded with solitary shots. At the end of the first day the people of Boonara were not a jot wiser about him. One fact was patent, he had money. It was difficult to discover how much, but he "shouted" at Bill Big's "shanty," and paid his footing, and was so far granted the freedom of Boonara.

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The township of Boonara consisted of one main street, with irregular, irresponsible-looking houses dotted about, built anyhow. They had been put up at various times by many different sorts of men. Building operations commenced at one end and continued at intervals until a sort of street was formed. The first inhabitant had been a "keeper of the fence," and he camped there because it was convenient to his work. Gradually, in oddments, other men came to the place. It was a bachelor township until some enterprising man, bolder than the rest, and more saving, ventured to Sydney and returned with a wife. She was the only woman in the township for a long time, and was regarded with a certain amount of awe and wonder. The consensus of opinion was that she must have had a terribly bad time in Sydney, or nothing would have induced her to marry Jack and come to Boonara. The example set proved catching, and other members of the bachelor community took unto themselves partners. The township grew slowly, unlike the centres of big mining districts which spring up mushroom-like in a night and often die away as quickly.

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Boonara gathered in many of the keepers of the fence, who had tired of the life and settled there

on a mere pittance. It was not a prosperous community; there was little conversation, and a lot of grumbling. Each man regarded his neighbour with suspicion, not knowing who he was, except by name, nor whence he came. All around Boonara was an arid waste, except at certain seasons, few and far between, when rain came sweeping in a deluge over the parched earth, filling up the gaping cracks and crevices, hissing and swishing over the land, bringing life, in every drop a new birth. Then the plains woke up. Miles upon miles of dull-brown crumbling grassless spaces became green and refreshing. Strange sights followed these deluges. In a mysterious manner sheep appeared in thousands wandering across the plains, nibbling this wonderful and succulent food from which they had been so long debarred. Cattle came, mobs of horses, all branded, belonging to squatters miles away. Nobody seemed to own the land round Boonara. At least no member of the township had ever heard the name of an owner mentioned. They ran what cattle, horses and sheep they possessed anywhere on it. There were no enclosures, no square-mile paddocks. The only fence was the glittering wire running along the border.

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There were very few men in the township who had seen the wire fence. But they met the keepers of it at long intervals when they paid visits to Bill's shanty.

In all communities, however small, there is a fierce desire to look down upon someone, to imagine a superiority. It is a trait which is laughable, and sometimes pathetic. Although the Boonarites were far from civilisation they had their pride, and regarded the keepers of the fence as beings of an inferior order. As the keepers had no respect for the inhabitants, everybody seemed satisfied with the state of affairs.

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There was one keeper of the fence whom the Boonarites placed upon an equality with themselves, and that was the man who came upon them in the night.

They were amazed when he went on the glittering wire track. He was far too good for that job; "he wouldn't stick it long" they declared. He did "stick it," however, to their great surprise. The man was a mystery to them, which is not to be wondered at, considering he was mostly a puzzle to himself. His hut was forty miles away, and only three people had visited him there. He did not encourage them. Loneliness sat lightly upon him, so it seemed. Bill Bigs was the most frequent visitor, and when he rode there, or drove in his buggy, it was seldom empty-handed. Somewhere, hidden in the bowels of the earth beneath Bill's shanty, there was mysteriously reported to be spirituous hoards of excellent quality; these rarely saw the light of day in Boonara. Various decoctions were served out over the bar, and there was a strange resemblance in the flavour, no matter from which bottle they were taken. A "nip" from one of Bill's underground bottles was like nectar from the gods.

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The man on the fence was never served with inferior stuff, and when Bill visited him he took with him of his best.

Bill Bigs was rough and ready. Rumour credited him with having been in league with bushrangers, before those undesirable and romantic figures disappeared from the earth. Probably this was true, but Ben was no longer an illegitimate prey upon mankind. He was licensed to "rob" by doctoring his goods. He prided himself on knowing a man when he saw one, and he put down the occupier of the hut in this category. He, however, knew nothing about his friend, except that he was worth a dozen ordinary fence keepers. The man never spoke of his past, or explained why he was in the most solitary place in this vast land. In vain Bill tried to induce him to talk. There was a threatening glitter in his eyes which caused Bill to halt and get on to another track. It was this man, the keeper of the fence, who stood under the blazing sun pitying his horse more than himself. He was waiting for another keeper at the point where they had met, and had a few words and parted. He shaded his eyes again, but saw no one coming.

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"I'll wait, I'm always waiting. It hasn't worn me out; it never will. There's a fire within that keeps me alive; it burns, but never dies down. There's enough fuel in my thoughts to keep it glowing until my light goes out."

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CHAPTER II

IN THE HUT

Glen Leigh was his name. At least he was down as such on the books, but names were not of much account on his job; they might as well have been numbers seeing they were mere indications of identity. He waited until he was tired, although he had much patience. His throat was parched; his skin burned; there was no shade. On his head, straight down, poured the fierce sun. To look at it was blinding. It seared the eyes; sparks danced when they turned to the earth again. He had no watch. In his hut there was one, but he seldom wound it. He told the time by nature's signs, and was never far out in his calculations.

"I've waited an hour. Damn the fellow. Why doesn't he come? He expects me to do his work and my own too." He shrugged his shoulders. Jim Benny was a mere lad compared with him.

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"Poor young devil. What's he done that he should come to this? The sins of the father, and so on."

A shadow flitted across the ground. He started. This was not a land of shadows, except when rain

clouds swept away the dazzling blue. He looked around, then above. There was a small black cloud floating in the brilliant sky; it looked like a balloon.

"Rain!" he exclaimed. "By all that's holy, rain."

There was a power of feeling in the word.

"Rain."

In lands where skies are dull, where moisture hangs in the air, where a downpour spoils pleasure and provokes temper, the word rain has a very different meaning. To Glen Leigh rain meant almost everything. There had been none for over nine months, not a drop, and that small balloon-like cloud that cast its shadows and startled him, was more welcome than a shower of gold.

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"It's curious," he muttered, "I've never seen it exactly like this. But it must mean rain. God send it. We want it, we dried up sapless things. Rain, Ping. Do you hear, old parchment, rain. And your coat'll be dripping wet. There'll be grass, and you'll feel juice in your mouth instead of dried leaves and twigs. Rain, Ping, rain!"

He gave the horse a sound smack, jerked up his head, and pointed to the cloud rolling above.

A slight breeze came. Ping sniffed, inhaling it with delight, while an anxious look of anticipation came into his eyes.

Glen watched the cloud as though his life depended on it, as thousands of lives did. It was a peculiar phenomenon, a black patch steering through a sea of blue. In its wake it left a trail, dull, streaking out, and beyond the trail were more heavy clouds on the rain path. This leader was the herald of the storm.

There was no moan, there was nothing to cause it, but presently the wire fence seemed to buzz, and the rising wind came through it playing on the strings a sort of sad harmony, but sweet music in the ears of the man and horse.

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A low rumbling sound proclaimed the advance of the clouds, and they rolled along in battalions blotting out the sunlight; the relief to the eyes was immense. He waited, but Jim Benny did not come. He almost forgot about him in his anxiety over the approaching rain.

A crack straight above his head, which echoed over the plain, was followed by a burst of water which deluged him and Ping in a few minutes. Both gasped with relief. They opened their mouths, and the refreshing water cooled them; they had not had such a soaking for months. The land responded to the rain. He fancied he saw the blades of grass already shooting; he knew they would be there in a matter of twenty-four hours. He mounted Ping and rode to his hut. It was no use waiting any longer for Jim Benny; he would see him next day. Still he wondered what had come to him, and felt a bit uneasy. He liked Jim, although he seldom spoke more than a few words to him. Perhaps it was the mystery surrounding him which appealed to him; he was a mysterious man himself.

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The rain poured down as he rode along. Ping's ambling pace soon covered the ground, and he reached his hut in a shorter time than usual.

The door was wide open. Someone had been there in his absence. He smiled; the intruder would not have had a very rich find. A few of his provisions might be gone; the poor devil was welcome to that.

He was always cautious, for he was accustomed to face danger. There was no telling what sort of desperate, hunted character had found his way there, so he handled his revolver as he went in. Lying on his bunk he saw a bundle of clothes, or what looked like it. Quietly he stepped up, then started back in amazement. It was no sundowner, not even a man from Boonara, out on the jag, who had wandered in a half-frenzied condition so many miles. What he saw was a woman, a young, pretty woman, whose face was lined with sorrow, whose cheeks were sunken. The hands were hanging down, thin, almost emaciated, showing the veins, a dull blue. One leg drooped down the side. The boot was worn, and torn. The dress over it was ragged. Her whole appearance denoted the utmost distress, hardship, exhaustion. She hardly breathed, although he saw her bosom slightly heave and fall. She was in a pitiable plight indeed.

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Glen Leigh was so wonder-struck at this strange sight that he stood staring at her for some time, until Ping roused him by poking his head in at the door, asking in his dumb way for food. Even the woman, lying so strangely there, did not cause him to delay. Ping was a good comrade; he must be attended to. He went round to the back of the hut, where there was a lean-to shed, and Ping followed him. There was a little precious hay still left, which he had secured for the horse at Boonara at a fabulous price, panning out, if reckoned up, at about a hundred pounds a ton. It had been brought down the river on one of the puffing, snorting, little steamers, and deposited at the small staging, to be left till called for, and fetched by Bill Bigs at his leisure. Ping sniffed this small portion of evil-smelling stuff with satisfaction. He had never known better fare, for he had been bred in the wilds, and brought up anyhow, on anything. His dam had very little milk for him; she had nothing to make it with. When his dam deserted him, or he left her to go on his own, he wandered about, living precariously until he was six years old. Then some master on two legs caught him, and Ping began to learn the effects of contact with humanity. Ping's life had not been a happy one until he passed into Glen Leigh's hands. With the wisdom of the horse he discovered the great change in ownership, and wondered at it. He followed Leigh about like a dog; there was

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no bucking, biting, squealing, kicking against the pricks. He settled down to a humdrum existence with a feeling of glorious content.

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As Glen Leigh stood for a few moments eyeing Ping he compared him with the woman lying in his hut. There was a similarity between their lives. Both had been ill-used, and both came into his possession. Into his possession? What on earth was he to do with the woman? Ping was all right. He had bought him for a trifle. But the woman. It was quite a different thing. She was in his hut, and part of his household for the night. What must he do with her?

"Eat your supper, Ping. I'll go and see to the other one," he said, and went back to his "front door."

He entered softly. She was still sleeping. He sat down on a log and watched her.

How had she come there? She must have tramped miles. From Boonara of course, but he did not remember seeing her there. He smiled at the thought. He seldom gave more than a passing glance to people in the township. He was hardly likely to have noticed her sufficiently to recognise her now. If she came from Boonara, why had she left the place and wandered all these miles? Was it by chance she had struck his hut? Of course, it must have been. No doubt she saw the rainstorm coming, and seeing the hut at the same time hurried in for shelter.

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She was not an ordinary working-woman, he saw that, and cudgelled his brains to find out how she came into the country at all.

She must belong to somebody, but to whom?

He knew of women who had lost their reason in solitudes, and had not wondered at it. The country was only fit for blacks, and even they shunned it, the few of them that were left after the white man's march. Had she come along with some squatter, when he had been making a visit to Bathurst, or Bourke, or even Sydney or Melbourne? That was a possible solution, but highly improbable. There was only one large station near enough to this place, from which she could have tramped. Its owner was Craig Bellshaw, of Mintaro Station, and he was not the sort of man to drive a woman away by ill-treatment, quite the contrary.

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She stirred. He listened. She was muttering, but he could not catch the words. He got up and leaned over her.

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CHAPTER III

A STRANGE SITUATION

He could make nothing of what she said. It was a jumble of incoherent sounds, with no meaning in them. He gathered no information as to how she came there.

"She's ill—delirious. What can I do for her?" he muttered.

He was a soft-hearted man, where women were concerned, and distress, although he had seen much of it, appealed to him. There were no doctors, not even in Boonara. When folks were ill in those parts they had to fight for life as best they could, with a few patent remedies to aid them.

"Fever," he said, "there's no doubt about it, and she has no strength to withstand it. I can't leave her alone. I wish to heaven Bigs, or someone, would come."

He sat by her all night; sometimes he had to hold her down, as she struggled like a bird in his strong grasp. He was very gentle with her. Not one man in a hundred would have credited him with such tenderness. When daylight sprang out suddenly, as it does in these climes, she became quieter. He put his hand on her breast, humming softly. The touch and the sound soothed her. With wonderful patience he remained in this position hour after hour, proving himself a great man, greater than he ever thought or reckoned himself to be. He was hungry, but he did not move. Ping came to the door and wondered why his wants were left unattended. It was unusual. He would have resented it had not the downpour brought up small shoots of green, with marvellous suddenness. He turned away and went nibbling the unaccustomed luxuries. Ping came to the door instinctively. Grass was a thing he had not seen for months. He didn't expect to find it, but as he sniffed its freshness he left the hut contentedly, and Leigh was glad.

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"He smells the grass," he thought, "There's more chance of her pulling through now it's cooler." He mixed up the horse and the woman in his thoughts continually. How long he sat there he did not know, but a sound reached him which gave warning that something or someone was approaching. Ping neighed. He knew if it was a rider he would call at his hut. They always paid "ceremonial" visits; it was an event in their lives. A sound of hoofs reached him. It was very welcome; he gave a sigh of relief. He looked round, and saw a horse and rider pull up at his door. It was Jim Benny. At any other time Benny would have been cursed roundly for neglecting his work. Curses were the habitual mode of forcibly expressing disapproval by the men of the fence. But never was man more heartily welcome. Glen Leigh didn't even give a thought as to why Jim Benny came to his hut. It was an uncommon occurrence but he had no time to consider it.

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Jim grinned as he put his head in at the door. He was about to speak when he grasped the situation, as far as it was possible for him to so do, lacking all knowledge of the facts.

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He was much surprised, as Glen Leigh had been, when he found the woman in his hut.

"Hush," said Glen softly, and Jim crept in on tiptoe.

He stood looking at the woman. His thoughts were much the same as Glen's. The white wan face struck a chord in Jim Benny's nature that had not twanged before. His eyes glistened, then moisture gathered. Presently a couple of drops trickled down his sunburnt face. He put a hand on Glen's shoulder, bent down, and whispered, "How did she come here?"

Glen shook his head.

"She's bad?"

"Fever."

"Poor little thing," said Jim.

Glen lifted his hand from her bosom. She only stirred slightly, then with a sigh became still again. He beckoned Jim to follow him outside. They walked a few yards away, so that the sound of their voices would not disturb her.

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"Where the devil were you yesterday?" was Glen's question.

"My horse broke down. I had to bag another, and a pretty brute he is. Look at him," replied Jim pointing to the wretched mass of skin and bone.

"Why have you come here?" asked Glen.

"I thought I'd ride over and explain. I know what you are when you're in a temper," replied Jim.

"That's not the reason."

"Perhaps it isn't. Anyhow, what about her?" and he pointed to the hut.

"Somebody must go to Billy's and get some good brandy for her. It's got to be the best—none of his poison," said Glen.

"In that case you'd better go. It's no good me trying it. He'd think I was lying, and there'd be no getting it out of him. I'll stay with her if you go. Besides my horse is no good. Ping will do the journey in half the time," Jim answered.

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Glen looked at him. Jim's face did not move a muscle.

"It's lucky you came," Glen remarked. "Tell me what brought you here."

"Another time," replied Jim hesitatingly.

Glen shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please," he said.

"How did she get here?" asked Jim.

Glen told him how he found her, and Jim Benny was as helpless as himself in solving the problem.

"It's very strange," said Jim. "We've never seen a woman round here before. What are you going to do with her?"

"Keep her until she's pulled round. Then I can find out all about her," returned Glen.

A faint cry came from the hut which caused them to turn round quickly and run back. A strange, weird sight met their eyes. The woman was standing close to the bed. Her hair was down. They noticed it was a beautiful nut-brown, and there was plenty of it. Her arms were stretched out. Her eyes stared glassily. As Glen came in she tottered forward, and he caught her in his arms.

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A thrill went through him as he clasped her. Her face was close to his. He felt her breath on his cheek. He drew her tightly towards him, and held her for several minutes. Jim Benny watched him with a queer light in his eyes.

Glen carried her, laying her on his rough bed. She was exhausted with the exertion and remained quite still.

"You'd better go at once," said Jim, "she's bad, very bad."

Glen stood thinking for a few minutes, then asked, "You'll not leave her while I'm gone?"

"No, I'll sit by her as I found you sitting. See?" and he sat on the log, placing his hand on her breast. "That'll soothe her."

Without another word Glen Leigh left the hut.

He whistled Ping, and obediently the horse came to his call. Glen saddled him, and rode off towards Boonara. Jim Benny sat looking at the woman. He heard the hoof beats gradually dying away, then with a sudden movement got up and kissed her on the lips. She moaned.

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"I couldn't help it. I meant no harm. She reminded me of—never mind names. I loved her, and she married him—that's all done with."

He remained quite still until Spotty, Glen's dog, half dingo, came sniffing round. He had been on the prowl for a day or so, and returned repentant. The predatory instinct was uppermost, which was not to be wondered at considering the wild stock from which he descended, and he made excursions to some land of which his master knew nothing.

The dog knew Jim, on the fence, but had not seen him in Glen's hut. Then there was the woman. Spotty had never come across one. Jim knew the nature of these dogs, their faithful savageness, and scented danger in the air. He had seen the dog on the fence with Glen, but had always been on horseback, and Spotty had never really scented him. He didn't even know the dog's name.

Spotty eyed Jim, then looked at the woman on the bed. Here was something he did not understand. He came forward, crouching, like a panther ready to spring, and Jim set him with his eyes, not daring to move, on her account. [Pg 39]

Spotty sniffed at her dress, turned round, faced Jim and growled, a low rumbling sound. Then he lay on the floor, paws outstretched, head erect, watching.

Jim knew if he moved the dog would probably fly at his throat. It would be hours before Leigh returned, and he must remain in this position the whole time, on her account. Had he been alone he could have cowed Spotty, or attempted it. He heard distant thunder. There was another storm brewing, the promise of more welcome rain. The lightning flashed through the hut, playing in and out at the doors. The crashing sounds came nearer; then the rain burst in torrents.

Spotty did not move. He remained with his eyes on Jim, not even giving a glance at the figure on the bed. The woman slept through it all. Jim wondered at her strange stillness. Was she dead?

The thought made him start. He had not put his hand on her again after he kissed her, and could not feel or hear her breath. Spotty saw him move, and growled. He seemed about to spring, then crouched again. [Pg 40]

It was a strange situation—the man, the woman, and the dog, in the hut, the storm raging outside, and Glen Leigh riding on his mission to Boonara. [Pg 41]

CHAPTER IV

"IT'S FOR A WOMAN"

"Hello, what brings you here?" said Bill Bigs, as Glen Leigh entered his house. The tone was not encouraging. Bill was in an ill-humour, and it was not difficult to discover the cause. The bar was in a state of wild confusion. Broken bottles, bits of wood, splinters from the rough furniture, and jagged pieces of glass lay about. There was every sign of a fight.

Glen took it all in at a glance. Although he was in a desperate hurry he knew the best way to succeed would be by humouring him.

"Bit of a skirmish, eh?" began Glen.

"Two of your fence fellows began it. I never saw such beasts in my life. They all are."

Glen's eyes glittered.

"Does that include me?" he asked.

"No. I can't say it does, but there's no telling what may happen. You'll break out some day. Flesh and blood can't stand your job," replied Bill. [Pg 42]

Here was an opening. Glen was holding himself in leash wonderfully well. All the time he was thinking, "What's she doing? What's he doing?"

He wanted to hurry back. Ping would have to hustle when he made a start.

"You're right," he agreed, "if it wasn't for a nip of your good stuff now and again, Bill, I'd go under."

"I see. So that's what you're here for. Well, I can't gratify you this time. I've run out."

Bill was husbanding his resources; it was his habit. Glen knew there was a tough job before him.

"I must have some of the best, Bill, I'm run down," persisted Glen.

Bill laughed.

"Must have it? I like that. Look around. Do you think I'm going to stand that sort of thing from your fellows without paying somebody out? As you happen to have come along first I'll pay you out. You'll get nothing from me to-day." [Pg 43]

"I must have it, Bill. I'll pay double price for it."

"When?"

"In a month. I can't do it now."

"A month! Six months you mean, and then it's uncertain."

"Not with me."

"I'll not deny you're a good payer, and straight, but you've got to suffer for the sins of others. You're one of 'em," returned Bill.

Glen Leigh leaned over the counter, his face close to Bill's.

"If you knew what I wanted it for you'd give it me without payment," he said.

Bill looked hard at him. Glen's face was quivering. His mouth twitched. His eyes glared. He was thinking of the woman. How should he get the brandy if Bill persisted in refusing, for he meant having it at any cost?

"What's it for?"

"I can't tell you. I will before long, but not now."

[Pg 44]

"Then it's a fake. You want it for yourself."

"I do not."

He fancied he could hear her moaning, becoming restless, and if he got what he wanted and hurried back she might have a chance. It exasperated him.

"Why not tell me the reason?" asked Bill, fairly enough.

"There's somebody ill in my hut."

"Oh, that's it, one of your mates. Do you think I'm going to help him after last night's work? Not me."

Glen wanted to conceal that it was a woman, but he was wasting precious time. Could Bill be trusted to keep it to himself? He had no desire for the township to know until he had found out all about her.

"It's not one of my mates. I'd not ask it for him after that," and he waved his hand round. "You'll not say a word, but keep it dark?"

"It depends on what it is you tell me."

"I can't tell you. Bill, we've been what folks call friends, as far as it goes here. Promise me. It's a matter of life and death. You'll not be sorry. You'll have done a good action, and saved a life."

[Pg 45]

Bill saw he was in deadly earnest. He knew Glen Leigh had always gone straight with him.

"Out with it then. I'll promise, so help me I will, but I don't say I'll let you have what you want."

Glen saw he was yielding. Again his thoughts went back to his hut, and he groaned at the loss of time.

"It's for a woman. She's got fever, and is delirious. She'll die if she doesn't have some stimulant. For God's sake, Bill, let me have it."

Bill stared at him. There was a genuine, even pathetic ring in his voice. But a woman! He couldn't be expected to swallow that yarn.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"In my hut."

Bill laughed. He couldn't help it. The thing was so ridiculous.

"Who's the lady?" he asked with a grin.

[Pg 46]

Leigh's hands clenched. He was becoming dangerous.

"I haven't time to tell you lies. I don't know who she is, or where she comes from. All I can say is I found her in there lying on my shakedown, dying," and he told the whole story as rapidly as possible to the astonished Bill.

"It's as true as gospel, and Jim Benny's with her waiting my return. Think of the time I've wasted here. I may be too late. Ping's none too fast, but he's sure. For heaven's sake, Bill, let me have it, and some tinned stuff, soup, anything you've got. There's nothing at my place for her."

He spoke rapidly, excitedly. He was strung to the highest pitch as he thought how long he had already been away.

"It's the rummiest yarn I ever heard, but I don't see as how you could make it up. I wonder who she is?"

"That's what I've got to find out. If she dies, her secret goes with her. Help to save her, then we'll

get to know," begged Glen.

[Pg 47]

Bill thought of his girl at work in Adelaide. Supposing she was in such a plight? The mere idea made him shiver.

"I'll do it, Glen. Damn it, man, if you'd outed with it at first the thing would have been settled in five minutes."

He disappeared. Glen knew if he had fired the story at him straight away it would not have been believed at all. Bill also knew it as he dived into the bowels of the earth beneath his bar.

"He's worked me cleverly," he muttered. "He saw I was cut up rough when he came in, and he handled me well. It's a queer go, a very queer go, but I believe him. He's not given to lying, and in any case I can go and see for myself in a day or two. If he's put up a game on me, I'll—No, he'd never do it. He's too much of a man. And his face! It might be his sweetheart the way he looked."

Bill was rummaging about. Selecting two bottles he took them with him. As he went back through his storeroom, he collected some tinned milk, soup, and biscuits.

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He packed them all carefully so that there would be no risk of breakage, then went back to the bar.

Two men had come in during his absence. One was "on the fence," and as usual they had selected a bottle of alleged whisky, and were helping themselves. Glen had refused to join them. He was called a sullen bounder.

"Get out of this," yelled Bill when he saw the rider on the fence. "You're one of the devils who caused all this mess."

"I'll pay for it—at least my share," answered the man.

"Then out with it," said Bill, putting his package down.

Glen eyed it greedily. He ought to have had it an hour ago and been well on his way back to the hut. Here was more delay. Would she be alive? Would she be alive? Was Jim with her? Yes, he'd wait. He was sure of it.

The man pulled out some greasy pound-notes and handed Bill a couple.

[Pg 49]

"That's more'n my whack. It'll have to stand good for this," and he placed his hand on the bottle.

"And mind, if I see any signs of strife brewing you'll not get away so easily next time," warned Bill, as he stuffed the dirty notes in his pocket, only too glad to get anything in payment for the damage.

He beckoned to Glen, picked up the package and went outside.

"You'll find all you want here; at least as much as I can give you."

"I'll never forget it, Bill. One of these days I may be able to do you a good turn. I'll see you are paid in full, and more."

"Never mind about that. It's something to my credit that I've faith enough in a man to believe such a dodgasted yarn as you've spun me."

"You do believe it?"

"Yes. Shake. You'll not mind me driving over? I'll not come empty-handed, and not to act the spy, but it's such a stretcher that I'd just like to see for myself."

[Pg 50]

Glen smiled as he mounted Ping, and Bill handed him the parcel.

"I can't wonder at it. I can hardly believe it myself. Come and see. You'll be welcome. You always are, but not a word to a soul."

"I'll keep it dark, you bet. I'm with you in finding out all about her. It'll be a bit of a change from that filthy work," and he jerked his thumb in the direction of the bar.

As Glen was riding away, the man who had paid Bill the two notes rushed out and yelled, "Expect you've not heard that Joe Calder's been found shot dead on his track!"

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CHAPTER V

WHY JIM CAME TO THE HUT

Joe Calder shot dead on his track!

Glen had no time to waste or he would have gone back to hear more. He must hurry on. Ping felt there was need for haste. His master seldom pushed him as he was doing now.

Joe Calder done for at last! Glen had warned him it would come some day, for the man was a

brute. He had no human feeling, and how he earned promotion over his fellows was one of those things no man could understand.

Glen was overseer on his track, as Joe Calder was on the other, and the two men often met, but they were as wide apart as the poles in every respect.

Calder was a sneak. The men under him hated him. More than one threatened to do for him, but he was a big powerful man, and dangerous. He was one of the worst characters, and when he went to Boonara even Bill Bigs fought shy of him. There was no doubt he was a criminal. His face, his shifty eyes, the backward glances, his fear of being followed and tracked down betrayed it. But he must have had a friend somewhere, or he would never have got his post. [Pg 52]

Glen was surprised, and yet he was not. The news was shot at him unexpectedly, but he believed it, and wondered who had rid the world of a scoundrel, and the track of a desperate man. Ping travelled well, his head bound for home, such as it was, and every horse knows the way to his stable. Mile after mile was traversed, until Glen saw a faint speck in the distance and knew it was his hut. A townsman would have seen nothing, but Glen's eyes were used to looking long distances, and were almost as powerful as a glass in distinguishing objects.

"Go on, Ping. We'll soon be there," and the horse put on another spurt. [Pg 53]

The tension in the hut was not relaxed for a moment. Hour after hour passed, and still the dog stood on guard and eyed Jim. If the man moved there came an ominous growl.

Two or three times the woman groaned, and Spotty pricked his ears wonderingly. Such sounds were unfamiliar. Jim watched him. The dog seemed half inclined to spring on the bed. Thinking better of it he settled down again with his eyes fixed as before.

A drowsy feeling crept over Jim. He was fearful of going to sleep. He had been sitting like a statue for the Lord knows how long and he had no idea of the time.

He listened. Not a sound, except a few melancholy notes from a passing bird. What was Glen doing all this time? He had promised to watch, but Glen had not promised to come back. Jim's mind was in a chaotic state, and he was hardly responsible for it.

Spotty pricked his ears. Jim accepted this as a sign that he heard something, and listened intently.

The dog gave a short, sharp bark, a true signal this time. [Pg 54]

In his great sense of relief Jim stood up. He could bear the strain no longer.

Spotty flew at him, straight at his throat. Jim caught him with both hands and held him, the dog growling, snarling, trying to wrench himself free to bite his hands. Jim held on. He heard the hoof-beats. It was Glen returning and all would be well, but he was tired and cramped with the strain, and Spotty was a ferocious dog, and strong.

The woman moved and half sat up; then she sank back again. He was thankful.

Ping halted. Glen got out of the saddle with the precious burden and strode into the hut. Unstrung as he was, the sight that met his gaze caused him to drop the package. With a cry of despair he caught at it, just breaking its fall.

Spotty, seeing his master, ceased struggling. Jim let go his hold and fell on the floor in a dead faint.

"Get out," almost yelled Glen, and the dog shot through the opening like a fox bolting from hounds, dashing under Ping's belly and scouring across country at top speed. Yet he had only guarded his master's hut, and his doggy brain resented the injustice. [Pg 55]

Glen opened the package before attending to Jim. There was no damage done, and he had never felt so like offering up a prayer before—supposing, after all, he had gone through, the precious bottles had broken? He knelt down beside Jim, summing up the situation, and wondering how long he had been subjected to the strain caused by the dog. Opening one of the bottles, he poured a small quantity down Jim's throat, being careful not to spill a drop.

Presently Jim sat up, looked round in a dazed way, and then seeing Glen said, "It was a near go. The dog watched me for hours. I dared not move for fear he would savage me or her, but when I heard you coming I could stand it no longer. I got up, and he flew at me. She's been like that ever since you left. What have you brought?"

"Many things, but I'd a job to work round Bill. There'd been a row in his shanty. Two of your fellows smashed things up, and he was in a towering rage. Fetch some water. It's funny we can get it nice, cool, clean and fresh. We haven't done that for months, have we?" [Pg 56]

As he spoke he was busy with the package placing the things carefully on the floor. Bill had made amends after all, and opened his heart. He was a dashed good sort, and should be repaid.

Jim staggered out for the water. The tank was overflowing into sundry water-catchers. It was far too precious to waste, although many times the quantity would have been used to wash up after a single meal in a big hotel.

Glen made the mixture weak, then, taking a bit of rag, he moistened her lips with it, squeezing a

little into her mouth.

He was glad she was alive. A tremendous sense of relief came over him, and with it relaxation from the strain he too had gone through. He could have lain down on the floor and slept for many hours.

"Get some rest, Jim. You need it," he said.

[Pg 57]

"Not so much as you."

"Yes, your struggle was greater than mine. Sleep, man; then you can watch when I give up."

Jim lay down. He was in a dead slumber in a minute or two.

Glen sat looking at the woman. A slight colour came into her cheeks, her lips were not so blue, a warmth spread over her body; he could feel it as he touched her bare arm. Then a curious thing happened. He bent down and kissed her, not like Jim Benny, on the lips, but on her forehead, reverently, tenderly, like a father would a child—and he was the most reckless rider on the fence. Both men were among the legion of the lost, why was only known to themselves, but they had given this woman what many a one of her sex in a great city would have been thankful for—human kindness.

"Sleep's best for her," he thought, as he moistened her lips again. "She's been hot and cold, but there's a nice glow on her now. It's healthy. She'll pull through. I'll bet she pulls through, and we'll have done it, Jim, and I, and Bill. He's had a big share in it. I should say the three of us will be able to look after her and find out all about her."

[Pg 58]

Jim had his rest. Glen roused him when he found sleep would overcome him whether he willed it or no.

"Wet her lips with it when they're dry. Place your finger on and feel."

Jim nodded. He thought how he had placed his lips to hers when Glen was away. He was ashamed of it; somehow he thought he ought to tell him. He'd think it over while he slept.

In the midst of nature's great silent solitudes these three were working out their fate. It was so still that to most people the silence would have been worse than the noise and rush of traffic. Outside, Ping, neglected after his long journey, unsaddled, was finding refreshment. The horse was weary, leg tired, but his heart was in the right place. He was the sort that never gives in until something snaps.

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Spotty called a halt when he had gone a couple of miles, and considered the question of the unjustness of his master. He must have arrived at some conclusion for he retraced his steps slowly. Near the hut he encountered Ping, so nosed round him as though apologising for the sudden bolt under him. Ping and Spotty were chums. They were both mongrels, but there is often a lot of good to be found in such animals. Eventually when Ping lay down Spotty curled up close to his back; the silence was unbroken.

When Glen awoke he saw at a glance the woman was coming round. She began to mutter. They listened but could make out no words.

"She's pulling through. I reckon she'll mend now. We've all of us got to get her round."

"All of us?"

"Yes, you and Bill and me."

"And what about the fence?" asked Jim.

"Damn the fence," answered Glen fiercely, "I've done with it."

"Then so have I," echoed Jim almost gladly.

[Pg 60]

"Good boy. It's a cursed job. Keepers of the fence. I tell you, Jim, it's slow murder. I'd as lief have solitary confinement."

"I guess we'd get better tucker in prison," said Jim.

The word murder recalled to Glen's mind the death of Calder.

"Jim!"

"Well?"

"Joe Calder's been shot dead on the track."

"Serves the brute right," replied Jim in a hard voice.

"You haven't told me yet what brought you here," said Glen looking at him.

"That was it."

"What?"

"The Calder business."

"You—?"

Jim nodded.

"I shot him."

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CHAPTER VI

"COME"

Glen asked no questions. If Jim Benny had shot Calder he must have had good reason for it. He waited to hear if he would say more.

"Do you want to know why?" asked Jim.

"Please yourself."

Jim pulled off his shirt, or tried to. It stuck.

"The water," he said faintly.

Glen gave him a damp cloth. Jim bathed the shirt, near his breast. For the first time Glen noticed a deep red mark.

"That's better," said Jim, as he felt the shirt give, and pulled it off. Then he went on, "He did that with his knife, and I shot him."

"It served him right," returned Glen.

"We quarrelled, not for the first time. He said brutal things to me, and called me names no man would stand, so I struck him between the eyes. He whipped out his knife, and I had it before I could think. I pulled my revolver from my belt, and shot him through the heart. He fell like a log. I left him there. I never even looked at him, but came on here."

[Pg 62]

"Why did you come here?"

"Because I thought I could depend upon you, and you would give me good advice. I didn't tell you at first, because of her. One thing at a time's enough."

"You can depend upon me. I'll help you if there's trouble, but no one knows you shot him, and there'll not be much fuss made over him," declared Glen.

The woman opened her eyes, and looked at them. Then a faint smile spread over her face.

"Are you better?" asked Glen.

No answer.

"Do you feel stronger, my lass?"

She pressed her hand over her forehead feebly, and a vacant look came into her eyes.

[Pg 63]

"She's weak. She's had no food. Warm some of that milk, Jim."

When it was ready Glen gave it to her with a spoon. She took it greedily. In a few minutes she dozed again.

"Her head's sure to be bad for a time," said Glen.

There was a brief silence, then Jim said, "While you were away I did something."

"What?"

"I kissed her on the lips. I couldn't help it. Something prompted me."

Glen started. For a moment he felt angry, then muttered, "When you were outside I kissed her on the forehead."

These kisses were characteristic of the men and showed the difference between them.

They said no more about it. Both thought it strange, and the subject dropped.

The woman progressed slowly but surely. As she recovered some strength they found her memory had gone; she did not know her name, or where she came from. She appeared to imagine she had been there all her life.

[Pg 64]

Bill Bigs arrived in his buggy, and did not come empty-handed; there was an ample supply stowed away in the back.

"That's her, eh?" he asked.

"Yes. Do you believe me now?" replied Glen smiling.

"I believed you before, but I wanted to see her. I say, Glen, she'll be a grand-looking woman when she's picked up and filled out a bit. Where the deuce did she come from? It's miles away from everywhere here," said Bill.

"It'll be hard to find out. She's lost her memory; she fancies she's been here all her days, but she's sane enough. She'll talk all right in a bit," replied Glen.

"Jim Benny!" exclaimed Bill.

"He's been here ever since she came. It was funny he should turn up almost at the same time."

Jim came into the hut and greeted Bill.

"I never expected to see you here," exclaimed the latter.

"He came to consult me. We're going to throw it up," Glen told him.

[Pg 65]

"Throw what up?"

"The fence. We've done with it; we're sick of the whole thing. It's too much for flesh and blood to stand."

Bill stared.

"Going!" he cried. "Why you're the best man on the job."

"Am I?" answered Glen. "I'm glad to hear someone has a good opinion of me."

"I always had," pursued Bill. "I'm not surprised. I've often wondered why you came. I remember the first time I saw you in Boonara. I thought you'd dropped from the clouds. Have you sent in your resignation?"

"No. What does it matter. Let 'em find out. You can drop a line to the overseer when we're gone."

"And the fence?" asked Bill "We don't want those cursed rabbits to get through to our side."

"There are plenty to look after it; men are always disappearing. There are good and bad among us. Some fellows are there fighting down the drink curse. I don't blame 'em; it's their only chance. I know two of 'em, good men in their way, but I can tell how it would be with them if they went back to a town life. They'd go under quick. I've been in many a jag myself, but that's not why I came out. I can stifle it; it's only a matter of will," declared Glen.

[Pg 66]

"I don't know so much about that. I've had a lot of experience in that line. Some of the poor beggars can't help themselves," said Bill, and then added, "They've buried Calder. There'll be no inquiry. Most people think he shot himself. Anyhow we've shovelled him away in Boonara. If any trouble is made they can dig him up again and call him as witness. He's the only one who could give evidence. All your fellows are glad he's gone."

Jim listened in silence, with a feeling of relief; he did not in the least regret what he had done. He regarded it as a righteous act.

The woman sat up. When she saw Bill she asked, "When did he come?"

[Pg 67]

This was almost the first sentence she had spoken correctly. Hitherto her words had come disjointedly—in jerks.

"Me, my lass? I've just dropped in to see my friend, Glen. He told me you were here."

"I've been here a long time. Oh, such a long time. I must have been sleeping for weeks. I've forgotten which is Glen," she answered.

"I'm Glen—Glen Leigh," he said as he placed his hand on her shoulder.

"How silly of me that I didn't remember, but I shall not forget again. You have been very good to me. Have I been very ill?"

"Yes, for a long time," replied Glen humouring her.

She looked at Jim, and Glen said, "He's Jim Benny, another good friend. And that's Bill Bigs, one of the best of friends. We're all going to look after you."

She smiled.

"Do I want looking after?"

"You'll not be too strong for a good while yet," replied Glen. "When you are strong we're going away from here."

[Pg 68]

She looked at him wonderingly.

"Going away from home?" she asked.

"You'll want a change when you get stronger."

This put a different complexion on the matter, and she smiled again, nodded, and lay down once more.

"That's the first attempt at conversation she's made," said Glen. "We're getting on."

"You boys—where are you going when you leave here?" asked Bill suddenly.

Glen did not hesitate.

"Sydney," he answered.

Bill remained silent a few minutes, then said slowly, as though still thinking it out, "Sydney! I've a good mind to go with you, I'm sick of Boonara. It's the last place that was ever put up on this earth."

Glen jumped up from his seat, so did Jim. They took a hand each and almost pulled Bill's arms off.

"Do it!" cried Glen. "Do it! We want you. If the three can't make headway in Sydney we're not the men I fancy we are." [Pg 69]

"Yes, come with us," put in Jim heartily.

"Stop, you fellows, stop," said Bill. "It's easier said than done. I'll tell you something. I've had an offer for my shanty, a damned good offer, more than it's worth. I can't think why he's made it, or where he's got the money from. I never knew Craig Bellshaw to give much money away, and I don't see where else it could have come from."

"Craig Bellshaw!" exclaimed Glen in surprise, "has he made a bid for it?"

"Not likely. What'd he want with a place like mine? It's Garry Backham, Bellshaw's overseer. He came into my place and wanted to know if I'd sell out. He said he wanted the place and was tired of Mintaro. I was never more surprised in my life. You could have pushed me over with a blade of grass."

"I met him several times. He seems a taciturn sort of man, sullen, bad tempered—not one of my sort," said Glen. [Pg 70]

"I fancy he's had a roughish time at Mintaro," Bill surmised, "but he must have saved money. Bellshaw wouldn't lend it him in hundreds."

"He was a pal of Calder's; about the only one he had," Jim remarked.

"I never knew that," said Bill.

"They used to meet on the track, and talk and smoke. He bought Calder drink at times," explained Jim.

"Birds of a feather," said Glen.

"He made no fuss about Calder being shot," Bill commented.

"It was no use. He's dead and gone, and there's no proof that he was shot; he probably did it himself as you have said," decided Glen.

The woman stirred, murmuring some words in her sleep; with a start she sat up, stared at the group, stretched out her arms, and in a pleading voice uttered the one word, "Come." [Pg 71]

CHAPTER VII

THE FACE IN THE WATER

"I'm not superstitious," said Bill, "but that settles it; she said 'come' as plainly as she could, although she's fast asleep. I can't get over that. I'll sell out to Backham, and join you. We'll make things gee in Sydney, I reckon."

They were delighted at this decision, for they knew Bigs was a good man of business, who had his head screwed on right, and if there was anything to be made he'd be on to it straight.

"She'll want some clothes. She can't go in those things," said Glen.

"I'll fix that up. I can get sufficient garments in Boonara for her to reach Sydney in and there's no occasion for her to arrive like the Queen of Sheba," Bill replied.

They laughed. Things were more cheerful. The decision to abandon the fence livened them up. [Pg 72]

When Bill left he promised to return in a week, and see how the woman was progressing.

"It'll be longer than that before we can travel with her," he said.

Away in Sydney, the great city, vast even in those days, life was going on very differently from the solitudes round Boonara. There were hundreds, nay, thousands, of people in that beautiful city who had never heard of Boonara, or knew there were such men as the keepers of the fence. As far as the majority of the inhabitants were concerned such men as Glen Leigh, Jim Benny, and Bill Bigs, might not have existed. Had the story of the woman in the hut been told it would have

been laughed to scorn, and counted impossible, but there is nothing impossible in the world, however improbable it may seem.

Sydney was pulsating with life in this year of grace 18—. There is no occasion to be exact. It might partially spoil matters, and what's a year or two to a story, so long as the interest is maintained, and the characters are living beings? Late in the nineteenth century Sydney flourished exceedingly. The last twenty years of that remarkable era saw it going ahead by leaps and bounds, and it has been growing ever since until men who left it years ago, and have revisited it, can hardly recognise the place. Long may it flourish, most beautiful of many beautiful cities!

[Pg 73]

There was a crowd in Pitt Street, outside Tattersalls, and over the way at the marble bar streams of people were passing in and out, for it was hot, and there were many parched throats. Moreover, it had been the winding up day of the A.J.C. Meeting at Randwick, and every favourite had got home, much to the disgust of the bookmakers.

It was ten at night and sultry; there was no air to speak of. The keepers of the fence would have thought it cool, but they were used to being burnt up and parched, and lived in a land where water was often flavoured with the taste of dead things, and not cooled with ice and fragrant with lemon. Not one of this crowd knew what took place on the border line of glittering wire. Boonara was as far off as, and more strange than, Timbuctoo.

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Not one of this crowd? Stay. There was one—probably the only one—who knew all about it, and he stood smoking a cigar and chatting to a man outside a tobacconist's shop, not far from the Club on the opposite side of the road. He was a man nearly six feet high, with black hair and eyebrows, and a sunburnt face. Not a pleasant face, but strong, determined, with a rather cruel mouth and dark cat-like eyes; a man dangerous both to friend and enemy if he willed. He was well-dressed, but somewhat carelessly; he had a slouch hat, dark grey clothes, and his tie was awry. He stood with his legs slightly apart, gesticulating with one hand as he talked. The man to whom he was speaking was the leviathan of the Australian turf, who had made his position by a mixture of shrewd business qualities and bold gambling, who betted in thousands, and took "knocks" that would have sent a less plucky man out of the ring. But he always came up smiling, and his luck was proverbial. He had been known to play hazards for twelve hours at a stretch and never have a hand tremble when he lost thousands. He was ostensibly a dealer in choice cigars, etc., in fact in all the paraphernalia of a tobacconist's, and it was his shop they had just come out of as they stood talking on the pavement. He was not so tall as his companion, and had a much more kindly face. He was popular because he was cheerful and honest, and the little backer could always get a point over the odds from him.

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The taller man was Craig Bellshaw, of Mintaro Station. The bookmaker was Nicholas Gerard, always called Nick by everybody.

Craig Bellshaw was, as before mentioned, probably the only man who knew there were such men as the keepers of the fence, who had heard of Boonara, and was acquainted with the vast solitudes in the West. He was a wealthy man, and could afford to leave Mintaro to the men he employed, and come to Sydney in search of pleasure. When he was away he still had his grip on his place, as some of his hands found to their cost. They put it down to the spying of Garry Backham, the overseer.

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Craig Bellshaw was a man of about fifty years of age, but did not look it. He had led a hardy life, and been successful. He owned miles upon miles of land, thousands of cattle, and his sheep ran into hundreds of thousands. Horses he had in abundance; how many he had no idea. He claimed all within reach of his land round Mintaro district, but never missed a dozen when they were taken. It pleased him to say they were his, so he did not grumble when Boonara men, and fencers, claimed a few. Bellshaw was difficult to understand, but one thing was certain: once he got his hold on a thing, he seldom let go.

He was a bachelor, but had a house in Sydney which cost him a considerable sum to keep up; he found it handy when he came to town. He owned racehorses, and his trainer was Ivor Hadwin, who had stables on the hill at Randwick. Hadwin was completely under Bellshaw's thumb, and was heavily in his debt. It was owing to pecuniary difficulties that he became connected with him. This was often the case with Craig Bellshaw. For once in a way the A.J.C. Meeting proved successful to the stable, and Bellshaw's horses had won four races, one on each day; all were heavily backed, and the bulk of the money had either been laid by Nick Gerard, or he had worked the commission. This was the subject of their conversation, and as they talked in the flare of the gaslights and the shops, many people turned to look at them, for both were well-known figures in the sporting world.

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"Yes, Nick, I've had a pretty good meeting," said Craig.

Nick Gerard smiled.

"I should say you had. There are several thousands to your credit," he rejoined.

"What do you think of the dark bay—the fellow that won to-day?"

"Barellan? Oh, he's all right. A pretty fair horse I should say."

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"Yes, he is, a good deal better than you think."

"Is he? I've seen him at work on the track. He went to-day, but I don't think he's the best you've got."

"No? Which is?"

"Flash."

Bellshaw smiled in his peculiar way as he said, "Perhaps he's a better track horse, but I'm sure Barellan is the better horse in a race, especially over a distance."

"He may be. When are you going back West?"

"Not yet. I'm sick of it. We've had such a long dry spell, but now we've had rain, a real soaker. We wanted it badly enough."

"It must be terrible when you have no rain for months."

"It is. You're lucky to be here always."

"Why don't you give it up now you've made your pile?"

"Throw it up? I can't afford it. You don't know what's hanging to Mintaro."

"A good deal, no doubt, but you're a single man, with no one dependent on you. It seems to me you're wasting your time. You've worked hard enough," argued Nick. [Pg 79]

"So I have, but I couldn't live in Sydney always, any more than I could at Mintaro."

They talked for some little time. Eventually Gerard bade him good night and went over to Tattersalls. The squatter walked along Pitt Street, then hailing a cab drove to Surrey Hills. He called at a house, remained some time, then drove to Circular Quay, catching the last boat to Manley. It was beautiful on the harbour; a cool breeze was blowing from the heads. The moon shone, and as he leaned over the side he saw his face reflected in the water. This was peculiar. He did not remember having seen such a thing before. As he looked he clutched the rail with both hands, turned pale, and gasped. Reflected beside his face was another face, that of a young woman—he had not noticed a lady standing a short distance away from him who was also looking over the side of the boat.

He staggered away and went to the fore part of the steamer, where there was more breeze, and sat down. The perspiration broke out all over him. He felt faint for the first time in his life. [Pg 80]

"I saw it. I'm sure of it, and it was like her face. I'm a fool to be frightened at a shadow on the water," and he laughed harshly, a mirthless sound. [Pg 81]

CHAPTER VIII

WAYS AND MEANS

Three men and a woman arrived in Sydney by the mail train from Bourke; there were not many passengers, and they attracted some attention. It was evident they came from out back, their appearance denoted it; they were clothed in a rough country style. They were Glen Leigh, Jim Benny, Bill Bigs, and the woman. They had very little luggage; it was contained in a couple of bundles, "swags," that could be strapped on the back, slung over a shoulder, or carried in the hand. Many people in Sydney have seen the once familiar figure of a tall Queensland millionaire walking along George Street with a similar outfit. In appearance Glen Leigh was not unlike him, only younger.

A porter watched them as they walked out of the station. They all seemed solicitous about the woman. The man understood the three, the female he was puzzled about. [Pg 82]

"They can't have picked her up coming in the train. She belongs to one of them. I wonder which. The tall chap, perhaps. He's a big 'un; I fancy I've seen him before. I wonder where they're bound for?"

The porter's attention was claimed and he forgot all about them.

"There's a coffee place in Lower George Street that will do us for a time," said Glen, "till we've had a look round."

The woman stared about her wonderingly. If she had ever been in a large city it was evident she had forgotten all about it.

Since her illness, which was not yet shaken off, she had developed in body and mind, although as regards the latter it was to a great extent blank as to the past. She had some colour in her cheeks. There were signs that she would be pretty, with a good figure, and be an attractive woman.

She made no remarks as Glen and Jim walked on either side of her, Bigs following behind with the larger bundle. Several people turned to look at them as they went along. [Pg 83]

The coffee house was large, but unpretentious, the locality being none of the best. It was at the Circular Quay end of George Street, and Chinamen's shops and dens abounded—dull dirty places, with a few empty tea chests in the windows, and bits of paper with Chinese characters scrawled, or printed on, in various colours, like cracker coverings on a table after a riotous Boxing Day dinner. In several of the shop doorways Chinamen leaned against the posts, seldom moving when a customer pushed by them into the shop, bent on playing fan tan, or smoking opium.

"The Chinkies might have been propped up there since I was here last, and that's a few years ago," laughed Bigs.

"Rotten lot," said Jim.

"Most of 'em. I've met one or two decent pigtails out West," Bill answered.

When the woman caught sight of the Chinaman it had a most peculiar effect upon her. She shrank close to Glen, pushing him on to the roadway, and almost slipping down herself. He saw by her face that she was terrified, and followed the direction of her glance. It was fixed on a fat Chinaman standing in his shop door looking across at them. He was not exactly repulsive, but he was sleek and oily. His face shone, his cheeks hung low, he had a double chin, and his eyes were like nuts fixed in slits.

[Pg 84]

"There's nothing to be afraid of," said Glen. "If he is a nasty-looking beggar I daresay he's harmless."

Jim and Bill noticed her agitation and scowled at the Chinaman, who returned the challenge with a broad grin, showing his yellow teeth.

She trembled violently. Her hand shook as it clasped Glen's arm with a tight squeeze. He hurried her on; she was quite willing. It was not until they were inside the coffee house that she recovered.

"You don't like the Chinamen?" asked Glen.

"I hate them. They frighten me," she said.

I wonder why? thought Glen, as a maid came to show her her room.

[Pg 85]

She looked back and asked, "Where is your room?"

"I don't know yet," returned Glen.

"Please don't go far away from me. Please don't."

"All right," replied Glen. "I'll see to that."

The maid smiled, but Glen's scowl quickly frightened it away.

"We'll have to fix something up," he said. "She'd better be somebody's sister. I'm too old; you take it on, Jim."

"Yes, Jim's most suitable. He's not much older—a matter of three or four years," agreed Bill.

"His sister!"

Jim didn't like the relationship. Once it was established it might be difficult to induce her to change the feeling. He must accept, however; there was no excuse for not doing so.

"Very well, that's settled. I'll tell her about it," went on Glen. "Try and explain to her, but she's as simple as a child, and won't understand the reason for it."

[Pg 86]

She was tired. The maid, who regarded her curiously, saw she was weak, and asked her if she had been ill. She said she had been very ill, for a long time, and she wanted rest.

"Lie down on the bed. Let me take your boots on. I'll draw the curtain round, and you can have a sleep. It will do you good. Have you travelled far?"

"From Bourke."

"Where's that?"

"In the West. Some hundreds of miles away."

This excited the maid's compassion. She was a good-natured kind girl, but fond of admiration, and she had seen a great deal of life since she came out as an emigrant from the old country.

"I'll be back in a minute," she said as she left the room. She went to ask if she could remain with her for a short time, and receiving a reply in the affirmative returned, after telling Glen she had persuaded her to rest.

"She's my friend's sister," and he pointed to Jim. "She's been very ill; take care of her."

[Pg 87]

"I'll look after her. I'm sorry I smiled as I did, but—"

"But what?" asked Glen.

"Oh, nothing. We see some queer folks here sometimes," she said.

"I daresay you do," replied Glen, "but we're all right. You needn't be afraid of any of us."

"I'm not," she retorted, unable to resist laughing at him.

"That girl's better than I thought," he remarked when she had gone.

"They often are, if you'll only take time to find it out," said Bill.

"Where's Jim?"

"He must have just gone out. I don't think he liked the sister business."

"Why not?" Glen asked, surprised.

"That remains to be seen," Bill answered, and the remark made Glen thoughtful.

Jim came in again and they had a council of ways and means.

Bill Bigs had a considerable sum of money. He had not half-poisoned the inhabitants of Boonara, and the keepers of the fence, and others, without making a handsome profit on his concoctions. His dealings in hay and provender of various kinds had been another source of income. Occasional loans, at heavy risks, and corresponding interest, had also brought grist to the mill.

[Pg 88]

The sale of his shanty to Garry Backham brought him in several hundred pounds, about twice the amount he valued it at, and he had not yet recovered from the surprise at his good luck, or at the fact that Garry had found the ready money in a lump sum. Altogether he had a few thousands at his back.

Glen Leigh had more money than the other two would have thought possible. He had it stowed away in a bank in Sydney, where it had remained, and been added to, ever since he had been on the fence.

Jim Benny had a few pounds which he carried with him.

"I'll look round," said Bill. "I'm the business man. I reckon I'd best stick to my own line and buy a 'house' if I can find a decent one at a fair price."

[Pg 89]

"It's about the best thing you can do," agreed Glen.

"And if I succeed, you two, and the girl, must put up with me until you find work," went on Bill.

Glen laughed.

"What sort of work?" he asked.

"That's a bit difficult, but two fellows who ride like you can ought to find some sort of occupation. Start a buckjumping show. Give 'em a taste of your quality; that's the game; I've hit on a little gold mine. We can get horses, and it won't cost a deal to run it."

"You mean have a real genuine show of buckjumping, and riding, in Sydney, and other places?" Glen queried.

"Yes, that's the idea."

"How much would it cost to start it?"

"A few hundreds. I'll find the money."

"I must have a share in it, and we'll let Jim come in. He can take it out in hard work," said Glen smiling.

[Pg 90]

"I'm willing to do anything you wish," Jim declared.

"If I manage to make the necessary arrangements," said Bill, "you'll have to go and find the horses, the very worst buckers you can get. There must be no faking about it."

"There'll be none where I am concerned," replied Glen, "I'll pick up some rough 'uns, you may depend on that, I say, Bill, I believe you've hit on the right thing."

"I'm sure I have. You're the best rider I ever saw sit a horse," said Bill.

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CHAPTER IX

THE CHINAMAN'S SHOP

Bill Bigs met a good many Chinamen, and had dealings with them, always finding them keen business fellows, moderately honest, though some were arrant rogues.

He went out of the coffee house to look round, and saw the fat Chinaman still standing in his doorway like a statue, as though he had not moved since they saw him before entering the house.

The name on the shop was Lin Soo. Probably this was the name of the man at the door; at any

rate something prompted Bill to cross the road and look in at the shop window. He saw three tea chests, which he guessed were empty, a couple of Chinese bowls, a vase with strange hideous dragons painted or burnt on, an ivory-handled stick, a hat, a pile of chop-sticks, a bundle of red papers, and a cat slumbering serenely among the miscellaneous collection.

[Pg 92]

"Is the cat for sale?" he asked the man.

The Chinaman smiled.

"Not for sale. A good cat; he catchee mice, cockroaches."

"I didn't know there were any mice here."

"He catchee them if they were here," grinned the man.

"Your name is Lin Soo?"

The Chinaman nodded.

"You speak very good English," said Bill.

"Been in Sydney years," he replied.

"And made a heap of money," said Bill.

"No. Chinaman no chance with the white man," said Lin solemnly.

Bill laughed.

"You yellow heathen, I know better than that. Are you a tea dealer?"

Lin Soo nodded; it was a habit, and when he did so his cheeks flapped and his eyelids fell up and down like trap doors.

"Sell me half a pound of good tea," said Bill.

[Pg 93]

Lin Soo turned and walked into the shop. Bill followed. He did not want any tea, and Lin Soo knew it.

The Chinaman went behind the counter, leaning on it with his elbows.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Tea."

Lin Soo grunted.

"You no fool," he said.

Bill laughed.

"How do you know?"

"You want no tea."

"What do I want?"

Lin Soo's head wagged again.

"Guess," said Bill.

"Give it up," replied Lin.

"Why did you leer at the girl we had with us? You frightened her, you oily beast," said Bill.

Lin Soo started back. This was evidently unexpected, and Bill was a formidable fellow to tackle.

Lin Soo protested he had not stared at her. Lots of silly women were frightened at Chinamen—why he didn't know. They had no cause to be.

[Pg 94]

"They have every cause," said Bill. "Chinamen have ruined many white women. Some of you yellow dogs buy and sell our girls, and trade them to human beasts, who disgrace their colour. They're worse than you fellows."

"Much worse," agreed Lin. "You know about it?"

"About what?"

"Trading in white girls."

"Yes, you scoundrel. I expect you've been at it."

Lin Soo protested. He was a good Chinaman,—not one of that sort.

Bill noticed the leer in his eyes, and concluded he was a deep-dyed rogue.

"Have you ever been out West?" he asked out of curiosity.

Lin Soo said he had. A few years ago he had business in Bourke.

Bill became interested. What took him to Bourke?

Dealings with a big man, a man of money. He did not live at Bourke, but he met him, Lin Soo, there. [Pg 95]

"What sort of dealings?" queried Bill.

Lin Soo would not disclose them.

Bill questioned him for some time, and discovered that he might smoke opium there if he wished; also that he might gamble for a considerable sum if he so desired.

He left the shop, wondering what had induced him to waste his time there.

Lin Soo watched him go up the street, scowled after him, called him bad names and cursed him in some horrible guttural way.

"You sneaking round me," he said. "Better take care. Lin Soo stand no fool play. Me stare at white woman! Why not? Me had dealings with many white women. Business in Bourke with what you call squatter and white woman. Tell him? Not muchy!"

Bill walked into Pitt Street. When he came to the corner of Market Street he stopped and stared.

That looks uncommonly like Craig Bellshaw, he thought. [Pg 96]

The man he had seen turned round and came towards him. It was Bellshaw. He saw Bill Bigs and recognised him.

"You here, Bigs? What brings you to Sydney?"

"I've sold out."

"Have you? Tired of Boonara, eh?"

"It's hardly a paradise as you know, and I got a good price for the place, so I thought I'd quit."

"I expect you've knocked up a nice little pile out of the natives, the fencers, and my men, shearers, and so on. I had a nip or two at your shanty. I can taste it yet. What horrible stuff you sold," said Craig.

"No worse than others sell. No worse than the man who bought me out will sell."

"Who bought you out?"

"Don't you know?"

"How should I?"

"Garry Backham. He paid cash down, too. I wonder where he came by it? I don't suppose you've been over liberal with him," said Bill. He watched Bellshaw as he spoke, and the squatter returned his glance without a flicker. [Pg 97]

"Garry's bought you out? I wondered why he wanted to leave me," replied Bellshaw.

He's lying, thought Bill, and wondered why.

"He'll not find it all profit," said Bill.

Bellshaw laughed.

"I don't expect he will," he agreed. "Who's there now looking after the place?"

"He is."

"You mean he's left Mintaro and gone to Boonara?"

"That's about it. He was in the house when I came away."

"The scoundrel. He's neglected my interests. He shall pay for it. He'd no business to leave Mintaro until I returned."

"I expect Mintaro will be all right. You've plenty of hands there."

Bellshaw laughed again.

"I daresay they'll pull through somehow," he said.

When Craig Bellshaw left him Bill went back to the coffee house, and told them he had seen him. [Pg 98]

"Did he say when he was returning?" asked Glen. "I don't want to meet him. He's not my kind. Besides he might try and make it nasty over leaving the fence. He's one of that sort."

"He's sure to be going back soon. He's been here some time I fancy. I wonder why he tried to make me believe he knew nothing about Garry Backham taking my place? It's all bunkum. He knew right enough, but he must have some reason for trying to hide it," said Bill.

"If all I've heard about Mintaro is correct there are some queer goings on at times. I've never been there, but one of the fellows on the fence, Abe Carew, was employed by him for a long time.

He offended Bellshaw, who kicked him out, and he was very sore about it. He gave him a nice character. I didn't believe it all, of course, but no doubt a lot of it's true," Glen remarked.

"Bellshaw's one of those queer sorts, you never know what they are up to, never know when you've got 'em. He's been in my place and said things I knew were lies, and he seemed to have no reason for it, but he must have had," said Bill. [Pg 99]

"Some fellows lie for the sake of lying," Glen answered.

The woman slept all night until late next morning. When she came into the large room Glen was the only one in it. She went straight up to him, holding out both hands. When he took them she kissed him. The hot blood surged in his veins. Was she always going to do this? He was glad no one saw it.

"You feel much better?" he asked when he had recovered his equanimity.

"Almost well. Sleep is wonderful. Are we going to live here?" she returned.

"No. This is a sort of hotel. We are staying here until we find a home."

"Why did we leave home?" she asked.

"It was impossible to stay there; there was only one room in the hut."

"Wasn't it always like that?" she asked as though trying to recall something. [Pg 100]

"No, not always. Can't you remember?"

"Remember—what?"

"Where you came from when you came to the hut."

She laughed.

"How funny you are. You know I always lived there."

"With me, and Jim, and Bill?" he asked.

She seemed puzzled.

"It must have been so, and yet—" she put her hand to her head.

He watched her. Would she remember, or would he have to wait? That it would all come back to her some day he was certain, and then—

She was at the window, looking into the street. Lin Soo's shop was nearly opposite, but he was not visible.

A dark man walked rapidly along, and was about to enter Lin Soo's when a cab horse slipped and fell. This attracted his attention. He turned round with the intention of going to assist the driver, but the horse struggled to his feet unaided. [Pg 101]

As the man looked across the road the woman at the window gave a faint cry. Glen was at her side in a moment.

"What is it?" he asked.

"That man, the dark man, looking this way. I've seen him before. Who is he? Do you know?" she said in an agitated voice.

It was Craig Bellshaw. [Pg 102]

CHAPTER X

THE ACCUSATION

"Have you seen him before? Do you know him? His name is Craig Bellshaw. He lives at Mintaro, a big homestead, some miles from the hut, the home we left," said Glen.

The fear, or whatever it was, passed. She smiled. No, she did not know him, nor had she heard the name.

"Perhaps you knew someone like him?" Glen suggested.

She shook her head. She did not remember.

Much to Glen's surprise he saw Bellshaw go into Lin Soo's shop. He came out again in about a quarter of an hour, hailed a passing hansom, and drove away.

Why had he gone into the Chinaman's? It was about the last place Glen would have expected to see him in. He told Bill what had happened. They could make nothing of it, but it made a deep impression on them. [Pg 103]

Craig Bellshaw was uneasy. The face on the water troubled him; it haunted him as he walked about. He left Sydney suddenly and returned to Mintaro, where he arrived unexpectedly. He found everything going on as usual. Garry Backham had put a man in charge of the shanty at Boonara, and returned to his duties until such time as Bellshaw came back.

"I met Bigs in Sydney," said Bellshaw. "He told me you went into his place the day he left, and handed it over to you. I suppose you came back when he had gone?"

"Yes. I thought it best to make sure of the place. Bigs is a shifty customer. If I'd left him in charge he might have done me out of no end of things," returned Garry.

"Probably he would. He seemed surprised when I told him I didn't know you had bought him out."

Garry grinned.

"Of course you didn't know. How should you?"

The two men looked hard at each other.

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"Joe Calder's dead," said Garry.

Bellshaw started.

"Dead," he exclaimed.

"Murdered. Shot through the heart."

"Who did it?"

"Nobody knows, but I have a suspicion," Garry answered. "He's buried, and so far as that goes it's done with, but he was a friend of mine, and yours, and we ought to do something."

"I shan't. Let it be, man. What's the good of kicking up a fuss?" argued Bellshaw.

"Two men have cleared out from the fence."

"Who are they?"

"Glen Leigh and Jim Benny."

"Good riddance to them. They were rotters—no good to me."

"You don't like Leigh. He's been one too many for you once or twice."

"I hate him. It was Leigh who kicked up a fuss about that mob of cattle that broke the fencing down. He complained that I ought to have them driven off, and said it was not the duty of the keepers of the fence."

[Pg 105]

"It's part of their duty. They are a lazy lot of beggars," replied Garry. "I fancy Glen Leigh and Jim Benny know a good deal about Joe Calder's death."

"Do you think that's why they have cleared out?"

"Yes. Don't you?"

"It may have something to do with it; I wish I could find out."

"You said a minute or two back it was best left alone," said Garry.

"But this is different. I'd like to put a halter round Leigh's neck."

"Why? Have you any strong reason?"

"I'm told Abe Carew and he were pals, and that Abe told him a good many things about Mintaro. Calder gave me the information," Bellshaw answered.

"Did he now, and Abe wouldn't spare you, would he?"

"Spare me? What do you mean? He'd tell a lot of infernal lies about me, the scoundrel."

"You should be more careful how you send men away. You were not over polite to him," said Garry.

[Pg 106]

"He didn't deserve it. He robbed me right and left."

"I don't think he did. I told you so at the time."

Bellshaw made an impatient gesture.

"You know nothing about it; I shan't be sorry when you're gone, Garry. You've been getting above yourself for some time."

"You think so, do you? I shan't be sorry to get away from Mintaro. There's some things a fellow can't stand."

Bellshaw laughed harshly.

"I didn't think you were soft, or chicken-hearted," he said.

"I'm not, but I'd like to know what became of the woman," retorted Garry.

"I told you I took her away with me because I was tired of her, and that she was going back to Sydney with me," said Bellshaw.

"Did she go to Sydney with you?"

"Yes."

"And she's there now?"

[Pg 107]

"Yes."

"With her mother, I suppose," sneered Garry.

"Never mind who she's with. She's all right."

"I don't believe you took her to Sydney," said Garry.

Bellshaw glared at him.

"Where else could I take her?" he asked fiercely.

"Nowhere."

"What do you mean by that?"

"It's pretty lonely about here. One woman would not be missed."

Bellshaw caught him by the arm in a fierce grip and raised his fist.

"Be careful, or I'll make it hot for you," he snarled.

Garry wrenched himself free.

"Let me alone. I guess I'm a match for you, and I'm not afraid of you, if other people are," he cried. "You lent me the money to buy Bill Bigs out. Well, it will be better for you to make me a present of it."

[Pg 108]

Craig Bellshaw started back.

"Look," he said, "see that?" and he pointed to the wide verandah, built round the house.

"There's nothing there," answered Garry, thinking he must have been doing it heavy in Sydney and that the effects had not died out.

"No, of course not," said Bellshaw, trying to laugh it off. "So you say I had better make you a present of it. Why?"

"Because I know you did not take her to Sydney," said Garry slowly.

"It's a lie," roared Bellshaw.

"No it isn't, and you know it. Where is she now?"

"That's my affair."

"You can't tell me. I'm worth a few hundreds. I'll bet them you can't tell me," Garry persisted.

"This is foolishness. What the deuce have you got into your head?"

"More than you think. I know you travelled to Sydney alone," replied Garry.

"And supposing I did, you fool, do you expect I'd travel in the same carriage with her?"

[Pg 109]

"Maybe not, but you'd have been only too glad to have gone anywhere with her a couple of years back," Garry retorted.

"It was her own fault. She was tired of my company. She behaved badly. I treated her well," said Bellshaw.

"When you first brought her from Bourke you did, but I don't think she ever forgave, or forgot, how she came here. It was a blackguardly trick to play her."

"What trick?"

"Oh, stow that. Do you mean to say you think I don't know? I'm no fool. She was dazed, drugged, or something, when she came. Why it was more than a week before she found out where she was, and she had to stay because she couldn't get away. There was nowhere to go."

"We'll drop all that. She's safe enough now. Don't bother your head about her."

"But that's just what I do. I might have saved her. I could have done so if I'd had the pluck, but you bought me off, and I hate myself for it. Do you know what I think?"

[Pg 110]

"No."

"You can have it whether you like it or not—I think you've done away with her."

Bellshaw stepped up to him in a threatening attitude.

"Stand back," said Garry, pulling out his revolver. "I found this near the big water hole when I was having a ride round."

He pulled a handkerchief and a piece of ribbon out of his pocket.

"Well?" Bellshaw asked.

"There'd been a struggle near the water hole, but she wasn't in there. I made sure of that, but you left her there, and she's as dead as if you'd shoved her in. She'd starve, die of thirst, go mad wandering about. It would have been more merciful to strangle her. I saw her tracks for some distance, but I couldn't follow them far; the ground soon dries up. She's no more in Sydney than I am, and you've done a brutal, cowardly act, Craig Bellshaw!"

[Pg 111]

Bellshaw made no answer, and Garry went on, "It'll come home to you some day, mark my words if it doesn't. If I thought she was alive I'd be mighty glad, for I feel as though I had a hand in it. When I saw her drive away with you something told me you meant mischief, but I never thought you'd kill her by inches. Hadn't she suffered enough at your hands that you must let her die such a terrible death?"

"Have you done?" asked Bellshaw quietly. His tone surprised Garry.

"Yes, I've said enough, and you know the bulk of it's true."

"You may think it is, although it's a poor recompense for all I have done for you. However, I bear you no malice. I have only one request to make."

"What is it?" asked Garry.

"Keep your thoughts to yourself. The law is powerful. There's more than that—in this part of the country I am the law, and I can take it into my own hands without fear of being called to account. You've seen me do it; you know I'm not a man to be cowed, that I do not fear you, or any other man, nor what you say, or do. Listen to me, Garry Backham. There are men round Mintaro who will do my bidding for money, no matter what it is I ask. You know the sort of men, desperate, some of them, the worst of criminals. If I hear any of the lies you have said repeated I will burn your place to the ground, and you with it. You had best keep a still tongue."

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Garry knew he was capable of carrying out his threats, and that he had the men to do what he willed. He believed the accusation he had brought, but he had no wish to run into grave danger.

"You'll think about that money, Mr. Bellshaw," he said.

"You mean giving it you, not lending it?"

"Yes."

"It depends upon yourself," was the reply.

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CHAPTER XI

JERRY, JOURNALIST

In a small house, in a side street, on Moore Park, the woman who came to Sydney with Glen Leigh, and the other two, had rooms. It had been decided to call her Clara Benny, as it was necessary she should have a name, and to install her here. Mrs. Dell, who kept the house, was a widow, a respectable woman in reduced circumstances, and she had promised to do what she could for her lodger. Clara could not understand it. She wanted the three to be with her. They had always been together. Why should they leave her alone? It was useless to try and explain, and no attempt was made. Glen said it was necessary because they had to work, and it would be better for her to have a kind motherly woman to look after her; this made her more contented, and one of them called to see her every day. Mrs. Dell was puzzled over her lodger; she fancied she suffered from some brain trouble, but she liked her from the first, and quickly came to love her; she looked upon her as a substitute for her own girl, who had died of consumption at about the same age. Clara repaid this affection, and in a very short time they became inseparable. The money she received for her board and lodging was a great help to Mrs. Dell, and Glen Leigh was always supplying some delicacy for the table.

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Bill Bigs succeeded in finding a small hotel to his liking in Castlereagh Street. The seller came into some money, and sailing for England, was glad to find a buyer at a reasonable price. The house was in bad condition, but Bill, with his usual energy, quickly set to work, and in a few weeks it was spick and span, clean and inviting. There was a steady trade, and a fair number of customers frequented the place—many theatrical, sporting and pressmen, with whom he became popular.

Jerry Makeshift, of "The Sketch," found good copy in Bill. Jerry was one of the most popular men in Sydney, a wonderfully clever black and white artist, a born joker, and an excellent writer of highly sensational news, in paragraphs, or columns, as required. He had one failing, not an

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unusual one in these days. He was fond of his glass and hilarious company, and as he always had a lot of admirers following in his wake he soon brought genial customers to "The Kangaroo," as Bill curiously named the place. Jerry Makeshift extracted from Bill much interesting press matter about Boonara, and the district surrounding it; also about the keepers of the fence.

The clever journalist was astounded at what he heard, especially about the men on the rabbit-proof fence. In a hazy sort of way he had heard of them before, but when Bill began to talk about them, with intimate knowledge, Jerry opened his eyes.

"I'll introduce you to two of 'em," said Bill. "They are staying with me. In fact they came to Sydney with me from the forsaken place. They found the life too much for 'em, and you bet it must be awful when such men as they throw it up." [Pg 116]

"I'd like to meet them," replied Jerry. "How is it I have not done so before?"

"Well, it's this way. They're busy. They've got a scheme in hand that I suggested, and I think it's just the thing for 'em and will pay well," and he explained about the buckjumping exhibition.

"By Jove, that's a capital idea," said Jerry, who saw the possibilities at once.

"You might be able to give it a lift," suggested Bill cautiously.

"Probably. I will if I can, but I must hear more about it," Jerry answered.

"Come in to-night, and I'll introduce you to Glen Leigh. He's the chap, a wonderful man, as straight as a die, big, strong, a rough customer, but with the heart of a child when anything appeals to his better nature. Why he went on the fence the Lord only knows. I remember him arriving in Boonara. It caused quite a sensation. No one could make him out then, and no one made him out before he left. A mystery man, that's what he is. Don't forget to-night. I'll have a decent dinner for you, and a bottle of the right stuff, and you can talk in my room to your heart's content." [Pg 117]

"That will suit me," said Jerry as he went out.

"He's a good sort," thought Bill. "He ought to be able to boom the show when it starts."

Glen Leigh was averse to talking with strangers, but Bill persuaded him to meet Jerry Makeshift.

"It's the fellow who draws those funny things that catch the eye on the front page of 'The Sketch.' They're the cleverest things out, and 'The Sketch' is the best paper of its kind in Australia. It goes all over the place. It even got as far as Boonara," said Bill.

"And I've had many a copy in my hut," answered Glen. "I don't mind meeting a man like that. He's out of the common. He can teach you something."

"That's settled," said Bill. "He'll be here at seven, and mind you pitch it him strong about the show. He'll ask you about work on the fence. Tell him what it's like; he'll appreciate it." [Pg 118]

Jerry Makeshift was punctual. He loved a good dinner and he sniffed appreciatively as he came into the house. Jim Benny was away, so Glen went upstairs with his companion, and they did full justice to Bill's good things, which he laid himself out to supply.

Jerry at once saw that Glen Leigh was no ordinary man, and that he would have to be handled in anything but an orthodox fashion. With his usual skill in such matters he set to work to propitiate him, and succeeded so well that at the end of the dinner Glen was talking freely to him. He told him all about the glittering wire, of the awful loneliness of the life, the terrible droughts, the millions of rabbits, how they died in hundreds of thousands from lack of food, and their bones were piled up in great heaps. He told of the losses of sheep and cattle, how squatters were almost ruined, and had to borrow money to go on with. He pictured the thousands of square miles of desolate land without a blade of grass; then suddenly the rain fell in torrents and in twenty-four hours came the glorious change from baked brown to verdant glistening green which covered the earth like a brilliant carpet, dazzling the eyes, that had been accustomed to dead colours for months at a stretch. [Pg 119]

Then he went on to describe the life on the fence, the men, their varied characters; some strange stories he told of crime and criminals that he heard when he was one of the keepers. His language was plain and simple so that every word hit home.

Jerry Makeshift listened with his eyes fixed intently on Glen Leigh's face. As he talked he seemed to forget where he was; he was back again in his old surroundings, in the hut, in Bill's shanty at Boonara. He stopped suddenly. There must be no mention of Clara Benny, the woman in the hut, or how they came to Sydney.

"I never heard such a thrilling, interesting, story before," said Jerry, who knew he had discovered a storehouse of fresh copy in Glen Leigh. Apart from this Leigh had won his wayward, roving nature completely. Here was a man after his own heart, a man who had seen much and done more, a worker at the hardest kind of work, who went grinding on in solitude with no word of encouragement from a living soul. [Pg 120]

Glen Leigh had made a staunch friend. He did not think he had done anything, or said anything, out of the common. That was where he proved so attractive to Jerry. The practised journalist knew every word he heard was true, that no exaggeration was here. On the contrary the reality

must have been ten times worse than it was described.

"Tell me about this buckjumping show Bigs mentioned," said Jerry.

Glen smiled.

"Bill's sanguine, too sanguine, about that."

"I don't think he is. There are great possibilities in it," Jerry answered.

"Maybe so, but it'll take a lot of working up."

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"I'll do what I can for you," promised Jerry.

"You will! That's good of you. I reckon a few words from you, or a sketch from your pen, goes a long way with the public," replied Glen.

Jerry laughed. There was not an atom of conceit about him.

"I do my best to amuse the public. I fancy I manage it all right somehow, but heaven knows where the talent I possess comes from, for I never had much education. I'm what they call self-taught."

"Then you were a better teacher than hundreds of men who profess to know a heap of things," declared Glen.

"Perhaps so. A battle with the world when you're young is a good education in itself," replied Jerry.

Glen told him how "The Sketch," and Jerry's drawings, were to be found even on the fence and in Boonara.

"I've spent hours over 'em," he said. "The man who can make a keeper of the fence laugh deserves a big pension for life."

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Jerry pulled "The Sketch" out of his pocket.

"That's the latest. Just off the press. I'll leave it you."

A paper fell on the floor. Jerry picked it up.

"Have you seen this?" he asked.

"What is it?"

"Tattersalls' Hundred Thousand Pound Sweep on the Melbourne Cup. You ought to try your luck in it," said Jerry.

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CHAPTER XII

IN SEARCH OF HORSES

"I think I'll risk a pound," said Glen laughing.

"A hundred thousand pound sweep is not bad, and the winner takes about a fourth of it," Jerry answered.

"Twenty-five thousand. That would do me all right. No occasion for more work. I'd buy a nice little property and be comfortable for the remainder of my life," said Glen.

They parted in a very cordial manner. It was not often Glen let himself go like this, but he liked Jerry, and when he was fond of a man he was not slow to show it.

Glen went West next day and forgot all about the ticket, but there was plenty of time as the sweep did not close for several weeks.

He went on a purchasing expedition, to buy horses for the show, while Bill Bigs and Jim Benny were preparing the way in Sydney for an opening in the exhibition building, which had already been secured. Jim had no desire to go into the Boonara district again after what had happened. There was no telling what rumours might be about. As a matter of fact Garry Backham was sorry he had thrown out a hint to Craig Bellshaw. He might be inclined to follow it up.

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Garry was very much surprised one morning when Glen Leigh walked into his place and bade him the time of day as though he had seen him a few hours before. Leigh was a cool hand and never flustered, except on special occasions, when he knew he had been put upon, or someone tried to bounce him. When he flared up there were ructions, as more than one man on the fence had found out during his time there.

"You're about the last man I expected to see in Boonara," said Garry.

"I daresay I am. I'm here on business. I can put some money in your way if you'll help me. We

were never very friendly, but that's all over. I daresay you have no objections to earning money?" [Pg 125]

"None at all. We're most of us that way inclined," replied Garry. "As to being bad friends, don't you think that was mostly your fault?"

"No. There was a good bit of underhand work on the fence, sneaking, and so on. Joe Calder and you were pretty thick. I fancy Bellshaw got some hints, true or untrue, from the pair of you."

"He never got any from me, whatever he did from Joe."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll try and believe it. Joe Calder paid for all the wrong he did."

"Do you know what some folks say about here?"

"No."

"That either you, or Jim Benny, shot him, and that's why you both cleared out."

"They say that, eh?"

"Yes."

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"They're wide of the mark. Why didn't they say it before we left, not when our backs were turned?" asked Glen.

Garry smiled.

"It wouldn't do for a man to accuse you to your face of murder," he answered.

"Then you don't hold me responsible for Calder's death?" Glen queried.

"Not likely, is it?" answered Garry. "What's the business you're here on?"

"I want a dozen of the worst bucking horses in the district. It swarms with bad 'uns of all sorts," said Glen.

"You're right. I never saw such brutes in my life. Mintaro's overrun with them, if one could only find them."

"Would Bellshaw sell some?" asked Glen.

"I should say he'd be only too glad to get rid of any you cared to pick."

"You can manage it, can't you? You were always on good terms with him," said Glen.

"I'm not now," replied Garry.

Glen looked surprised. He thought Bellshaw found the money with which Garry bought Bill Bigs out. [Pg 127]

"You don't mind me saying it, but Bill fancied Bellshaw found you the money for this place," he said.

"He did, but he only lent it me. It's since I bought it we quarrelled."

"Serious?"

"Rather, but we've agreed to drop it. Still, we're not on good terms."

"Then I'd better go and see him alone," said Glen.

Garry hesitated. There was no telling how Bellshaw might act, as Glen ought to have sent in his notice to him before he left the fence. He knew, however, that Glen Leigh was capable of taking care of himself, and that he was more than a match for the squatter.

"Perhaps you had," he agreed. "I can tell you where the best horses for your purpose are to be found. I never saw such beasts, regular savages, half wild, unbroken, not even handled, and some of them six years old. They're most of 'em by old Tear'em, as they call him. Perhaps you've heard of him?" [Pg 128]

"I've heard the name, but nothing much about him except that he's a savage."

"So he is, and so are all his lot. Tear'em has accounted for more than one man's life," said Garry.

"Why doesn't Bellshaw shoot him?"

"That's more than I can tell. It strikes me he rather likes the horse. It suits his temperament."

"Where are these horses to be found?"

"At the Five Rocks most likely. Do you know where that is?"

"No."

"To the south of Mintaro, a good twenty miles."

"And how the deuce am I to get at 'em? I shall want assistance."

"If you get Bellshaw's permission to bag a dozen or two I'll go with you to get 'em and take half a dozen men from here."

"That's a bargain," said Glen. "I expect it will be tough work getting 'em into the trucks when we have driven them as far as Bourke, if ever we get 'em there." [Pg 129]

"Never fear about that. I know how to handle them. What are you going to do with 'em when they reach Sydney?"

Glen explained, and Garry thought the idea splendid. He was quite sure it would pay. He said he'd like to be in it.

"So you shall, Garry," said Glen, who was one of the quick forgiving kind. "How much?"

"A couple of hundred or so."

"It's as good as done. Of course, I must consult Bill. He's the prime mover, the originator of the scheme."

"You'll stay the night?" Garry asked.

"I've no time to spare. I must return as soon as possible, so if you'll let me have a fresh horse I'll ride on to Mintaro at once."

"You can have the best I've got. It'll be nothing very grand, but I'll find one that will take you there."

He went out, leaving him in the bar. [Pg 130]

Glen as he looked round vividly recalled the day he rode in from the hut to see Bill on behalf of the woman. He wondered what she was doing. Was Jim Benny with her? He did not like the idea of Jim seeing too much of her. Yet it was foolish of him. Why should he not see her as often as he wished? She was supposed to be his sister.

Garry returned and said the horse would be round in a few minutes.

"Don't ruffle Bellshaw," he counselled. "He's not been in the best of tempers since he came home from Sydney."

"Bill had a talk with him in Pitt Street, and I saw him. Where do you think he was going?"

"I don't know. He's a queer sort."

"Into a Chinaman's shop in Lower George Street. A fellow named Lin Soo. A beastly-looking Johnnie. I wonder what he went there for?"

Garry was glad Glen was not looking at him or he might have seen his agitation and wondered at it. [Pg 131]

"He knows a lot of curious people," he answered. "Probably he went to buy tea."

"It wasn't a tea shop, although that is what Lin Soo pretends it is. I expect, from what Bill said, it's an opium den, or worse."

"There are lots of 'em in Sydney," said Garry with an assumption of carelessness.

"Plenty in that quarter. They ought to root the whole lot out. It wouldn't be a bad job if the places were burned down."

Glen went out, mounted, and had a parting word with Garry, who said, "Remember what I told you about Bellshaw. There's something wrong with him, I'm certain."

"In what way?"

"He talks a bit wild, and seems to have something on his mind; he sees things," and he told Glen about the verandah incident. "I put it down to the spree he'd probably been on in Sydney."

"I'll humour him," replied Glen laughing. "If he turns rusty I'll have to try and get the horses elsewhere. There are plenty of 'em, I expect." [Pg 132]

"Heaps, but none half so good for your purpose as those at the Five Rocks, by old Tear'em, or one of his sons," said Garry.

Glen waved his hand as he rode away. Garry watched him until horse and man became specks in the distance. As he went inside he muttered, "I think I can guess why Craig Bellshaw went into Lin Soo's shop." [Pg 133]

CHAPTER XIII

LEIGH HEARS STRANGE THINGS

Craig Bellshaw was in an ill humour. He had received a letter from Lin Soo which upset him. The Chinaman said he had changed his mind. He could not supply him with what he required, it was too risky; already he had been in trouble with the police, and he dare not undertake it. These were not the exact words, for the letter was illiterate, but Lin Soo made it plain enough to Bellshaw.

"He hasn't returned the money I advanced him, but he'll have to if he doesn't fulfil his part of the bargain. There's no risk, at least not much, and he's done it before. I can't live here without some sort of comfort."

His quarrel with Garry Backham made him vindictive. He was rather afraid of Garry after what he had said. The man knew too much about certain things at Mintaro, doings, which, if they came to light, would get him into serious trouble. He would have to give Garry the money he had lent him, but intended keeping him in suspense for a time. [Pg 134]

Glen Leigh arrived at Mintaro in the evening. When Bellshaw saw who his visitor was he wondered what brought him there. It was bold conduct on Leigh's part to come and face him after deserting his post.

"Are you surprised to see me?" asked Glen as he dismounted, and Bellshaw came out.

"Yes, you're a cool hand."

"Why?"

"I suppose you know I can have you arrested for deserting?"

Glen laughed.

"Who is to arrest me?"

"I have the power."

"And who's to look after me if you arrest me?"

"I can easily manage that."

"But you won't."

"Why not?"

"Because it would only cause you trouble and worry." [Pg 135]

"What have you come for?"

"To buy horses," replied Glen.

Bellshaw laughed as he said, "Turned horse-dealer, have you?"

"I'm on the look out for a dozen of the worst buckjumpers I can find," said Glen.

"What for?"

Glen explained. Bellshaw became interested. There seemed to be money in the idea.

"You'll find plenty here, but you'll have to sort them out yourself. I can't afford men to help you."

"I'm prepared for that. Garry Backham will find the men."

"Backham's behaved badly towards me; he's not to be trusted. I shouldn't advise you to have much to do with him."

"He'll not get round me. I've had a long talk with him. He tells me you put him into Bigs's place; it was good of you to help him."

"And he's repaid me by the basest ingratitude, but it's generally the way if you help a man." [Pg 136]

"It's not my way," said Glen.

"You'll stop the night?" asked Bellshaw.

"Yes, if you'll put me up."

"There's heaps of room. You're welcome to some of it," answered Bellshaw ungraciously.

After dinner they talked about the horses, and Bellshaw agreed to let him have a dozen for a hundred pounds, which was quite as much, or more, than they were worth, but Glen had no desire to haggle over the affair.

He slept in a room near Bellshaw's. In the wooden homestead sounds carried far.

About the middle of the night Glen was roused by hearing someone walking on the verandah, pacing to and fro. The footsteps sounded stealthy and peculiar. He could not make it out; his curiosity was aroused. He got off the bed quietly, he was only partially undressed, and went to the door, which opened on to the verandah. It was not locked. He turned the handle, opened it cautiously, and looked out. There was a faint light, and at the end of the verandah he saw Craig Bellshaw coming towards him; he was, like himself, only partially dressed. He did not wish [Pg 137]

Bellshaw to think he was spying on him so he almost closed the door and listened.

The pad of his bare feet on the boards sounded strange in the stillness.

Bellshaw stopped when nearly opposite Glen's room. He was talking in a weird voice; it sounded unnatural. As Glen listened he came to the conclusion that Bellshaw was walking in his sleep; to make sure he opened the door wide. He could easily make an excuse that he heard someone prowling about and wanted to see who it was—if Bellshaw were not asleep.

The squatter faced him, his eyes wide open, but vacant. He stared fixedly at Glen but did not see him.

"He's fast asleep," thought Glen, and crept closer to him, not being able to restrain his curiosity.

"Don't struggle, you fool, or make that horrid row. I'll put you in that hole if you do. Bite, will you, you vixen? I've had enough of you; you've tired me out with your grumbling ways. Brought you here by force! It's a lie. You came of your own free will. You knew why you came to Mintaro." [Pg 138]

Bellshaw clutched the air with his hands as though trying to strangle something. Glen watched every movement closely. He felt he was on the eve of a discovery. Bellshaw went down on his knees and pressed the boards with both hands.

"Keep still, will you! Keep still," he muttered, "or I'll crush the life out of you. She's quiet now. I'll leave her here. She'll die. There's no place for her to go to. She'll wander about until she drops, and then give up. That's the best way. No one can say I killed her. I'll leave you here. It will give you some sort of a chance if it is a poor one."

Bellshaw got up and began talking again. This time Glen knew he was speaking to his buggy horses.

Suddenly Bellshaw caught Glen by the arm. For a moment the shock staggered him. The awakening was dangerous; he seemed about to faint. With an effort he pulled himself together and glared at Glen Leigh. [Pg 139]

"What the devil are you doing prowling about on the verandah at this time of night?" asked Bellshaw.

"I might ask the same question. I heard your footsteps. Naturally I wanted to see who it was. You were walking in your sleep. I thought it best not to wake you. I've heard it's dangerous," replied Glen.

Craig Bellshaw shivered. He was thinking of what he might have said or done, in Leigh's presence.

"I'm troubled with sleep-walking," he said, "and have been for some time. It's beastly. No doubt I do and say queer things for which I am not responsible."

Glen made no answer. He had heard sufficient to put him on what he thought was the right track, and he could have strangled Bellshaw without compunction. His hands itched to get at him, but he must bide his time, and make his punishment more severe. A quick death was too good for this man, if what he, Glen, surmised was correct. [Pg 140]

"I advise you to go and rest," he remarked at last, "or you'll be fit for nothing later on."

"I'm always upset after this," said Bellshaw. "It unnerves me. If you want to get away early don't mind me. You can have as many buckjumpers as you care to take. Pick 'em where you like. I'll lend them to you. When you've finished with them you can return them, or sell them, and we'll divide the money."

He spoke feverishly, hurriedly, evidently with the intention of propitiating Leigh.

"No thank you," answered Glen. "I prefer to buy right out. I'll pick what I want, and a hundred pounds will more than cover it. A bargain's a bargain. Besides if I buy the horses I'm under no obligation to you, and I can do as I like."

Glen left him, went into his room, and shut the door.

Bellshaw walked to his room and sat down in a cane chair, cursing his luck that he should have walked in his sleep with Glen in the house. [Pg 141]

What had he said?

This question kept on repeating itself with monotonous regularity. It sounded like the ticking of a clock in his head. On one occasion, when he woke up suddenly, and found himself on the verandah, it all came back to him how he acted in his sleep. He remembered it now. Had he said anything that Leigh could get hold of?

No, of course he hadn't. If he'd gone through the whole thing Leigh would not have understood what he meant. He laughed at his momentary fears. Glen Leigh might think him mad, but he would never guess at the truth; it was impossible. He started. Leigh had seen Garry Backham. Had Garry told him what he suspected? This was hardly likely. Why should he?

Glen Leigh did not lie down again. He was piecing the threads of a tragedy together, and Craig

Bellshaw was depicted as a most hideous villain, a monster deserving of slow torture, if what he, Leigh, thought were true. He'd find out, get proof, and when there was sufficient to go upon, Craig Bellshaw had better beware. No mercy would be shown him. The scene when he found Clara Benny in his hut rose before him. He clenched his fists, raised them above his head, and vowed vengeance on Craig Bellshaw.

Taking a piece of paper he wrote in pencil in large letters LIN SOO. Dressing himself he went out. When he reached Bellshaw's door he pushed the paper underneath. He got his horse, saddled it, and rode towards Boonara.

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CHAPTER XIV

"A MAGNIFICENT BRUTE"

It was late when Craig Bellshaw awoke from a restless slumber. His first thoughts were about Glen Leigh, and the happenings of the night. He wondered if he had gone. He hoped so; he had no desire to meet him again at present.

Opening the door he saw a piece of paper on the floor. Picking it up he read the name Lin Soo written in pencil in large letters.

He stared at it, wondering how it came there.

Glen Leigh must have slipped it under the door. But why? What had he to do with Lin Soo? Probably he had never heard of him, and yet there was no one else to do it.

Lin Soo. Supposing by some strange chance Glen Leigh had met the Chinaman. Even so, it was not likely Lin Soo would say anything about their transactions; he dare not. It flashed upon him he might have mentioned the name in his ramblings. If so, what had he said in connection with it? As he dressed he became nervous. If Glen Leigh had an inkling of what had happened there would be trouble brewing. He, and other keepers of the fence, had many grievances against Bellshaw which they would be only too glad to pay off. He must try and find out what had passed when he walked and talked in his sleep. It must be done warily.

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"I'll see him before he returns to Sydney," he thought. "Even if he heard things he had no business to, I can silence him. Murder is not so easily shelved, and there's Joe Calder's death to account for."

Glen Leigh arrived at Boonara, and next day set out for Five Rocks, with Garry Backham and half a dozen good riders, used to the work, to round up a mob of horses and make a selection.

"The best plan will be," said Garry, "to drive 'em into the nearest yard, which is about half a dozen miles away, and test them. It will be a tough job, but the men who are going with us are used to that sort of work. They'll not mind how rough they are."

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They did not ride near Mintaro, and Glen had no intention of going there again.

As he rode along with Garry, he mentioned about Craig Bellshaw walking in his sleep; he said he talked a lot and acted strangely.

"What did he say?" asked Garry.

"Something about leaving someone to die—a woman. He went through some curious antics, as though he were struggling with her. At the finish he said he'd leave her to wander about until she died. He must have committed some dastardly deed or he'd never rave like that," said Glen.

Garry was silent. Should he tell Glen how much he knew? There was no necessity for it, and he might be dragged into trouble if he did.

"I've never seen him walk in his sleep," he replied eventually, "but he's a queer fellow, and has more on his conscience than I'd care to carry."

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"I've heard of strange doings at Mintaro when I was on the fence," said Glen.

"What sort of doings?"

"About women who came and stayed for a time and were sent away."

"I'd rather say nothing about it," answered Garry.

Glen did not press the subject; he could find out what he wanted later on. In case it were necessary, he would put a straight question or two to Garry.

It was late when they arrived at Five Rocks and camped for the night. The place was well named. Five large rocks rose from the ground in the strangest manner. They were conical, smooth, not many yards apart. Their formation was a strange freak of nature. They were probably the result of a fierce upheaval in some far distant age, when natives and wild animals were the only occupants of the vast territory.

There was a water hole in the centre of the group, fed from the rocks, and Garry said it was this which brought the horses round, for it was seldom dry.

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The six Boonara men were strong sturdy fellows used to a life of hardships. They were not given to conversation and quickly rolled over, with their saddles for pillows, and went to sleep.

Garry and Glen talked for some time, but gradually they dropped off, and the silence of the night reigned round the eight recumbent forms.

As soon as daylight sprang upon them they were astir, and after a hasty, scanty meal they set out to round up the horses.

This was easier said than done. They traversed several miles before they sighted a mob, but were rewarded by seeing at least fifty.

"You'll be able to get what you want out of that lot," said Garry, "if we can get 'em into the yard."

"We'll manage that," answered one of the men. "I suppose the gates are always open?"

Garry said they were, and indicated the direction in which the horses should be driven.

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The men set out to round them up on the side. Garry rode to the left, Glen to the right, so as to guide them in the right direction as they came along.

The horses quickly scented danger, and started off, but were headed back and driven at a wild tearing pace towards Garry and Glen.

The pace became faster and Glen watched the horses as he rode at top speed alongside them, and saw they were a good lot. He hoped their vicious propensities had never been checked. They were all practically unbroken. A few of them might have been handled and turned loose again, but it was improbable.

Towards the yards they went, the men shouting behind them. These yards were erected with a view to driving horses, or cattle, into them with the least trouble. They were at the end of a dried-up river between high banks, whose strange formation Craig Bellshaw had taken advantage of. The opening to the yards extended the whole width of the pass, and there were three large gates through which horses entering the cul-de-sac were bound to go. The difficulty was to head the wild horses into the opening. Once in they were easily driven into the yards.

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As luck would have it, the leader of the mob headed direct for the spot, guided by Garry on the one side, and Glen on the other.

It was a stern chase, and it said much for the horses Garry supplied that they kept pace with the galloping mob. As the leader rushed into the narrow channel the rest followed him pell-mell. The men closed in after them, driving them along at full speed, rushing them through before they realised they were caught. When this happened the din was tremendous. The trapped horses gave vent to their feelings by kicking, squealing, and biting in an extraordinary manner.

The men rested themselves and their horses and watched them.

"There are pretty near fifty," said Garry. "They're a good-looking lot. It's the recent rain's done it. They've had more to eat than they've had for months past."

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"It will make them the harder to mount," replied Glen.

"Suppose we give 'em a rest for a night, and try our luck to-morrow. They'll have been without food for about eighteen hours, and it may tame them down," Garry suggested.

This was agreed to and they camped for the night close to the yards.

Next morning business commenced in earnest. Likely looking horses were separated from the rest, and then the struggle began. The bulk of them were hard to saddle, still harder to mount, but it takes more than a savage, untamed buckjumper to conquer a man from the West.

There were some stiff fights, and now and again a horse more desperate than the rest managed to rid himself of his rider after a long struggle. He was at once selected by Glen as one of his lot.

Glen Leigh excited the admiration of the men by the way he rode a tremendous horse about six or seven years old. He was a rough untamed animal, probably a son of old Tear'em, Garry said. At any rate he was very like that incorrigible savage. He stood nearly seventeen hands, and had the strength of half a dozen ordinary wild horses.

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It took them half an hour to get the saddle and bridle on, and Glen was another ten minutes before he got into his saddle.

The Boonara men never forgot that mighty struggle. They talked about it for years after, whenever buckjumpers were mentioned. It easily broke all records as far as they were concerned.

The huge animal was a prince among buckjumpers, and Glen had all his work cut out to keep his seat. The horse bounded up and down as though his legs were springs. One moment he was off the ground, on all fours, his back arched like a bended bow, the next his fore feet were planted firmly on the ground and his hind quarters elevated almost to the perpendicular. He twirled and

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twisted in an extraordinary fashion, lay down, crushed Glen's leg, rushed against the fence, did everything to throw his grim rider, but without avail. At last he stood covered in sweat, and quivering in every limb. It was then that Glen dismounted, but when he tried to get into the saddle he found the horse ready for another battle-royal.

"He'll do, Garry. If anyone can ride him in Sydney they'll earn any prize that may be offered. What a magnificent brute he is. If one could only tame him—but I expect that's impossible," said Glen.

"By Gad, you can ride above a bit," was Garry's admiring comment.

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CHAPTER XV

THE BIG SHOW

The horses selected were safely railed to Sydney. Bill Bigs had secured stabling for them; such as it was it answered the purpose. They bore the journey better than might have been expected, but there was some danger and difficulty in getting them through the streets to Redfern. Once they were safely housed Glen felt a difficult task was well done.

He went to see Clara Benny. She welcomed him in her usual way, with a smile and a kiss. These constant kisses embarrassed Glen, but he liked them. They showed she had faith in him, and that gave him hope. He told her where he had been, and what for, watching her closely all the time, but there were no signs of recognition. Her memory in that direction was still a blank.

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He had no doubt, after what he had heard and seen, that she was at Mintaro with Craig Bellshaw, and that he had driven her away, after a struggle with her, and left her to die a terrible death, which would have happened had she not found her way to the hut. For this Bellshaw should pay in full when the time came. Glen, however, had such a lot of work in hand with the horses that he had no time for anything else. It took a month to get them in hand so that they could be saddled quickly, but their bucking propensities were encouraged in every way. They were given full scope in this direction. Jim and Glen were constantly in the saddle. The big horse threw them both more than once, until Glen fairly mastered, but could not tame him.

He was a big bay horse with a savage-looking head, and his strength was great.

They called him The Savage, which was appropriate, and he did not belie his name.

There were fourteen horses in all, and a cheque had been sent to Craig Bellshaw for them.

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Jerry Makeshift came to a private exhibition, and was enthusiastic about it. He gave the show valuable assistance in "The Sketch," spoke to many of his press friends, and the buckjumpers were boomed well, so that public excitement about them was roused to the highest pitch.

The building was well adapted for the purpose. A ring was formed and fenced in with stout posts and rails so that there would be no danger to the spectators. On the opening night the place was packed. A challenge had been issued. Two hundred pounds would be given to anyone who could sit The Savage for ten minutes; assistance would be given to mount. Fifty pounds was offered for riding half a dozen others, ten pounds for the remainder, all ten minutes' spells.

There were scores of men in Sydney and the surrounding districts who thought they were equal to the various tasks set.

Six well-known riders sent in their names. Two of them came from Wagga with big reputations, and one from Bathurst. They all tried The Savage. The horse had an easy task, for he was no sooner mounted than he shot riders through the air like rockets. Not one of them made the semblance of a fight with him.

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Then Glen Leigh's turn came. He sprang into the saddle without assistance and the battle commenced. Round and round the ring The Savage bucked in a series of furious leaps. He kicked, squealed, fought desperately, tried to bite Glen's leg, but all in vain; he stuck to his seat in splendid style. The Savage finding these tactics of no avail, threw himself down. Glen slipped out of the saddle. As the horse struggled to his feet he sprang on again amidst a hurricane of applause. At the end of a quarter of an hour he concluded his exhibition, and when he stood in the ring holding The Savage tight by the bridle, the people cheered him to the echo, and the building rang with the shouts. The other riders were exciting, but paled before the performance of Glen Leigh and The Savage.

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As the crowd left the building everybody was asking who Glen Leigh was, and where he came from. He was the most wonderful rider they had seen.

Jerry Makeshift had not given Glen away. He reserved the account he intended to publish for the issue following the opening night. He made good use of the material he had in hand. It so happened that "The Sketch" came out in the afternoon of the next day, and a full account of the "keeper of the fence" was given and the manner in which he had captured the horses and brought them to Sydney.

It was the genuineness of the show that attracted the people, and the place was crowded every night. Money came rolling in and the promoters were in high spirits.

Ivor Hadwin, Bellshaw's trainer, had been a great rider of rough, unbroken horses on his father's station, before they fell on evil times, were ruined by drought and moneylenders, and came to Sydney. On the station he had ridden the worst of buckjumpers, and he thought with a little practice he might be able to stick on The Savage for ten minutes and win the two hundred pounds. For four nights running he succeeded in riding the horses for the lowest prizes. Then he won one of fifty pounds, and Glen Leigh complimented him. [Pg 158]

"You'll have to try for the two hundred," he said to Ivor.

"That's what I mean to do."

"Will you allow us to advertise it?" asked Glen.

"Certainly," answered Hadwin. "I've no objections. You've treated me well, and paid me the money I have won."

"We shall always do that, and I hope you have to draw the two hundred, but I warn you The Savage is a demon, and you'll have to keep your eyes open," said Glen.

"I believe at one time I could ride as well as you, but training has made me a bit soft," replied Hadwin.

Strange to say Glen Leigh did not know Hadwin was a trainer. No one told him, probably taking it for granted that he knew. [Pg 159]

"You train racehorses?" asked Glen.

"Yes, at Randwick. Come and see me one day."

"With pleasure," said Glen. "Who do you train for?"

Ivor Hadwin smiled.

"I wonder someone has not told you about me," he said.

"I never asked. There is such a heap of things to do I've had no time, and it matters little who wins the prizes," returned Glen.

"I train for Craig Bellshaw," said Ivor.

Glen started. This was strange, especially as the horses all came from Mintaro.

"I know him," he said.

"So do I, too well," answered Ivor. "He's a hard man to please."

"I daresay he is," Glen agreed.

Someone called him away and he left Hadwin, saying he would call and see him next morning.

"I'll be there. Come about eleven," said Ivor.

"What night will you attempt to ride The Savage?" asked Glen, looking back. [Pg 160]

"Saturday."

"That's the best night for us, thanks."

Glen told Bill what had passed between them when he reached The Kangaroo.

Jerry Makeshift was there. "You mean to say you didn't know until to-night who Ivor Hadwin was?" he asked.

"No."

"And you made no enquiries?"

"It didn't interest me. It was part of the show."

"And no one enlightened you?"

"No."

"Well, I'm blessed. That's funny; everybody knows Hadwin. I'm told he's likely to win the Caulfield Cup, or the Melbourne Cup, or both, for Bellshaw," said Jerry.

"Has Bellshaw some good horses?" enquired Glen.

"Yes, about a dozen in all, I think, and four or five above the average, but I don't go in for racing much. Tom Roslyn, of 'The Racing Life,' told me. He's the best turf judge we have on the press, and he can pick out good horses as easily as I can a bottle of wine." [Pg 161]

"Then he must be an uncommon judge," laughed Bill.

"What's the name of the Cup horse?" asked Glen.

"Barellan. He's five years old now, and has a nice weight, so Tom says. I forget what it is," Jerry answered.

"Here's Nick Gerard's list," put in Bill. "Barellan, 8st. 7lbs., in the Melbourne Cup, 8st. 10lb. in the Caulfield Cup."

"I'll ask Hadwin to let me have a look at him when I go there in the morning," said Glen.

"Have you bought a ticket in the big sweep on the Melbourne Cup yet?" asked Jerry.

"No, I forgot all about it," replied Glen.

"I'll get one for you if you like," said Jerry.

"I wish you would. Here's the money," and he handed him a sovereign.

Jerry tossed it, "Heads a horse, tails a blank," he called.

The coin fell on the table head up.

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"That's a fair start, anyhow. Let's hope it will be a good 'un you draw."

Glen laughed.

"I haven't much faith in sweeps. I was never tempted to throw money away in them."

"Have one in the Caulfield Cup as well?" suggested Jerry.

"No, that will be sufficient," returned Glen. "It's a sovereign gone to the bad."

"Don't be too sure about that; it's your maiden effort, and may prove successful," said Jerry.

"Get me a ticket at the same time," said Bill.

"All right, and I hope when I call here with them it will bring luck to The Kangaroo," answered Jerry.

"I can do with the cash," said Glen laughing, "Bill's got heaps."

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CHAPTER XVI

MRS. PREVOST

Glen Leigh went by the train to Randwick, and walked to Hadwin's stables. The trainer was glad to see him. He liked him; something hearty about Glen appealed to him.

"We'll have a look round the horses first, if you care to see them," said the trainer.

"That's just what I want," replied Glen. "I'm fond of horses. When I was a keeper on the fence old Ping was my only companion. I've got him in Sydney. He's the queerest horse out; you'd be amused at him. I don't suppose you'd consider him worth a fiver, but it would take a good many fivers to buy him."

"A bush horse, I suppose?"

"Yes, one of the best, a faithful old slave. We've been companions for many years."

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"I like a man who's fond of horses. What a queer name—Ping."

"And he's a queer horse," laughed Glen.

They went round the stables. All the horses belonged to Craig Bellshaw; they were a fair lot as far as Glen could judge.

"That's Flash," said Ivor, pointing to a good-looking chestnut. "He's rather smart."

Glen eyed him over and came to the conclusion he was the best he had seen so far. In the next box was Barellan. The brown horse looked well. He was full of muscle, hard and clean.

As they entered his box he turned and looked at them. When he saw the trainer he seemed quite contented, knowing everything was all right when he was there.

"He's quiet enough," said Ivor. "Have a good look at him. He's a bit different tempered from The Savage."

"I hope so, for your sake," retorted Glen smiling, "or you stand a very fair chance of being killed."

"That's something to look forward to on Saturday night," Ivor answered.

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Glen went up to the horse and examined him well, passing his hand over him, carefully taking in his points. It was difficult to find fault with Barellan. If there was one it was his hocks, which were large and rather unsightly, but there was nothing wrong with them. They were rather low down, in the greyhound style. He had a splendid back and quarters, good shoulders, neck and

chest, a shapely head and a good forehead, and fine eyes. He stood over sixteen hands.

"What do you think of him?" Ivor asked.

"He's a good-looking horse. He ought to gallop. He's built for it," replied Glen.

"So he can. He's the best I have by a long way, although some people prefer Flash."

"I don't," said Glen promptly. "He's in the Melbourne Cup, isn't he?"

"Yes, in both Cups," said the trainer.

"Will he go for them both?"

"I don't know. It depends on the sweep-money, I expect. Bellshaw's always insisted on having a cut out of the sweep with his horses."

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"I suppose that is a regular thing," said Glen.

"Generally speaking it is, but he's greedy. He wants too much," Ivor answered.

Glen stayed to lunch, and they chatted about life in the West, and the trainer told him about the doings at Randwick and elsewhere, interesting him in some of the great horses and races he had seen.

"I shall have a good try to win that two hundred on Saturday night," said Ivor.

"If you stick on for ten minutes you'll deserve it," replied Glen. "I'll give you a bit of advice. If he throws you get out of the ring as quick as you can, or he'll be on top of you before you know where you are."

"He's not going to throw me," said the trainer confidently.

Glen smiled. He had no wish to dishearten him, but he knew there was little chance of his being successful.

On Saturday night the building was crammed, every seat being taken. The announcement that the well-known trainer, Ivor Hadwin, was going to ride The Savage, and try to win the two hundred pounds, caused much excitement.

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There were some good bouts before the event of the evening took place, and when Ivor entered the ring he was loudly cheered. The trainer was pleased with his reception. He had not received much of the world's applause during his career.

The way he mounted The Savage augured well for his success. The horse appeared to know he had a man on his back who would give him "a good game." For a moment The Savage stood still, then suddenly he sprang straight into the air, all his feet off the ground, and his back arched. Ivor had a severe wrench, but stuck to his seat. Round the ring the horse went, backing and fighting in his most savage mood.

Glen saw the horse was in a nasty temper and hoped the trainer would not be hurt. That he would retain his seat for ten minutes he thought impossible.

Ivor Hadwin made no empty boast when he said at one time he believed he rode as well as Glen Leigh. Considering the small amount of practice he had his seat was splendid, and for five minutes The Savage tried in vain to throw him. Glen, who was in the ring, encouraged him by frequent shouts.

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Six minutes passed and still Hadwin was in the saddle, but Glen fancied he saw signs that he was tiring. If this were so it was all up with his chance.

Again The Savage stood still, gathering his strength. His eyes rolled, his nostrils were extended and red. Foam came from his mouth, but his limbs were set, and there was no quivering. It was all determination, and no excitement.

Away he went again, round and round the ring, twisting and twirling, leaping sideways, banging Hadwin against the posts. Then he went to the centre of the ring, turned suddenly, galloped round at top speed. In a moment he stopped dead and springing into the air gave a terrific buck, squealing like a mad horse as he did so.

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The trainer was tired. The struggle had been tremendous, and the last plunge proved too much for him. He was thrown clean out of the saddle, and fell with a thud. Remembering Glen's warning to get out of the ring as quickly as possible, he was scrambling to his feet, when The Savage rushing at him, knocked him down, and trampled him with his forefeet.

Glen Leigh sprang forward as soon as the trainer fell, and it was well he did. He arrived just in the nick of time, before any more serious injury than a few bruises was done. He seized The Savage by the bridle and pulled him back, unconsciously showing his great strength; there was a cheer as he held the brute in hand while the trainer left the ring. Before The Savage had time to switch round Glen was in the saddle, and another tussle took place, but it was an easy task for the rider this time. The trainer had given the horse a severe dose, which had had due effect.

Glen dismounted and announced from the ring that a cheque for twenty-five pounds would be handed Ivor Hadwin for the splendid way he had handled The Savage; a roar of cheering greeted

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this generous offer.

There was one woman in the vast audience who watched Glen Leigh all the time he was in the ring. She was a dark, handsome, well dressed woman, with fine eyes, a good figure, rather inclined to be stout, and she evidently knew many people present. She had been several times, and had always given her whole attention to Glen's performance with The Savage. This alone appeared to interest her.

She wished she knew him. She was about forty years of age, perhaps a year or two older, and her life had been a peculiar one. She had married at the age of eighteen, and her husband deserted her when she was twenty. At this time she went as a barmaid in one of the numerous private bars that then existed in Sydney. Some of these were veritable dens of vice, but she kept herself respectable for several years. When she was thirty she had saved sufficient money to take a small boarding-house at North Shore. Shortly afterwards she was introduced to Craig Bellshaw, and from North Shore she went to Macquarie Street; for the last year she had lived at Manley. She did not like Bellshaw, but he was useful to her and not ungenerous, and as he left her pretty much to herself she was fairly contented. She was one of those women who, given a better chance early in life, would probably have made good use of it. She had plenty of confidence, boldness if you will, but she was not vicious; her life was irreproachable, except for Bellshaw's coming into it, and she lived quietly at Manley, with her maid, and a Chinaman cook, who was a perfect marvel at concocting curious and succulent dishes. Her name was Rosa Prevost, and her neighbours, although they did not quite understand her, found her affable, generous and hospitable. In fact Mrs. Prevost was popular in her surroundings. She knew Ivor Hadwin, through Bellshaw, having been to the stables with him. If she wished to be introduced to Glen Leigh the trainer would oblige her, but she did not care to ask him; she was too proud.

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Her house at Manley was frequented by several well-known people such as Jerry Makeshift, Tom Roslyn, and other journalists, and many actors and actresses, several of whom knew her past life, and how she had been treated in her young days.

She was destined to have her desire for an introduction to Glen Leigh fulfilled sooner than she expected.

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CHAPTER XVII

JEALOUSY

"Yes, I know Glen Leigh—a most interesting man," said Jerry Makeshift.

He was at Sea View, Mrs. Prevost's house at Manley. She had invited him there with the purpose to find out something about the daring rider of The Savage.

"Tell me about him. I admire his riding," she said.

Jerry gave her a full account of Glen's career as far as he knew it. She had read "The Sketch," but he embellished what he had written there for her gratification.

"So he was a keeper of the fence," she said thoughtfully. "Fancy a man like that being exiled there. I wonder why he went?"

"A woman probably," said Jerry.

"That's always the way when a man banishes himself from society. It's always a woman who is the cause," she said.

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"And don't you think nine times out of ten it is so?" he asked.

"No, the man is often more to blame than the woman. Take my case."

"Which is an exception," he said smiling.

"Will you bring him here? I should like to meet him. Do you think he would come?"

"I'll try. He's not a shy man, but he doesn't go out much. Are you anxious to know him?" asked Jerry.

"He interests me," she answered.

"Then I'll try and fix it up. Only promise me not to draw him into your clutches; you are so fascinating. Look at me, I worship you."

"Jerry, you're a humbug. You don't care a straw for anyone except yourself," she laughed.

"That's all you know. I have done some generous actions in my time, that it won't do to speak about; it would sound too much like blowing my own trumpet," he said.

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Jerry had some difficulty in inducing Glen Leigh to go to Manley, but succeeded at last, and they went together.

"Who is Mrs. Prevost?" asked Glen.

Jerry explained as much as he thought proper. There was no occasion to mention Bellshaw. If his name cropped up in conversation it would not be his fault.

Mrs. Prevost was agitated. She almost wished she had not asked Jerry to bring him, and yet she was desirous of making Glen's acquaintance. Already, before she knew him, he had a peculiar fascination for her. She felt angry because it was so. The feeling was quite new and strange; hitherto she had been cold and calculating. She knew all this would vanish where Glen Leigh was concerned.

They arrived before lunch, and when Glen saw Mrs. Prevost he was at once struck with her peculiar charm of manner. No sooner was he in her presence than all her doubts and agitation vanished, and she exerted herself to her utmost to please him.

Glen was quite willing to be pleased by this handsome woman, whose preference for him was already beginning to be marked. [Pg 176]

Jerry smiled as he watched her. He knew her powers. No woman had ever gone so near to capturing him as she, but he had steeled himself against her. His career did not include a wife; he could not afford the luxury, he said.

It was a nice luncheon. Glen thoroughly enjoyed it, and complimented Mrs. Prevost on the possession of such an excellent cook.

"He's a Chinaman," she said smiling. "One of the despised heathens, but I have had him several years, and he has served me well. I found him."

"Found him!" exclaimed Glen.

"Yes. It's quite correct; strange though it seems."

"Where did you find him?"

"Some years ago when he was quite young. He lived with his uncle in Lower George Street. He offended the great man in some way, and he turned him out of the house. He was wandering about when I came along. He spoke to me, pleaded hard for me to make him my servant. Strange, was it not? Something prompted me to take him in. I did, and have never regretted it. He appears to have one set purpose in life, to pay his uncle, Lin Soo, back in his own coin, and have his revenge. Most unchristian-like isn't it? But of course he's a heathen," she said laughing. [Pg 177]

"Lin Soo is his uncle!" said Glen.

"Yes. Why? Do you know him?"

"Not exactly, but I know of him. He keeps an infamous den in Lower George Street."

"I thought it was a tea shop," she said.

"To outward appearances, but inside it's an opium den, a gambling hell, and worse," Glen replied.

"Worse!" she exclaimed enquiringly.

Glen did not care to pursue the subject and she asked no further questions.

No mention was made of Craig Bellshaw, and Glen left, not knowing she was intimate with the squatter. He promised to call again. She knew by his ready acceptance that she had made a favourable impression, and she was more pleased than she had been for many a day. She walked to the steamer with them, and when the boat left sat down on a seat at one side of the wharf. Why should she not have her share of happiness in life? It had been denied her so far. There had been riotous living, and much pleasure, but no peace, no contentment. It was all a struggle, and part of a game which she had been forced to play, but never cared for. [Pg 178]

She walked slowly back to her house, thinking all the time, hoping, wishing as she had never wished before. If a man like Glen Leigh had come into her life years ago, how different everything would have been. She felt she had great capacity for making a man she loved happy. She was in the prime of life, good-looking, robust, full of health and spirits, and she did not lack money. Why should she not find a fitting mate? A man who would condone the past, forget, or shut his eyes to it, and love her for herself. Glen Leigh was a man after her own heart, the stamp of man she had always admired. No matter what he thought of her, or whether they were merely acquaintances, she would never forget him. She made a firm resolve to try and win him; she would exert all her powers to that end. She craved for the real love of a man to meet the love she knew she had to give. It would not be half-hearted love or cold surrender. She wanted the real thing, not a sham. She had had too much of shams; she was sick of them. She longed for honesty, not deception, pretence, lies. There was Craig Bellshaw. He must be made to understand that she desired to sever all connections with him. She would write and tell him so. If he insisted on seeing her for a personal explanation she supposed she must grant him an interview, but it would be the last; she vowed it. [Pg 179]

Glen Leigh little knew the storm of feeling he had raised in Mrs. Prevost. Had anyone told him he would have laughed at the idea. In answer to Jerry he said he thought Mrs. Prevost a very nice woman.

"Handsome, eh?" said Jerry.

"Yes, and she's a jolly good sort I should say."

"So she is. I wonder some fellow hasn't snapped her up long ago," Jerry answered.

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"She's better as she is," said Glen.

"Not she. In her case I should say she ought to have a mate. She looks a woman who could make a man happy."

"There's no telling," declared Glen gloomily.

The Buckjumping Show was a huge success, and a large ground had been taken for it in Melbourne for a month, during which time the Caulfield and Melbourne Cups would be decided.

Glen was surprised when his share was calculated by Bill Bigs. It was far more than he had expected in his most sanguine moments. Jim Benny was given a bonus with which he was more than contented. Nearly all Jim's spare time was spent with Clara, who was in perfect health, and had developed into a very pretty woman. Her mind, however, was still a blank as regards everything before she came to Glen Leigh's hut. Glen thought some sudden shock might restore the lost memories. At the same time the effect might be serious. Probably it would be better for her peace to remain as she was. Glen's feelings towards her were difficult to analyse. He knew by the way she always greeted him that she regarded him as a father. At first he thought he loved her, but gradually this feeling lessened, and he knew it was pity and compassion that had grown in him, not love. He was more solicitous towards her than he had ever been, spoke kindly, looked after her every comfort, and she trusted and idolised him—but not as a lover.

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With Jim it was different. He was younger than Glen, and there was no doubt about his affection for her. She treated him differently from Glen, was more reserved, never kissed him; she shrank away when he came too near, and was nervous in his presence.

Jim noticed all this and misunderstood. He thought her love was all for Glen Leigh, and this embittered him. He had not the strength of character of the elder man, could not stand trials so well, was soon cast down and dispirited. He had seen her kiss Glen when they met—she always did—and yet when he came near her she shrank away.

Glen seemed to get the best out of life, while he, Jim, had hardly anything to look forward to.

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He forgot what Glen had done for him. A growing jealousy rose against his comrade; such feelings were easily roused in him.

"I must know what he means, what she means," said Jim to himself. "It's torturing me. I can't stand it—I won't."

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CHAPTER XVIII

A QUESTION OF JOCKEYS

Craig Bellshaw's life at Mintaro was a burden to him; if his time had not been occupied there is no telling what might have happened. During the day he was constantly out of doors, but at night, his lonely dinner ended, he sat down and brooded. There were many actions in his life that would not bear the searchlight. He did not regret them; he was hardened. What he missed was the presence of a woman. It could not be called companionship, because he never gave his friendship fully to anyone. It would soon be time for him to go to Sydney and see his horses do their work for the big Victorian Meeting. He had great hopes of Barellan winning the Melbourne Cup, and thought Flash had a chance in the Caulfield Race. He heard from his trainer regularly, and the reports were favourable. Letters for Mintaro were left at Boonara by the mail coach which came twice a week.

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He read the account of the buckjumping exhibition, and begrudged Bill Bigs and Glen Leigh their success. They were his horses; why had he not thought of such a show and run it himself? He always begrudged fortune's favours to others.

He had been uneasy ever since he found the piece of paper with Lin Soo written on it pushed under his door. He tried to persuade himself it meant nothing, but he knew different. It was a warning and he wondered how much Glen Leigh knew. Then there was Garry Backham. He must see him before he went to Sydney and find out how the land lay in that quarter.

His man brought the post-bag and placed it on the table. Craig unlocked it and took out the letters and papers. He opened one from Ivor Hadwin, who gave favourable accounts of the progress of all his horses, and prophesied a successful campaign in Victoria. Barellan was specially mentioned. No horse could be doing better; he had come on by leaps and bounds and was at least ten pounds better than when he ran at Randwick.

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"If he is he'll win the Cup," said Craig.

He placed the letter on one side to answer; the post-bag had to be at Boonara next day. There

were several bills, some circulars, newspapers, and one or two packages. A letter, directed in a lady's hand, claimed his attention. He knew the writing; it was from Mrs. Prevost.

"She wants more money, I suppose," he muttered. "She'll have to want. I've been too openhanded with her, and she's not a bit grateful. Women never are."

As he read the letter his face became gloomy: it was not pleasant to look at. The contents angered him. She expressed her intention of severing all connection with him, said she had no desire to see him again, and much more to the same effect.

Craig Bellshaw was in a rage. He considered Mrs. Prevost a useful adjunct to his visits to Sydney. There was always a house to go to, where he could be sure of comfort, and the presence of a woman who was good to look upon; and now she coolly said she had no desire to see him again. There were no words of apology or respect. She repudiated the bargain, or what he considered the bargain, between them. There must be some solid reason for it, and the only one he could think of was another man. She would find he was not to be treated in this cavalier fashion. Some men might stand it; he would not.

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He made up his mind to go to Sydney at once. There were plenty of hands at Mintaro, and his new overseer would look to things. He announced his intention of going next day.

He started in the early morning, arriving at Boonara about eleven o'clock; from there he would take the coach to Bourke. He went to Garry Backham's, and asked him if there was anything he could do for him in Sydney.

"He's mighty polite," thought Garry, "there's some mischief afoot."

They talked for some time, and Craig said. "About the money I lent you to buy this place, I've thought it over; you're welcome to it. You were always reliable when you were with me and did your work well."

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"He's changed his tune," thought Garry.

"You can consider yourself free of that debt," said Craig.

"I thought you'd come round to my way of thinking," replied Garry, who knew well enough why he had suddenly become generous.

"It was always my intention to make you a present of it," Craig declared.

"Then why didn't you do it at first?"

"Because I wished to see what sort of man you were, and how you'd take it."

"Glen Leigh and Bill Bigs have done well in Sydney with the show," said Garry.

"It's lucky they got some of my horses. He seems to have picked out the right sort."

"Trust him for that. The fellow they call The Savage is a ripper. He's by old Tear'em, I'll swear. I never saw such a brute, but Leigh mastered him as soon as he was yarded."

"Everybody seems to think he's a wonderful man," said Craig.

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"So he is. They're few and far between," answered Garry. "I see your horses are doing good work for the Cups. Do you fancy them?"

"Barellan and Flash both have chances."

"I've got a couple of tickets in the sweep on the Melbourne Cup," said Garry.

"If you draw Barellan I shall expect you to stump up a good round sum out of your lot," Bellshaw told him.

"You'll get nothing out of me if I draw him, but it's about a million to one I don't," retorted Garry.

"Whoever draws him will have to give me a cut out of the sweep or they'll stand a poor chance of getting a run for their money," said Craig.

"You don't mean to say you'd scratch Barellan for a race like the Melbourne Cup merely because you were not offered anything out of the sweep?" Garry asked.

"I would. No man shall get the better of me. It's only fair. I have all the expense incurred over the horse."

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"Then you're not much of a sportsman."

"Just as good as anyone else," returned Craig.

"Well, if I happen to draw him you can scratch him. You'll not get me to lay you anything," said Garry.

When Bellshaw arrived in Sydney he went to Hadwin's house at Randwick, where there was always a room for him. The trainer would have preferred his staying elsewhere, but could raise no objections. The horses pleased him, Barellan especially. He seemed in rare fettle, and the trainer said no horse could possibly have done better.

"You'll have to look out for a jockey soon, or they'll all be snapped up. There is likely to be a big field, thirty runners or thereabouts," said Ivor.

"What about Nicholl?"

"He'd be all right if you could get him."

"Is he engaged?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then what's to prevent me engaging him?"

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Hadwin hesitated, then said, "He'll want a big fee."

"And can't I pay it?" thundered Bellshaw.

"You can pay it. The question is will you?" said the trainer.

"If it's reasonable. What will he want?"

"A hundred at least."

"Then he'll not get it. I'm not going to pay any jockey a hundred, win or lose. If Barellan wins it's a different matter."

"Shall I see him about it or will you?" asked Ivor.

"You'd better see him. If he asked me that figure there's no telling what I'd say to him," Bellshaw answered.

Hadwin saw Nicholl on the training ground next morning. Bellshaw was there, standing some distance away.

"Will you ride Barellan in the Melbourne Cup?" asked Ivor.

"What sort of a chance has he?"

"A winning chance. You can have the leg up on him this morning; he's just coming out."

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"All right," agreed Nicholl.

"Then come with me," said the trainer.

When Barellan came out with Nicholl up there was a stir among the watchers. Luke Nicholl was one of the best jockeys. There were few to equal him, and it was known he had not a mount in the Cup, as he declined to tie himself down. His appearance on Barellan at once set tongues wagging as to the possibility of his riding the horse in the Cup. Nicholl liked the way Barellan moved. He knew he was a good game animal, and 8st. 7lb. was a nice weight. He could do it comfortably.

"He moves well," said Nicholl, when he dismounted.

"You'll find him a far different horse in a race. He's not a track horse," said Ivor. "Will you accept the mount?"

"It all depends."

"What on?"

"The amount to be paid me."

"What do you want?"

"A couple of hundred."

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"Win or lose?"

"Yes."

"He'll never give that. I doubt if he'll give a hundred, but come over to my place and talk it over. I'd like you to be on him, Luke, because I think he'll just about win," said the trainer.

"You can't expect me to ride him without I get a good fee," answered Nicholl. "I'm worth it, eh?"

"You are, and if I had the arranging of it I'd give you fair terms. You'll just suit Barellan; he wants a lot of riding. He's a lazy beggar, and you know how to handle such horses."

"When shall I come over?"

"After breakfast."

"I'll be there soon after nine," said Nicholl, "but you can tell him I must have my price. I've not worked my way to the top of the ladder without trouble, and I mean to get what I'm worth."

"I'll do my best, but don't be hasty over it, or you'll regret it," replied Ivor.

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Something in the trainer's earnest manner appealed to the jockey.

"We've always been friends," he said. "I'd like to ride a big winner for you."

CHAPTER XIX

MRS. PREVOST'S DILEMMA

There was a tough skirmish when Nicholl met Craig Bellshaw at Hadwin's, but eventually the owner of Barellan gave way, mainly owing to his trainer's representations and persuasion, and settled with the jockey to ride both his horses, Flash at Caulfield, and Barellan at Flemington, for two hundred, win or lose, five per cent. on the stakes, and five per cent. on any sweep money that might be forthcoming. Having fixed this up, with a good deal of grumbling, Bellshaw set out for Manley to see Mrs. Prevost, who was not aware he was in Sydney.

Bellshaw was in a bad temper. Things were all awry, and even the thought of winning the Melbourne Cup with Barellan did not soothe him. It was a disagreeable surprise to Mrs. Prevost when she heard who her visitor was.

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Bellshaw made no bones about the matter. He asked her what she meant by writing him such a letter after all he had done for her; he upbraided her in no measured terms, used harsh names, and behaved somewhat brutally. It was his way with women.

She resented his conduct and replied forcibly. He saw she was determined, and this angered him still more. There was a scene, they lost their tempers, and mutual recriminations were the result. Mrs. Prevost was expecting Glen Leigh for lunch and wished to get rid of Bellshaw before he arrived. She dreaded their meeting, not on his account, but for the effect it might have on Leigh, and her influence with him. Bellshaw, however, did not seem in any hurry to go. He was loth to give her up; in his way he liked her.

"The fact is," he said, "you've taken up with someone else. I warn you he shall know all about you."

"You are cad enough to do that?" she asked.

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"You can call me names if you wish; I don't care, but I'll make it mighty unpleasant for you," he said.

There was a ring at the front door. Mrs. Prevost was at her wits' end how to act. It was no doubt Glen Leigh.

She left the room hurriedly, and opened the door herself. It was Glen Leigh. She took him into the front room, and said her maid had just gone out; she promised to return in a few minutes, and left him.

Glen thought this strange. She was agitated; something must have upset her. He wondered what it was.

Craig Bellshaw also wondered why she had gone out of the room. He heard her open the door, and someone come in. Who was it? The voice sounded like a man's.

She gave him a hint that he had better be going.

"Not until I have seen who your visitor is," he said.

"If I have a visitor it is no business of yours," she retorted.

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"It is. I am still interested in you even if you treat me badly," he said.

What was she to do? How could she prevent a meeting between him and Glen Leigh? She cudgelled her brains but was at a loss to find a plan. Bellshaw did not seem inclined to move.

Glen Leigh waited a quarter of an hour and became restless. What detained her? He heard voices in the next room, but could not distinguish who was speaking. Perhaps she had a visitor. If so, why did she not tell him?

"I must ask you to leave my house," she said desperately.

Bellshaw laughed.

"Your house?" he sneered.

"Yes, mine. You did not know I had bought it."

"Have you paid for it?"

"I have, if that's any consolation to you."

"And you wish me to believe that? I wonder where you got the money from?"

"It was my money. I am not without means," she answered indignantly.

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He laughed as he got up, but there was an evil look in his eyes.

"I'll go. I don't wish to interfere with your pleasures, or any conquests you may make, but I've not done with you, I promise you that," said Bellshaw.

He took up his hat and opened the door. She followed him. Would he go into the front room?

Her heart beat fast. She felt faint. It was a trying moment.

Glen Leigh might see him leave the house, but he would not know who he was; if Bellshaw saw him there was no telling what might happen.

Bellshaw passed the door of the room, opened the front door, and walked away without saying another word, or even raising his hat. It was a tremendous relief now he was gone; she waited a few minutes to regain her composure, and then with a faint smile, entered the front room.

Glen Leigh was looking out of the window; he recognised Craig Bellshaw and was so astonished he did not hear her open the door. Scores of questions crowded into his mind as he saw the owner of Mintaro walking away; the main questions were how came he to Mrs. Prevost's, and for what purpose? [Pg 199]

She saw Glen with his back turned to her, and knew he had seen her visitor; she was not aware Leigh knew him, and of his doings elsewhere of which she was in ignorance; she had, as yet, no conception of the depths of infamy to which Bellshaw had sunk.

"I am sorry to keep you waiting so long, but I had a visitor," she said.

"I saw him leave the house," said Glen, turning sharply round.

"He's an old friend; I have known him many years." She could not make him out. He was looking at her steadily; his eyes seemed to pierce her.

"I know him," said Glen quietly. "I did not expect to see him in *your* house."

"You know him!" she exclaimed aghast, the colour deserting her cheeks.

"Yes. Do you know him well?" he asked. [Pg 200]

"Yes, but why do you ask in such a strange way?"

"I do not think you know what Craig Bellshaw really is. I am sure you do not. If you did he would never have been admitted to your house," said Glen.

What was she about to hear? She must learn more; how was she to excuse herself to him? What if he and Bellshaw met? There would be revelations, her backsliding would be magnified a hundred times; she must have the first say no matter what it cost her.

"What is he?" she asked.

"A bad man, almost a murderer. I dare not tell you what has happened at Mintaro. You would be overwhelmed with shame to think you ever had dealings with, or ever took the hand of such a man," said Glen seriously.

She looked very charming in her distress. Even Glen Leigh would have been very dense had he failed to see the appeal in her eyes, or to recognise that she liked him very much indeed.

No woman had ever appealed to him quite in the same way as Mrs. Prevost; he had thought a good deal about her since he saw her last. [Pg 201]

"Tell me about him," she said.

"What was he doing here?" asked Glen who doubted everything where Craig Bellshaw was concerned.

"He came to see me, not at my request, but I was not surprised. I had written to him at Mintaro telling him—" she hesitated.

Glen waited. Should he help her out? He thought he could. Rage was surging up in him, not against Mrs. Prevost, but against Bellshaw. Was she another of his victims?

That was hardly possible; yet there were unmistakable signs of acute distress at the situation in which she was placed. As Glen thought, a sudden wave of feeling overwhelmed him, and would not be beaten back. He loved this woman. By some strange fatality Bellshaw was connected with her as he had been with the other woman. He felt a mad desire to rush after Bellshaw and kill him. This passed in a few seconds; then he said, in answer to her hesitation, "Telling him you never wished to see him again." [Pg 202]

She looked at him in great surprise, feeling intense relief. This man understood her, because he knew Craig Bellshaw for what he was. Already he had forgiven her without the asking. He did not blame her, but the man. In that case he guessed some of the truth and the rich blood crimsoned her cheeks. She bowed her head; then she looked straight at him and said, "That is what I wrote him—that I never wished to see him again. I ordered him to leave the house, my house, when you saw him go. I will never admit him again."

"I am glad of that," said Glen. "Very glad. When did you write to him?"

It was the truth she would tell him.

"The day after you came here with Jerry," she said.

Glen smiled.

"What decided you to write?" he asked.

"You did."

Again he smiled.

"I wonder how that happened?" he said.

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"Can't you guess?" she answered in a low voice.

"No, at least not yet. Later on I'll try—with your permission."

"You have it now. I want a friend—like you."

"You don't think he'd dare to come here again?" asked Glen savagely.

"There is no telling what he might do. Try and avoid him."

"Why should I?"

"He's a dangerous man."

Glen laughed.

"I'm more than a match for him in many ways," he replied.

After lunch she asked him to tell her about Craig Bellshaw.

"I will tell you one terrible thing which I believe to be quite true," he said. "I am waiting to find out. It is a matter of time, and you must promise not to repeat what I tell you."

She readily gave her promise and he told her in a graphic narrative all about the woman who came to his hut, what happened there, and since her recovery. He concealed nothing, not even about Lin Soo. He thought, in justice, she ought to know what manner of man Craig Bellshaw was.

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As she listened, horrified, believing every word, she felt deeply humiliated when she thought what Bellshaw had been in her life; she shuddered with repulsion.

"Bring her here," she said. "Let her be my companion. I may be able to call back her lost memories. I will love her for all she has suffered. You will trust her with me, will you not?"

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CHAPTER XX

THE DRAWER OF BARELLAN

They decided to allow Clara to go to Mrs. Prevost's, and Glen took her there. She was given a kindly welcome. Mrs. Prevost was glad to have her, liked her at once. The feeling was mutual. Glen felt he had left her in good hands, that she would be happy and comfortable.

"Don't let Bellshaw see her if by any chance he calls," said Glen, "but he will be going to Melbourne for the Cup meetings, and our show leaves to-morrow. I shall not see you again for several weeks."

"I shall look forward to your return. I hope you will do well there," she answered.

"I think we shall. There is no reason why we should not do even better than in Sydney."

As Glen was leaving, having bid good-bye to Clara, he said, "On my return I may have something to tell you; something which I hope will be for our happiness."

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She smiled brightly, guessing what he meant. There was a prospect of sailing into a peaceful harbour after a stormy life. Glen Leigh was indeed a man. He had not even questioned her about the past, or her relations with Bellshaw.

The horses, and all the paraphernalia of the show, went to Melbourne by steamer, Glen and Jim going with them. During the short voyage Glen thought Jim taciturn and ill-tempered. He asked him the cause.

"I'm sick of life," said Jim, "I never seem to get anything out of it. You and Bill have all the luck."

"I don't think you've done so badly," objected Glen, "and now you have a share in the show. What more do you want?"

"A good deal more. I want happiness, and I don't seem in the way of getting it."

"Why not? What troubles you? Tell me, lad; I may be able to help you."

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Then, as they sat on deck, Jim poured out the vials of his ill-tempered wrath on Glen's head. He told how he loved Clara, but that she avoided, shunned him. He complained that it was very hard lines he, Glen, should come between them. For a long time he went on grumbling, and Glen listened to him patiently not saying a word. He let him exhaust himself before he made any reply.

"Jim, you're a fool," said Glen. "When she first came across my path and found her way to my hut, as I sat and nursed her back to life, you helping me, I thought I loved her. I was sure of it. That same feeling possessed me when we came to Sydney. It remained with me until something happened which opened my eyes, something totally unexpected. She put her arms round my neck and kissed me."

"I know," said Jim. "I know. She always does. She loves you."

Glen smiled as he said, "You're a bit shallow, Jim. You can't see far. I knew when she kissed me she would never love me like that, so I gave it up. She regarded me as a father, that was all, and I'm quite contented she should. I've found out the feeling I had for her was not that of a lover. I love her, I always shall, because I rescued her from death. It's only natural. You've no need to fear me as a rival. I love another woman, not her."

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Jim's face brightened. He knew Glen spoke the truth; he always did. It clouded again as he thought how she avoided him.

"The reason she doesn't kiss you," said Glen, "is because she feels different towards you. She doesn't think it would be right. I've watched her, and I think if she does not love you now she will in days to come. She'll miss you when you are away from her in Melbourne. Probably she'll talk to Mrs. Prevost about you. Wait till you come back and then see how the land lies. She's not fit to marry yet, not strong enough. It will be better to wait until she recovers her memory."

"She may never recover it," said Jim.

"She will, I'm sure of it, and through Mrs. Prevost, who will help her. She's a sympathetic woman, and I told her all about it, everything. She'll do all in her power to bring back her lost memory; she said she would," Glen answered.

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After this conversation Jim was a different man.

All along he had been jealous of Glen; now the cause was removed. Sometimes he gave a thought to Joe Calder, but he felt no regret for what he had done; the man had brought it on himself.

"If I hadn't shot him he'd have done for me," said Jim to himself.

The show arrived safely in Melbourne, and opened in a large tent on the St. Kilda Road. Crowds flocked to it, and before the first week was over Glen knew they were in for an even better season than in Sydney. They started business the Saturday before the Caulfield Cup. The tent was packed every night, and sometimes twice a day.

Ivor Hadwin arrived at Caulfield with his horses, Barellan, Flash, and a couple of others.

Betting on the two Cups was brisk, and Barellan was well backed by the public at a hundred to eight.

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Bellshaw had been laid a fair sum to nothing by the drawer of Flash in the Caulfield Cup Sweep.

The first Hundred Thousand Pound Sweep on the Melbourne Cup was to be drawn in Sydney on Monday night.

When Glen Leigh was informed he laughed, and said, "I don't set much account on it. A fellow can't expect to get anything with one ticket in a hundred thousand."

There was a tremendous race for the Caulfield Cup, and Flash ran third, being beaten by Roland and Mackay.

Flash ran a remarkably fast race. Ivor Hadwin hardly thought him good enough to win and he died away a furlong from the post. Knowing what Barellan could do with Flash on the track, the trainer told Nicholl he thought the Melbourne Cup was pretty nearly as good as won.

The result of the drawing for the Hundred Thousand Pound Sweep on the Melbourne Cup was made public on the Wednesday. Glen Leigh received a wire from Bill Bigs which fairly astonished him.

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"You have drawn Barellan. Good luck, Bill."

This was astounding news indeed. He had only one ticket in the sweep, number 33444, and it had drawn Barellan, third favourite for the great race. Was there ever such a stroke of luck! Glen could hardly believe in his good fortune. Barellan was Bellshaw's horse which made it more remarkable still. All his friends connected with the show crowded round congratulating him. He was regarded as a kind of hero. The first prize was close upon twenty-five thousand pounds, and there were numerous other large and small sums to be divided. He was bound to get one of the first three big prizes with such a horse as Barellan running for him, so said everybody who knew him.

Ivor Hadwin heard the news with mixed feelings; he was glad Leigh had drawn the horse, but wondered what would happen if he declined to give Craig Bellshaw a cut out of the sweep money.

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It was impossible to keep the fact that Leigh had drawn Barellan a secret, nor had he any wish it should be so.

"I've drawn the horse; where's the harm in people knowing it?" said Glen.

Bill Bigs arrived in Melbourne, and consulted with Glen as to what was best to be done.

Bill advised him to lay some of it against Barellan. He could stand to win a large sum to nothing, and if the horse lost he would also be a winner. Glen, however, was adamant on this point. He declared he would not lay off a penny; he'd stand the thing right out.

"It's only cost me a pound," he said. "That's not much, and I'd sooner go the whole hog and win the lot, if Barellan wins. If he loses I shall not grumble."

"Please yourself," said Bill. "From all I hear you stand a good chance of pulling it off at the first time of asking. It's an extraordinary piece of luck, that's what it is. I know fellows who have been going in for sweeps for years and have never drawn a horse. I've been doing it for a dozen years, and all I ever got was a non-starter."

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"You shall have a couple of hundred if Barellan wins," said Glen. "So shall Jim, and I'll see Hadwin and Nicholl have a trifle."

"You're distributing the cash before you've won," laughed Bill.

"Half the fun of things is to anticipate, and plan out what you'll do with the money," Glen laughed back.

"So it is. I've drawn some nice little pictures myself, but they've always been rubbed out, not so much as a daub remaining," said Bill.

When Glen met Hadwin, the trainer asked, "I suppose you've not heard from Bellshaw?"

"No. What do I want to hear from him for?" replied Glen.

Hadwin smiled.

"You've not had much experience of sweeps. Owners generally expect a good slice out of them," he said.

"If Bellshaw expects to get me to lay him a big slice he's mistaken. I shan't lay him a penny," replied Glen determinedly.

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"For goodness' sake don't say that," expostulated Hadwin in genuine alarm.

"Why not? I mean it."

"It will ruin me, Leigh, ruin me. I've backed Barellan for all I'm worth, or nearly so," said the trainer.

"Well, my drawing him in the sweep won't stop him winning."

"No, I don't mean that. I think he will win, but if you don't lay Bellshaw a fair sum, there's no telling what he'll do."

"What can he do?" asked Glen, surprised.

"Scratch him," said Hadwin in a low tremulous voice.

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CHAPTER XXI

LAME

Craig Bellshaw soon heard who was the drawer of Barellan in the great Melbourne Cup Sweep. Glen Leigh held the ticket. He smiled wickedly. He had found out that Glen had been a welcome visitor at Mrs. Prevost's. So this was the man who had supplanted him. He wished him joy of his bargain; he'd find it pretty expensive. No doubt it was Leigh who called when he, Bellshaw, was ordered out of the house. If he had only known he would have enlightened him there and then; he intended doing so at the first favourable opportunity. He'd make it particularly hot and sultry for Mrs. Prevost, put a spoke in her wheel that even Glen Leigh would not care to try and pull out. A keeper of the fence, a common showman, a rider of buckjumpers, to be ousted by such a man—it made Craig Bellshaw writhe. He did not call at Sea View before he left for Melbourne; there was time enough. He'd put in an appearance when he had fairly choked Leigh off, made him sick of the whole business. He hated him, he hated Mrs. Prevost for throwing him over, and he vowed vengeance against them. Leigh had thwarted him in many ways when he had been on the fence. Bellshaw recalled how on one occasion he had given him the lie direct at a meeting held at Boonara, and had proved his statement up to the hilt. This had lessened the owner of Mintaro's prestige considerably, and he had not forgiven it.

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Glen Leigh had drawn Barellan. Bellshaw chuckled, a curious gurgling sound, more like the

growling of a dog. This decided him. He had returned to Sydney after the Caulfield Cup; he didn't care for Melbourne. He took train back again as soon as he heard who had drawn Barellan in the sweep.

He always stayed at Scott's. He walked there from Spencer Street Station, along Collins Street. [Pg 217]

"Hallo, Bellshaw, back again?"

It was Nick Gerard who, for a wonder, was in that part of the town.

"You, Nick. What's the news?"

"I expect you know it all; you're never much behind the times where your interests are concerned. By Gad, perhaps you don't know; it only happened this morning. When did you arrive?"

"I've just come in by the express. What's up?"

"Your horse, Barellan."

"Well?"

"He went lame on the track at Flemington this morning, limped away badly, and it's the week before the race. He'll not have much time to pull round. I'm sorry for you. It's deuced bad luck, but you can stand it. I'm more sorry for that chap, Glen Leigh, who drew him in the sweep. It's rough on him. I like him; he's the best roughrider I ever saw. I'm open to bet there isn't a buckner in Australia can get rid of him in a quarter of an hour. I told him I'd bet a level thousand, two thousand if anybody wanted it, and give him half if he won," said Nick. [Pg 218]

"My horse lame!" exclaimed Bellshaw, ignoring the latter part of Nick's remarks.

"Dead lame, from all accounts. I didn't see him, but I met Luke Nicholl in Bourke Street, and he told me. He was on his back, so he ought to know," said the bookmaker.

"Damn him! He'd no right to say anything about it, especially to a bookmaker," cried Bellshaw angrily.

"And pray why not? What have I done? The fact will be in all the evening papers. Most men I met at the Club were talking about it."

"Were they? It's a den of thieves," almost shouted Bellshaw, in his anger.

"You're talking rot," said Nick, who knew his man. He also had a fairly thick skin, and such remarks failed to penetrate it. "Have you been playing 'solo' all the way from Sydney and losing, or what's ruffled you?"

"I never play 'solo' or hazards," sneered Bellshaw. [Pg 219]

"Well, I do, and I'm considered a fairly good hand at the former. As to hazards, I'll not say much about that. I'm out on the green cloth, out a biggish sum, but I can't leave off. It's in my blood. I must throw the dice sometimes," said Nick.

"More fool you. Where are you going?"

"To the Federal."

Bellshaw smiled grimly.

"What have you got there? Is she nice? bewitching? or just an ordinary filly?" he asked.

"It's a man, a dashed clever fellow, but he's one failing, and it's got fairly hold of him since he's been in Melbourne this time. I've known him come here and never touch a drop the whole blessed time, but he's been knocked out this trip. I'd like to find out the beggar who led him on. I'd give him a piece of my mind," said Nick hotly.

"Haven't you enough to do without wasting your time over a boozer?"

"He's always been a friend of mine; he's done all his expenses in, and hasn't a bean. I mean to see him through, if he'll promise to keep straight until the meeting's over." [Pg 220]

"And do you suppose he will?" sneered Bellshaw.

"Yes, if he gives me his word," replied Nick.

"You're blessed with an uncommon amount of faith," said Bellshaw.

"And you've got none, not even in yourself. If you'd any pluck you'd not squeal because Barellan's gone lame. He may pull round. Hadwin's a clever man with dicky horses."

"He's an ass or he'd not have galloped the horse to a standstill. I told him he was giving him too much work."

"I'm more sorry for him than you," said the bookmaker.

Bellshaw laughed cynically, ignored the remark and asked, "Who's your sick friend at the Federal?"

"Jerry Makeshift, of 'The Sketch,' one of the best, the very best, a jewel with only one flaw in it."

"A gem of the first water, with whiskey in it," jeered Bellshaw.

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"And supposing he is? That's better than being a grinding, snarling, miserable money-grubber," retorted Nick.

"Who's in a bad temper now?" asked Bellshaw.

"You're enough to rile a parson," said Nick.

"I never tried. I don't know much about 'em. I haven't got a chaplain at Mintaro."

"By all accounts you ought to have."

"What for?"

"To marry you," said Nick laughing.

Bellshaw swore and left him. Nick looked after him.

"He's a rotter if ever there was one, but he's been straight with me so far, and he'd better continue to walk the line. The first time he steps off it I'll push him right down," he thought, then went into the Federal.

"Is Mr. Makeshift in?" he asked the young lady presiding over the entry book in the desk, on the right hand side near the door.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Gerard. Yes, he's in. He's been asking for you," and she told him where to find him.

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Nick ascended the stairs, knocked at the door.

"Come in," said a thick voice.

Nick entered and found Jerry struggling with a sketch.

"I don't feel a bit humorous," said Jerry.

"You're a pretty specimen," began Nick.

"Look here, Old Nick, if you've come here to upbraid me I don't want to see you. What I want is ten pounds to see me through."

Nick laughed.

"I'll let you have it if you promise to keep all right."

"Snakes alive. You don't suppose I want to be sacked, do you?" exclaimed Jerry.

"I'd be sorry if you were, so would thousands of people. We'd all miss you, Jerry. 'The Sketch' wouldn't be the same paper," answered Nick.

"That's awfully good of you," said the repentant Jerry. "It means a lot to me. I'll not go back on you, Nick, I promise you, and you shall have some good stuff to amuse you next week."

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"That's right, old boy. Buck up. Here's the cash. Have you heard the latest?"

"I haven't been out for days."

"Barellan's lame; Nicholl told me this morning. I've just met Bellshaw. He's in a towering rage, cursing everybody, and everything. He can handle some language when he likes. He's a heavyweight at it," said Nick.

"Bellshaw's a beast," replied Jerry. "I'm not sorry for him, but I am for Leigh and Hadwin."

"So am I, and I told him so," said Nick.

"What'll happen?" asked Jerry.

"I suppose he'll scratch him if there's no chance of getting him to the post."

"Lame horses have gone to the post and won a Melbourne Cup," said Jerry.

"I'd sooner have one with four legs sound."

"I say, Nick?"

"Yes."

"What do you fancy?"

"If Barellan gets right I think he'll win."

"And if not?"

"Roland."

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"The Caulfield Cup winner?"

"Yes. He's a good horse—better than folks imagine."

"But his penalty?"

"He's a weight carrier. His trainer says he'd a stone in hand at Caulfield."

"That settles it," said Jerry.

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CHAPTER XXII

SWEEP MONEY

After the Caulfield Cup, Hadwin took the horses to Flemington, where they were boxed at the top of the hill, at the Racecourse Hotel, where many good horses have had their quarters.

Thither Bellshaw went, when he had been to Scott's, and cleansed himself from the grime that accumulated coming from Albury to Melbourne. He was not popular at the hotel. His generosity was of the miserly kind, and everybody knew it. Still he was the owner of Barellan, the sensational horse of the hour, and people wondered if it would be a case of another Assassin, who was reported lame, and won easily.

The head waiter said, "It's just up to Bellshaw to plant a lame 'un on us, and then for the horse to come up smiling and win."

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When Bellshaw arrived at the Racecourse Hotel he at once saw Hadwin, and there was a stormy scene.

"I told you he'd break down if you gave him such strong work," said Bellshaw.

"He hasn't broken down," retorted the trainer.

"Gerard told me he's dead lame."

"That's different to breaking down. He's not dead lame."

"Then what's the matter with him?"

"Limped when he pulled up, that's all."

"Isn't that enough the week before the race?" growled Bellshaw.

"It would be under certain circumstances, but it's not serious."

"You think he'll be fit to run?"

The trainer laughed.

"Of course he will. Who put that silly idea into your head?"

"Let's look at him."

They walked down the yard to Barellan's box.

"Bring him out," said Bellshaw.

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Hadwin called the head lad and the horse was led out. He limped slightly. His near fore-leg was swollen.

"It doesn't look hopeless," said Bellshaw.

"It isn't. He'll be all right in a couple of days, and he's as fit as he can be. The rest will not do him any harm."

"I haven't seen Leigh yet," said Bellshaw.

"You'll have no difficulty in finding him."

"He'll have to come down handsomely over the sweep money."

"I don't think he will. I shouldn't be surprised if he declines to lay you at all."

"He'll do it. If he doesn't I'll scratch Barellan."

"You dare not. There would be a terrible outcry against you."

"What do I care? He's my horse; I can do as I like with him."

"If you scratch him you'll throw the Cup away."

"You're confident. What makes you so sanguine?"

"I know what he can do, and after Flash's running in the Caulfield Cup it is a good thing," returned the trainer.

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"Don't say anything about the lameness being slight," said Bellshaw. "You're sure to have someone rooting round for information."

"Very well," said Hadwin, who intended doing as he thought fit.

At night Bellshaw went to the Show and saw Glen Leigh ride The Savage. He admired his skill; he could not help it.

After the performance he went round to see Glen Leigh and had a cool reception.

"I've come about the Sweep," he said. "You've drawn my horse."

"He's lame," answered Glen. "Just my luck. Will he run?"

"It all depends."

"Depends whether he's got over it by Tuesday?" said Glen.

"It depends on you."

"What have I got to do with it?"

"A good deal. You've drawn Barellan in the Sweep, and I expect a cut out of it."

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"Do you, and how much do you expect?"

"Half of what you draw. That's fair."

Glen laughed as he said, "You don't want much. You'd better have the lot."

"It's a fair proposition," said Bellshaw.

"I drew Barellan and I shall stick to anything I get out of it," Glen replied.

"You mean you will give me nothing out of the Sweep?"

"Not a farthing," snapped Glen.

"Then do you know what I shall do?"

"No."

"I shall scratch him."

"A nice sportsmanlike proceeding that would be," said Glen.

"I don't run my horse for your benefit, or the benefit of the public."

"So I always understood," answered Glen.

"Consider it over. If you do not make me a fair offer by Saturday I'll strike him out on Monday."

"I don't think you will," said Glen, in a mildly irritating way.

"But I shall."

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"Again I repeat I don't think you will."

"Why not?"

"Because I can advance some weighty reasons against your doing so."

"To which I shall not listen," said Bellshaw.

"To which I am certain you will listen, and, having heard them, will fall in with my views."

Bellshaw was fast losing his temper. He had no idea what Leigh was driving at.

"I tell you again if you don't come down handsomely with the sweep money I'll strike him out."

"And I say you will not," retorted Glen.

Gerard came round to see Glen Leigh. Jerry Makeshift, and Tom Roslyn were with him.

"How's your horse?" Tom asked Bellshaw.

"Lame," snapped the owner of Barellan, who objected to being questioned by the representative of "Racing Life" or any other journalist.

"I'm quite aware of that, but as I presume you have seen him since your arrival, I thought perhaps you could give me some later information to wire to Sydney. There will be considerable excitement over the mishap," said Tom in his most placid manner, at the same time wishing Bellshaw at the uttermost part of the earth.

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"You know as much as I do," returned Bellshaw. "If he doesn't pull round by Monday he'll be struck out."

Glen Leigh looked at him with contempt. He knew Bellshaw would not be so anxious about the sweep money if Barellan were dead lame, a hopeless case.

"That won't be the reason he's struck out," said Glen and they all looked at him questioningly.

Bellshaw turned on him in a rage.

"It's a lie. It *will* be because he's lame if he's struck out."

Glen laughed.

"You told me a few minutes ago you'd strike Barellan out if I did not give you a cut out of the sweep," he said.

Tom Roslyn smiled knowingly at Jerry as much as to say, "That's more like it."

"I say, Bellshaw, you'd never do a dirty thing like that?" said Nick.

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"I've told you my horse is lame; I also told Leigh I expected a cut out of the sweep, and he said he wouldn't lay me anything. Do you think that's fair?" Bellshaw asked.

"He's drawn the horse; he can do as he likes. Personally I don't think an owner has any right to demand sweep money," said Tom.

"That's your opinion, is it? I expect you'd talk differently if you owned Barellan," sneered Bellshaw.

"If a lucky drawer of the sweep money offered me a portion I'd take it, but I'd never demand it," replied Tom.

"I mean to get some of it anyhow," declared Bellshaw.

"Then if Barellan will start on those conditions," said Tom, "he can't be so bad. I think I'll risk it and wire to that effect. It will relieve his backers."

"Wire if you like, but don't say I gave you the information."

"Not willingly, but putting one thing with another I think I am justified in wiring that your horse's lameness is not so serious as at first supposed," answered Tom.

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"Then you'll be misleading the public, as you have done many a time."

"I never mislead the public, knowingly," said Tom.

"Through ignorance of facts," sneered Bellshaw. "Put it that way."

"You're not making a bed of roses for yourself by going on in this way," said Jerry. "You'll smart for it if you don't mind."

"You've been on the spree ever since you've been here," remarked Bellshaw. "I wonder what your boss would say if he knew."

"You can tell him if you wish. I fancy you'd get your change," retorted Jerry.

Turning to Leigh, Bellshaw said, "I've had enough of this talk. You let me know by Saturday what you are going to do, or I'll act as I said I would."

He left them and walked out of the office.

"The atmosphere's a bit purer now he's gone," said Tom. "Isn't he a bounder?"

"He is. I've a good mind to rub it into him next week. He's a good figure to caricature," answered Jerry.

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"Let him alone. Don't waste your talent on him," said Nick.

"I'd better turn my attention to you, and call it 'The Philanthropist'," suggested Jerry smiling.

Nick laughed. He knew to what Jerry alluded.

"I've issued a challenge," he said, "or rather I am about to do so; you can wire it to the 'Life' if you wish to."

"What is it, boxing?"

"No, something more exciting. I'll wager two thousand pounds no one can produce a horse that will throw Glen Leigh in a quarter of an hour. There are conditions of course; it must be a throw, no lying down, and rolling over him, and so on."

"By Jove, that's plucky," said Tom. "He thinks a lot of your riding, Leigh."

"I do. He's the best roughrider in Australia, and that's saying a lot," affirmed Nick.

"We'll draw up the conditions," said Tom, "and I'll forward them."

"Give 'em a month from date in which to find the animals," replied Nick. "We must limit it to six horses, one to be ridden each night. It will pack the place, bring grist to the mill, and it must come off in Sydney. I mean to give Leigh half the stake if he wins, as I feel sure he will."

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"What do you say, Leigh?" asked Tom.

"I'll accept with pleasure; I'll ride anything they like to bring in," answered Glen.

"Good man," said Tom. "There'll be some sport. You'll have your work cut out."

Glen smiled confidently.

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CHAPTER XXIII

BEATEN

It was Saturday night, and Glen Leigh had sent no word to Bellshaw about the sweep money.

Bellshaw waited impatiently in his private room at the hotel, fretting and fuming.

"If he thinks I don't mean what I said he's mistaken," he muttered. "I'll scratch him right enough. He can't have a very big chance. He limped a bit this morning. He'll have to run in bandages if he starts; that doesn't look very well for a Cup horse. I'm not going to give him all the spoil—not me."

It was ten o'clock and still no word from Glen Leigh. Bellshaw thought he would come round after the show, but he did not.

"I'll wait until Sunday night," thought Bellshaw. "I can go round on Monday morning and scratch him."

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Ivor Hadwin went to the show on Saturday night and saw Glen Leigh. He was very anxious about what Bellshaw would do over Barellan, and tried his utmost to persuade Glen to see him about it.

"He'll not scratch him," said Glen. "He dare not."

"You don't know him. He'd do it just to spite you."

"Then he's a fool to throw away a chance of winning the Melbourne Cup out of sheer spite."

"Will you call on him to-morrow morning?" asked the trainer.

"What's the good? There'll only be a scene," replied Glen.

"Think of me, Leigh, the anxiety I've had over the horse for weeks, all the trouble, and now the job of getting him to the post after his lameness. It's heartbreaking," said Hadwin.

Glen relented. For the trainer's sake he would see Bellshaw and try and persuade him not to scratch Barellan, but he was firmly resolved not to yield any sweep money.

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"Very well, I'll see him. I think I have a persuasive way, and I'll try it on him," answered Glen.

The trainer brightened visibly.

"You're a good 'un. I'll not forget it," he said.

About eleven o'clock on Sunday morning Glen Leigh was announced.

Bellshaw smiled when he heard the name of his visitor.

"Show him up," he said, and added to himself, "I thought he'd never be such an ass as to throw a chance away."

Glen entered the room. The only greeting he gave was a nod. He took a chair without being asked, and threw his hat on the table, then leaned back and looked at Bellshaw.

"So you've come to your senses," said Bellshaw. "It's lucky for you the office was closed on Saturday night, or my orders to scratch Barellan would have gone in. There's the letter," and he threw it across the table to him.

Much to Bellshaw's surprise, which quickly changed to anger, Glen Leigh tore it up and let the pieces flutter on the table.

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"Damn your impertinence. What do you mean by that?" roared Bellshaw.

A tap at the door. A waiter put in his head.

"Did you call, sir?"

"No—get out," foamed the angry man.

Glen smiled exasperatingly.

"What do you mean by it?" asked Bellshaw again.

"It's a silly useless letter, because you will not scratch Barellan," answered Glen.

Bellshaw simmered down. Leigh had come to make terms; they must be liberal.

"Useless because you are going to make a proposal," said Bellshaw.

"I have a proposal to make?"

"How much will you give me out of the sweep?"

"Nothing," was the unexpected answer.

Bellshaw flared up again, swore roundly, talked fast and furiously, all to no purpose. Leigh sat immovable, lit a cigar and waited until he was exhausted.

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"Would you like to hear my proposition?" asked Glen calmly.

"Not if it doesn't refer to sweep money."

"You'd better, for your own sake. It's rather important to you," said Glen.

"Nothing you have to say, outside the matter at issue, can interest me," returned Bellshaw.

Glen smiled at him. It was the most irritating thing he could do.

"I shall sit here until you listen to what I have to say," he said.

His manner was determined. He looked stubborn, and was more than a match for Craig Bellshaw, as far as strength went. He got up and locked the door, putting the key in his pocket.

"What I have to say you would not like anyone to hear. Besides I don't want you to bolt out of the room."

"Get along with it then," growled Bellshaw, "but I assure you beforehand you are wasting your time."

"Oh no, I am not. You'll say so when I've done. You'll consider it rather a clever move on my part and that the time was very well occupied. It's about a woman," blurted out Glen suddenly.

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Craig Bellshaw felt as though an electric current had passed through him. The remark was so unexpected, meant so many things, and he was utterly in the dark. He stared at Glen, who still smiled as he said, "I thought you'd be surprised. Do you know what became of the young woman you took away from Mintaro and left in the open to die?"

"You're raving. There never was a young woman at Mintaro," said Bellshaw hoarsely.

"Oh yes, there was. You drove her away in your buggy, emptied her out, and left her insensible while you drove away. You told me about it the night you walked in your sleep; at least all you knew. You acted well, very well indeed. You illustrated in a remarkably clear way how you attempted to throttle her. You also showed me how you were dragging her to some water hole, but thought better of it, and left her to die of hunger. I heard you speak to your horses so knew you must have taken her there in a buggy. It's a bad plan to walk in your sleep when you've a murder on your conscience," said Glen.

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Bellshaw glared at him like a caged tiger.

"Murder," he hissed. "Be careful what you say."

Glen took no notice of his remark.

"Do you know what became of the woman?" he asked.

"There was no woman."

"Don't deny facts. It's a waste of breath. Doesn't Backham know there was a woman at Mintaro? Don't all your hands know?"

Bellshaw was silent. Glen was rubbing it in strong.

"There's awful evidence against you to prove she was at your place. We'll take that for granted; we'll also take it for granted you left her in the wilderness to die—you brute," said Glen, who could hardly restrain his feelings.

Bellshaw writhed, but did not speak. He waited to hear more.

"Do you know what became of the woman?"

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"I tell you there was no woman."

"There's ample proof that you lie," answered Glen, "so I'll pass that. I found her in my hut when I rode back from the fence."

He gave Bellshaw a graphic account of what happened and how Jim Benny came to assist him.

Then he looked hard at Bellshaw as he placed his hands on the table and stood up, leaning over until his face was within a few inches of the squatter's.

"She died in my hut," said Glen. "You are her murderer; you can't get away from that."

Bellshaw shivered. He believed what Glen Leigh said. It was not true, but there was every justification for making the statement to punish him.

"She confessed how she came there and everything you had done to her before she died," went on Leigh. "Jim Benny knows it; Bill Bigs knows it; they were there. The evidence is strong enough, if not to hang you, to send you to penal servitude for life."

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Bellshaw tried to laugh, but was thoroughly frightened. He had often wondered what had become of the woman. The story sounded probable. She might have wandered as far as Leigh's hut. During the few minutes' respite Bellshaw thought of a way to retaliate.

"You shot Joe Calder," he said.

Glen being innocent, laughed. Bellshaw must have been dull if he did not see his shot had not gone home.

"I did not. I shouldn't wonder if you had a hand in it," retorted Glen.

"He was a friend of mine."

"You'd as soon leave a shot in a friend as an enemy if he was in your way," said Glen.

"Why have you told me this silly story?"

"In the first place because I want to bring home to you that if Jim Benny, Bill Bigs and myself bring a charge against you of causing the death of this woman, you'll be in the hands of the police instead of witnessing the Melbourne Cup. In the second place if you scratch Barellan you will have no mercy shown you. We shall act at once," replied Glen.

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Bellshaw saw the drift of it all. He was cornered. It was a clever move. He would have to run the horse. The evidence of three men who saw the woman die, and heard her charge against him, would be serious—too serious for him to face in public. Even if he escaped punishment he would be branded with infamy for life.

"You'll not scratch Barellan?" said Glen.

"I shall if I get no sweep money from you."

"I say you will not scratch the horse," Glen repeated.

"Supposing I do."

"Then you will be taken into custody at once on the charge I mentioned."

"And if I run him?"

"You shall be free to do what you will. Your conscience will punish you; it has done already. I saw that at Mintaro. You were afraid—a coward," said Glen.

"You will stand me a thousand out of the sweep?"

"Not a farthing."

Bellshaw would like to have shot him.

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"What guarantee have I that you will be silent?" he asked.

"I give you my word," returned Glen.

"That is nothing to me."

"But it is to me, and you will have to accept it."

"I will not."

"You will run Barellan?"

"No."

"I have another witness," said Glen at a venture.

"Go on. I am amused," answered Bellshaw, fighting hard before he gave in. He must save his face by making some show of resistance.

"Lin Soo," said Glen.

The effect of the mention of this name on Bellshaw was remarkable. He gasped and seemed on the point of choking, sank back in the chair, his hands hanging down.

Leigh opened the door and went downstairs for some brandy. This revived Bellshaw and he looked round in a frightened way.

"You will run Barellan?" asked Glen.

Bellshaw murmured a faint "Yes." He was beaten.

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AT FLEMINGTON

There was tremendous excitement in Melbourne on the eve of the Cup. The Victoria Club was thronged, a stream of people constantly passing up and down the stairs on to Bourke Street. On the pavement the crowd was dense, and it was difficult to push along. Many of the tobacconists' shops were tenanted by bookmakers and heavy wagers were recorded in them. Nick Gerard was busy at the Club; he had a heavy book on the race, and had laid the favourite, Roland, the winner of the Caulfield Cup, heavily. Barellan was one of his best horses; he had not laid much against him. Ivor Hadwin gave him a glowing account of his candidate. On Monday morning Glen relieved the trainer's mind by telling him he need have no doubt about Bellshaw running the horse.

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"Then you must have laid him a lump out of the sweep," said the trainer.

"Not a penny," answered Leigh.

"Then how did you work it?" asked the trainer amazed.

"I managed it after a tussle, but I can't tell you how," replied Glen.

Wagering was fast and furious at the Club. Barellan's lameness disappeared as if by magic and there were many people who thought the whole thing a fake, and of course blamed Bellshaw. He was unpopular, and made no secret that he ran his horses as he liked, without consideration for anyone. When he came into the Club he was not greeted heartily as a popular owner would have been. Hardly anyone spoke to him until one or two bookmakers asked him if he wished to back his horse.

Nick Gerard crossed over the room.

"I suppose you've persuaded Leigh to give you some of the sweep money?" he said.

"Not a fraction. It's a mean, dirty action on his part, but as the horse is so well backed I shall run him," replied Bellshaw.

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"It's something out of the common for you to consider backers," said Nick. "Have you got all your money on?"

"All I want. If he hadn't gone lame I'd have had more on; it's not worth the risk now."

The street was crowded until midnight, when the bulk of the people wended their way homewards.

Jerry Makeshift and Tom Roslyn walked down Collins Street together, discussing the chances of the probable runners in the Cup.

"What have you sent on as your final?" asked Jerry.

"Barellan and Roland," answered Tom.

"Why Barellan?"

"I rather fancy him. I saw him this morning. Hadwin told me the horse was all right again, and that the lameness disappeared as suddenly as it came."

"Still it can't have improved his chance for the Cup," said Jerry. "I wonder how Leigh induced him to run the horse. He says he hasn't laid him anything out of the sweep."

"I'm glad of it. There's too much fleecing goes on. When a man is lucky enough to draw a horse it's hard lines he should be robbed out of a lot of it."

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"It's been the practice for so long, owners appear to regard it as a right," said Jerry.

"It's just as well they should find out it is not," replied Tom.

The two friends parted and Jerry went on to the Federal.

Next morning it was beautifully fine, and from an early hour huge crowds wended their way to Flemington. Towards noon Spencer Street Station was crammed. All the specials were full.

There is no finer racing picture in the world than Flemington on Cup Day. Even Royal Ascot pales before it in many respects. It is the luxury of racing in comfort that makes Flemington, and most Australian courses, attractive. There is room for everybody; there is no jostling or overcrowding, and the cost is moderate. Everything is done to enhance the pleasure of the public, who are not treated with the scant courtesy meted out to them grudgingly in England.

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The lawn and stand were a grand sight before racing commenced. The hill at the back, overlooking the stand, was a mass of people, yet there was ample room to move about. The beds on the lawn were gay with brilliant-hued flowers. The grass was splendidly green; there was no dust or dirt, no fear of new and wondrously devised ladies' costumes being damaged in an hour. Despite the heat, it was one of November's hottest days, people looked cool. There was plenty of shade. Cosy tables for luncheon parties were laid beneath arbours of vines, whose leaves afforded a refreshing covering. Here scores of parties chatted and made merry, talking over the prospects of the horses in the great race of the year. Coaches, with fine teams, came driving in.

There were no motor cars, and the scene was far more picturesque without them. On the flat the huge crowd assembled. It was evident there would be a record attendance.

The Governor and his Lady arrived and were greeted with rousing cheers as they stepped from their carriage and walked across the lawn to the reserved box on the grand stand. [Pg 252]

The bookmakers, located between the lawn and the paddock, were not cooped up in an iron cage like animals in a zoological collection. Wagering could be done in comfort. There was no fighting to get money, no scrambling. Everything was decent and in order.

Nick Gerard stood with his back to the rails, against the stewards' and official enclosure and his clerks were seldom still. The leviathan had a big book, and could afford to lay any horse asked for, but a casual observer might have noticed he was in no particular hurry to put Barellan's name down. He laid against Roland whenever he got a chance, but the horse was so heavily backed he came down to five to one before the first race was decided.

A whole string of horses figured in the betting, and there were thirty-one runners in the field, or would be if all started.

Isaac, the winner of the Derby on the previous Saturday, had plenty of friends. He was ridden by Nicholl in that race, and the jockey considered he had an excellent chance.

He had been asked to ride him in the Cup, but had to decline because he was engaged for Barellan. [Pg 253]

Luke Nicholl was conscientious. He liked the trainer of Barellan, and since he had known Glen Leigh he had been on very friendly terms with him. Barellan's temporary lameness came as a blow to the jockey, as he might have had the mount on any horse in the race he could do the weight for.

Ivor Hadwin, however, had somewhat relieved his mind when he told him Barellan moved in his accustomed style, and he had but little fear about his lasting out the race.

"You'll ride him carefully," he said. "No need to tell you that. Nurse him until you are well in the straight; then let him come along as fast as you like. I got a clever man to bind his hoof. It's a bit brittle, and he'll run in bandages, but take my word for it, whatever beats him will win. I fear nothing, Luke."

This was reassuring and Nicholl looked like not only riding the Derby and Cup winners but also landing his first Melbourne Cup. For the leading jockey he had had bad luck in the race, having been placed half a dozen times. He could never quite get home. He hoped Barellan would accomplish that for him. [Pg 254]

As he went into the paddock he encountered Glen Leigh.

"I hope you'll win," said Glen. "It means a lot to me, as you know. If Barellan gets home you shall have five hundred."

Luke thanked him, and said he'd do his best, telling him what Hadwin said.

"That sounds all right," returned Glen smiling, "let's hope he's hit the mark."

"You'd better have a bit on my mount in this race," said the jockey. It was the Railway Handicap, six furlongs, fifteen runners.

"What are you on?" asked Glen.

"Pioneer," replied Luke. "There he is. I must hurry up."

Glen turned back into the ring, and walked to Gerard.

"What price Pioneer?" he asked.

Nick looked at him and smiled.

"Eight to one," he answered.

"Eight fivers," said Glen, handing him a note.

There was a few minutes' slackness and Gerard said, "What makes you fancy Pioneer?" [Pg 255]

"Nicholl's riding him. He told me to have a bit on."

"His luck's in," said Nick, who sent one of his clerks to put fifty on Luke's mount.

Glen Leigh met Bill Bigs and induced him to back Pioneer, also Jim Benny, and they went on the stand to see the race.

Many people knew Glen Leigh as the daring rider in the Buckjumping Show; and he was a tall, athletic, handsome man. Many bright eyes were levelled at him as he moved about.

"What's Pioneer's colours?" asked Bill.

Glen looked at his race book.

"White, black cap," he said.

He had no sooner spoken than the horses were off, racing up the straight at top speed. It was a regular Newmarket Handicap on a small scale.

Soon after crossing the tan the white jacket came to the front.

"That's Pioneer!" exclaimed Bill.

"He's in front and he'll stop there," said a man behind him.

"I hope he does."

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"So do I. He's a speedy horse, and good enough for a Newmarket."

Pioneer came sailing along past the stands and turned out an easy winner by three lengths, at which there was much jubilation among the three friends.

"I shall put my winnings on Barellan," said Bill.

"So shall I," said Jim.

"I'll keep mine in my pocket," said Glen.

"You've got a big stake going. By Jove, it will be a go if you win first prize in the sweep; you'll be a cut above us poor beggars then," Bill remarked.

"It won't make the slightest difference that way," replied Glen smiling.

"I know that, old man. I was only chaffing," laughed Bill. "I suppose if anyone accepts Gerard's challenge you'll ride, even if Barellan wins?"

"Certainly. I promised him," Glen answered.

"Let us go into the paddock, and have a look at some of the Cup horses," said Jim, and they walked along the lawn in that direction.

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CHAPTER XXV

HE LOOKED AT HIS TICKET

"That was a good tip; we all backed it," said Glen as Nicholl came up to them.

"He won easily," said the jockey smiling.

"Your luck's in," remarked Bill.

"I hope it will continue in the Cup," answered the jockey.

Barellan was being put to rights in the corner of the paddock and they went to see him.

Bellshaw was not there, so Hadwin had an opportunity of speaking to them. He assured Glen the horse would win if he had a good run in the race, which he was almost sure to have with such a jockey as Luke Nicholl in the saddle.

Barellan looked fresh and well. His coat shone like satin. He was trained to the hour, but the suspicious-looking bandages, and one hoof bound up with copper wire, caused many people to pass him by in their search for the winner.

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Luke Nicholl, wearing Bellshaw's sky blue jacket and red cap, was ready to mount when the time came. He felt confident. Hadwin had made an impression on him, inspired him with some of his enthusiasm. Nicholl was well off, Hadwin was not; the victory of Barellan meant the difference between debt and independence. The trainer was not a gambler. He seldom had more than five or ten pounds on, but he could not resist backing Barellan, at the long prices offered, when he was lame. He had three thousand to ninety about the horse, and backed him to win another thousand that morning. Glen had laid him five hundred out of the sweep money.

Perhaps Glen Leigh was one of the most anxious men on the course, but there was no sign that he was unduly excited. He laughed and joked as usual and appeared quite calm outwardly.

The chance of winning a fortune of nearly twenty-five thousand pounds for the investment of a sovereign does not come to many men in a lifetime. This was what Glen stood to win, and he conjured up his future prospects if it came off. He thought of Mrs. Prevost and Clara; the former he knew loved him; at least he was very much mistaken if she did not, and he knew he loved her. If Barellan won he would go to her and ask her to be his wife, and she would not refuse. He cared nothing about her connection with Bellshaw. He would never ask her about it. He knew the man, and pitied any woman who got into his clutches. As he stood looking at Barellan he thought what the horse's victory meant to him, and naturally he became more anxious as the time of the race drew near. He saw Bellshaw coming and would have avoided him had it been possible.

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The squatter scowled at him, then asked, "Have you changed your mind? Will you give me a cent out of the sweep?"

"No," replied Glen as he walked away.

Bellshaw sent a curse after him, then turned to the jockey.

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"If you can't win it doesn't matter about riding him out for a place," he said. "There's no sweep money attached to it."

Nicholl made no reply.

"Do you hear what I say?" snapped Bellshaw.

"I heard; I shall have to ride him out."

"You'll do as I tell you."

"I shall ride Barellan out," said Nicholl firmly.

"Against my orders?"

"If those are your orders, yes. I am not going to run any risks."

"What risk would you run?"

"I might be called up before the stewards to explain, and I'm not going to risk that for you or anyone else."

"You hear what he says," Bellshaw said to the trainer.

"He'll have to ride him out. There's no help for it. Besides, there's big money for the places," answered Hadwin.

"I don't want place money if he can't win. I want to keep that fellow Leigh from winning if Barellan can't come in first," said Bellshaw. [Pg 261]

"I thought so," said Nicholl.

Bellshaw did not stay to see his horse leave the paddock. He went back into the ring. He was in a vile temper, which his trainer's confidence in Barellan did not soothe. Leigh had got the better of him. He knew it was no empty threat when Glen said he would be put on his trial for manslaughter if evidence were given incriminating him. He hated Glen Leigh. His animosity was so great he would have scratched Barellan had he dared. He intended paying him out. The best way to wound him would be through Mrs. Prevost. He cared nothing for her sufferings, even after all she had been to him. He was a man without feelings.

He was not quite sure whether Leigh would keep his promise if Barellan won. There was Lin Soo. What did Leigh know about him? The paper found under his bedroom door at Mintaro had warned him, and Leigh mentioned it again in the hotel. He must see Lin Soo on his return to Sydney, but first of all he would go to Mrs. Prevost's again and inform her he had enlightened Glen Leigh as to her past life, would gloat over her distress, make fun of her, then offer to be on friendly terms with her again. He had no doubt she would accept. [Pg 262]

He stood alone in the ring listening to the calling of the odds. Roland was a firm favourite. Isaac, Painter, Out Back, Adelaide, The Gong, Rosehill, Canterbury, Crocker, Thane, The Rival, Jack, and Mackay, were all well backed, some at long odds, and rank outsiders at a hundred to one each.

The name of Barellan was seldom called by the bookmakers. Bellshaw wondered why? Had they laid his horse heavily before he met with his accident?

He went to Gerard and asked the price of his horse.

"Full against him," replied Nick.

"You mean you won't lay him," said Bellshaw.

"Take it as you like."

"Do you expect him to run well?" asked Bellshaw.

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"I expect him to win," answered the bookmaker. "I hope he does for Leigh's sake."

Bellshaw made some remark about Leigh being a bad lot.

"He's a straight goer. It's a pity there are not more like him," said Nick.

"Perhaps it is. Even if he wins the sweep he'll soon lose it. Probably you'll get most of it, or some of your fraternity," retorted Bellshaw.

"You don't know the man. If he wins he'll stick to it, take my word for it," said Nick.

Barellan's price was a hundred to eight, and no longer odds were obtainable about him. This was not tempting enough for Bellshaw, so he made no further investment.

Jack was knocked out to a hundred to one for some reason or other. His trainer did not understand it as he thought the horse had a fair outside chance.

Glen Leigh was missing. Bill and Jim could not find him.

"He's best alone until after the race," said Bill. "He must feel a bit queer about it; I should."

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"So should I," agreed Jim. "Fancy standing to win all those thousands for a sovereign; it makes a fellow's mouth water."

"He'll do something for you if he wins the first prize," said Bill.

"He's not mentioned it."

"No, it's not his way, but he will, depend upon it; I shouldn't wonder if he gives you his share in the show."

Jim thought of Clara and what he would do if such a stroke of luck came his way. Glen Leigh had gone on to the top of the stand close to the press-box, where he would have a good view of the race. He wished to be alone. His feelings almost overcame him. He saw Jerry and Tom Roslyn in front of the press-box, and was glad they had not noticed him.

There was a dull roaring sound all over the course, the voices of thousands of people talking before the race, mingled with the shouts of the bookmakers. A sea of faces met Glen's gaze as he looked across the course. Far away, on the other side of the canal, people were camped on the slopes, waiting for the big field to come out. At the back of him, on the hill, there was a dense crowd reaching down to the top of the stand; he turned round and looked at the surging mass. To his right, below, was the ring, and paddock; he saw a mass of heads on Tattersalls' stand, and just caught a glimpse of a colour or two in the paddock. On the lawn people were still strolling about in groups. The race, most of it, could be seen from the terrace and the slopes. Presently, when the horses came round the bend for home there would be a rush to get on the rails. Still further to the left was another stand, on which there was plenty of room. Late lunchers were still under the vines, but were now making a move towards the terrace and stands. A long streak of bright green, the course, stretched out between the crowds. A solitary horseman cantered down. It was the starter going to the post; then the clerk of the course came along, on an old chaser, and went after him. Already there were one or two in the stewards' stand. Near the weighing room diminutive men were going about; they were the jockeys weighed out for the race. It was an animated glittering scene; many-hued costumes, the brightest of colours, the daintiest of designs, artistic creations, the labour of clever women and clever men, and hats and sunshades almost too dazzling to feast the eyes upon, as the glorious sun poured his rays down from the cloudless sky.

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It was an ideal day. A faint breeze, tinged with sea air from the bay far away, cooled hot cheeks, and blew delicately through thin blouses and skirts. Men moved about in all sorts of headgear; but there were no regulation top-hats, although in the Governor's Box "a bit of Ascot" was seen. It was Glen Leigh's first Melbourne Cup, and the sight at Flemington entranced him, threw a glamour over him, and he looked at it all and fancied himself alone, even in the vast crowd. And he had drawn Barellan in the big sweep. Would the horse win? Would No. 33444 be the successful ticket? He had it in his pocket. He pulled it out and looked at it, thinking how wonderful it was that if Barellan won he could cash it for nearly twenty-five thousand pounds.

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CHAPTER XXVI

BARELLAN FALLS BACK

Glen's thoughts wandered. The heat and excitement made him drowsy. For a few minutes he dozed, and as he did so his mind went back to the days when he was a keeper of the fence, on the border line between New South Wales and Queensland. Surrounded by thousands on Flemington course he slumbered peacefully, as men will when overcome with some powerful feeling, that acts like a drug, and for a few minutes there is oblivion.

His thoughts wandered far away. He was back once more on the glittering wire fence, with Ping, and Spotty, waiting there in the blazing heat for his mate to meet him and compare notes. There had been no rain for months; everything was parched, and dried up. He saw thousands of dead rabbits, and sheep. The stench seemed to be in his nostrils. The scene changed. He was looking in at his hut and saw the woman on the bed. In a few seconds he went through the struggle for a life again, the ride to Boonara, the tussle for brandy with Bill Bigs, Jim's arrival, and keeping watch, Spotty's attack; then the convalescence and the journey to Sydney. His meeting with Mrs. Prevost, Bellshaw at Mintaro, the search and capture of buckjumpers, Lin Soo, The Savage, the show, were all jumbled up together when he came out of his temporary swoon with a start, rubbed his eyes, and stared round him at the bustling scene, hardly daring to believe he was not back in reality on the fence. He gave a sigh of relief, and was wide awake again. He could not have been asleep for more than five minutes, and he had gone through the experiences of half a lifetime. It was strange. He had not quite shaken it off when the horses came out of the paddock on to the track, and the sight caused the past to vanish.

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All eyes were turned on them as they cantered down the course to the starting post. There were thirty-one runners; it was a big field, and half of them were considered to have chances.

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Jack, knocked out to a hundred to one, was first out, his jockey wearing a green jacket, yellow

belt and cap; then came half a dozen more in a cluster. Isaac, the Derby winner, passed, going in great style. A tremendous cheer greeted Roland, the favourite. His owner's black jacket, white sleeves, and red cap were popular; the colours were always out to win. Painter, Plume, and Out Back followed, then Glen saw the sky-blue jacket and red cap, and his heart beat rapidly. Barellan went slowly at first, then burst into a gallop, pulling hard, reaching for his head, but Nicholl would not let him go. Glen watched him through his glasses, until he reached the post, thinking how much depended upon him. Barellan was carrying his fortunes. If he won what a change there would be in his life. If Jerry had not suggested his buying a ticket probably the opportunity would have gone by. Certainly he must be remembered if Barellan won. Had he not bought the ticket, and, with it, luck?

He looked round. All faces, thousands of them, were turned in one direction, watching the horses at the post, waiting for the signal when they would be dispatched on their journey. There was not much delay; they were well-trained. The starter had the jockeys under control. He was an autocrat, his powers great. It went ill with those who disobeyed him.

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They were off; a terrific shout proclaimed it. The race for the great stake had commenced. What Glen Leigh felt at that moment he hardly knew. He had a hazy idea something was going to happen that would dash all his hopes. He shook off the feeling and determined to take a hopeful view of the situation.

Jack was making the pace. He had a light weight. His jockey was told to go ahead and wear the field down; the little fellow was nothing loth to do so; for one thing, he would be out of harm's way, and be in no danger of getting shut in. Jack was a dull grey horse, not a brilliant performer by any means, although on one or two occasions he had shown a turn of speed. There could be no doubt he was on his best behaviour, for, as they passed the stand, he was half a dozen lengths ahead of his field. Glen looked at each horse as they swept past; there was Barellan in the middle division, on the rails, going at an even pace; Roland, the favourite, was just in front of him. Close behind came Isaac, and Mackay; he was in good company.

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Round the bend they swept, a cheer greeting them from Tattersalls' stand. Jack spread out, increasing his lead as they entered the back stretch. Half-way along the field closed up. There was not a long tail. It was a pretty sight, thirty-one bright colours showing up, glinting in the sunlight. The sheds were reached when racing began in earnest, for no laggards here had any chance of success.

Glen's glasses were levelled on the sky-blue jacket. He wondered when Nicholl would make a forward move. He became anxious. Was he lying too far back? Ought he not to be nearer the front? Why did he let Jack get so far ahead? These and sundry other questions jostled each other in Glen's mind.

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Bill Bigs, and Jim, were standing together on the terrace. They had a fair view of the race.

"Jack's got a lead on them," said Bill.

"He'll give way before long," replied Jim.

"Don't you be too sure, young man," said someone behind him. "I've seen Jack do a good couple of miles several times lately."

"You don't think he'll win?" asked Bill.

"I won't go so far as that, but I reckon he'll put up a good fight," answered the stranger: then asked, "What have you backed?"

"Barellan," said Bill.

"A friend of mine's on him. He fancies him a lot. Knows his owner, I believe."

"So do I. He's not much to know," remarked Bill.

The stranger laughed.

"He is rather unpopular," he said.

"Look!" cried Jim. "Barellan and the favourite are going up."

Glen Leigh saw the move on Nicholl's part. His heart was in his mouth. The jockey had just squeezed Barellan through on the rails and the favourite had to go on the outside. As they neared the home turn the crowd shouted. The names of half a dozen horses rang out clearly over the course.

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Jack was first into the straight. He had made all the running and was still going strong. Glen wondered if they would get on terms with him.

Isaac, finding an opening, dashed through. The Derby winner was bound to be thereabouts. He had run well and was coming out at the right time; his rider's pink jacket and white cap showed conspicuously.

Mackay's jockey pushed his mount and ran into third place, behind Jack and Isaac. They were all in the straight now, thirty-one runners, and the centre lot, numbering about a score, were all of a heap. The jackets looked bunched together, a many-hued mass of colour.

Barellan lost his position on the rails as they rounded the bend. He was not forced out but ran wide. Nicholl, taken by surprise at this move, thought it must be his leg pained him, and he wanted more room. He grew anxious. There was a slight faltering on Barellan's part. He must be nursed carefully or he might break down, and nursing at this critical point, when every horse with a chance was making a run, spelt defeat, being left behind. As it was Barellan fell back when he ought to have come into the front rank.

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Glen Leigh's hand shook as he held his glasses. The sky-blue jacket was right away at the end of the middle division. Barellan's chance looked forlorn. His hopes were shattered; the thousands vanished into thin air; it was what he might have expected. How could he win with only a sovereign invested? It was absurd on the face of it. He was foolish to buoy himself with false hopes. He had raised a mirage in which he saw happiness and full content. Now it vanished and would never appear again.

"It is all up," he muttered. "I was a fool to think I could win such a sum."

"Hang it all, where's that beastly blue jacket got to?" said Bill.

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"Right away back," returned Jim. "We're done. I'm sorry for Glen."

It was with mingled feelings Bellshaw saw Barellan fall back; he wanted to win a Melbourne Cup, at the same time he wished Leigh to lose his sweep money. He hardly knew which feeling was the stronger. If Barellan were beaten he would have the satisfaction of knowing Leigh had been done out of thousands and there was a chance that he, Bellshaw, might win the Cup another time.

Ivor Hadwin guessed why Barellan ran wide and lost his place at the bend. It was the strain on his bound foot which caused it; he ran out to ease it. Would he regain his position? He doubted it, but knew the horse was one of the gamest, and at the end of two miles he went as fast as the average horse at the end of half the distance, so he hoped for the best as he fixed his glasses on the sky-blue jacket.

Jack shot his bolt. He had done well, and was not disgraced, but the pace and the distance proved too much for him. Isaac took his place, the Derby winner coming along in great style. His numerous admirers and supporters were on good terms with themselves. Roland came with a rattle and ran into third place behind Isaac and Out Back, who made a terrific run from the bend. A large field of horses in the straight, at the finishing struggle for a Melbourne Cup, is one of the most exciting scenes in the racing world; it rouses the lethargic to some sort of enthusiasm, and a lover of the great game almost goes frantic over it. From the moment the horses race in desperate earnest, when the bend is cleared, the pent-up excitement continues until the winning post is passed.

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Glen Leigh, with a matter of twenty-five thousand at issue, looked on wonderingly; even the melancholy fact that Barellan was so far back did not obliterate from view the grand sight he witnessed. As he looked at the various horses, one by one, from Isaac in the lead, his rider's pink jacket and white cap standing out alone, he gave a gasp of surprise. What caused it?

"Look at Barellan!" yelled a man standing near him.

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Glen looked, his eyes glued on the sky-blue jacket. It was this which had caused the gasp of surprise. Barellan was going great guns, and passing horse after horse in a remarkable manner. His name was shouted over the course, far and wide.

"Barellan, Barellan!"

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CHAPTER XXVII

WHAT A FINISH!

What looked like a hopeless position was turned into a promising situation as Barellan came up the course at a tremendous pace. It was a thrilling sight, watching the sky-blue jacket forging ahead, and Glen Leigh's pulses beat rapidly. His body quivered as it had never done before as he watched Barellan galloping the field to a standstill. The shouting was tremendous. The noise deafening. Barellan's name echoed over the course. Smack, on Roland, cast a hasty glance back and caught sight of the blue on the outside. Barellan had "dropped from the clouds." It was now or never. If he caught Isaac he might win. He raised his whip, shaking it at the favourite. The gallant Caulfield Cup winner responded gamely and was soon at the Derby winner's quarters. In another moment he crept up, drawing level, and there was a rare set-to for the advantage.

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Nicholl watched the leading pair. A smile flickered across his face. They were playing into his hands, wearing each other down. The struggle must tell, and there was still a furlong to go. Almost level with Barellan were Rosehill and Out Back, the last named still going well. When Barellan forged ahead and left them there was a terrific yell. Glen Leigh dropped his glasses in his excitement. A man picked them up, handing them to him, saying with a smile, "I expect you're on Barellan."

"I drew him in the sweep," said Glen.

The man stared at him, then said, "And you stand a good chance of winning. Lucky fellow, you are."

The chase commenced. Three to four lengths in front were Isaac and Roland. The form was coming out well. If Barellan beat the Derby and Caulfield Cup winners he would indeed be a great horse. When he lost his place, and fell back soon after rounding the bend, there were at least a dozen lengths to make up. It seemed impossible it could be done. Nicholl rode with splendid judgment, nursing his mount carefully, easing him as far as he dare, but he could not afford to lose more ground. Then came the sudden spurt on the horse's part, without being forced. It was a spontaneous effort, without pressure, and Nicholl's hopes rose rapidly. His winning prospects increased with every stride.

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Pandemonium reigned on the course. This was to be a most exciting finish. If Barellan kept up his run to the finish there was no telling what might happen.

Isaac was on the rails, Roland level with him, the pair racing in grim earnest, fighting as only the best thoroughbreds can; no giving way, no acknowledging defeat, a battle of giants, stern, determined, the jockeys helping their mounts with all the skill and experience at their command.

Barellan, and Out Back, were having a tussle behind the leading pair. The spectators, roused to a boiling pitch of excitement, watched first the leaders, then the others, and wondered if the latter pair would get up.

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It was a breathless scene, full of strange emotion, bringing out all the pent-up enthusiasm that nothing can rouse like a great race. People watched with bated breath; hands shook, hearts palpitated, eyes blinked, faces twitched, nerves twinged, pulses beat rapidly. In all those thousands no one appeared to stand quite still. There were movements everywhere; it was impossible to restrain them.

Glen Leigh's mind was in a whirl.

Twenty-five thousand pounds at stake, a fortune on Barellan and the horse was only a few lengths from the winning post. He guessed how many, twenty, thirty, more, less, which was it? What did it matter, if only he won at the finish!

"He'll win, he'll win, he'll win," seemed to be the refrain in Glen's ears as he now and then caught a dull sound of hoofs when there were brief lulls in the shouting.

"Go on, Luke," he yelled. "Go on. You'll catch 'em."

He could not restrain his feelings. He must shout or something would happen. The strain was too great. There might be a snap, and then collapse.

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Glen Leigh was a strong man, hard and fit, but the perspiration stood on his forehead like beads, then gradually trickled down his face. He did not feel it. Even when the drops wet his eyes he took no notice. He glared at the sky-blue jacket through a mist which soon passed, although for the moment it dimmed his vision. He put down the glasses. He could see without them. The horses were not far off. He bent forward, swayed a little. The man who had spoken to him thought he was about to fall and caught him by the arm. He remembered a policeman, who had drawn the winner, falling down dead on the lawn as the horses passed the post.

Glen felt the friendly pressure, and said in a thick voice, "Thanks. I'm all right."

Roar after roar came from the surging crowd as Roland, the favourite, got his head in front of Isaac.

The shouts of triumph rang in the air, heralding the victory of the favourite, and when this happens in a Melbourne Cup the scene baffles description. Who that saw it will ever forget the wonderful victory of Carbine when he carried top weight, started favourite, and beat Forester's Highborn, and Correze, both outsiders, easily? It was a sight seen only once in a lifetime. It equalled Persimmon's Derby, if it did not surpass it, and "Old Jack" took it all quietly, for, as he passed the winning post, he stopped, turned round, and made for the weighing enclosure without any assistance from Ramage, his pilot. This race was more exciting than Carbine's Cup even, for there were four horses in it, all with chances, and close on the winning post.

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"Even hundred nobody names it," yelled a bookmaker in the ring. It was a safe offer, for nobody could name it except by a lucky guess.

Roland was a neck in front of Isaac, Out Back and Barellan were on their quarters.

An electric current seemed to shoot through the living mass of human beings and galvanise them into life; such a shout rent the air as had not been heard at Flemington before. There had been desperate finishes between two horses, but here were four putting up one of the greatest battles ever seen.

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Glen Leigh shook with excitement. Small wonder at it, for the sky-blue jacket had passed Out Back, and drawn almost level with Isaac.

"I'm sure of the place money," thought Glen with a sigh of relief.

Sure of the place money! In another second Barellan looked all over a winner. Roland, hard ridden, held his own. Isaac was only half a length off, the three together, with Out Back on the Derby winner's quarters. What a fight, and what a great compliment to the handicapper, for behind the leading four came a cluster of six, not two lengths away.

Bill Bigs and Jim were well nigh frantic. Their hats were off. They yelled, "Barellan," until they were hoarse.

Ivor Hadwin turned pale. The strain was almost more than he could bear. If, if only Barellan got his head in front as they passed the judge's box.

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"He will. He'll win," almost shouted the trainer, who had to give way under the pressure. His shouts acted like a safety valve.

Barellan was head and head with Isaac, Roland half a length to the good, and the winning post a few yards away.

Luke Nicholl, for the first time, raised his whip. He was on the outside and his right arm was free.

One cut, another, a third, not too sharp, just sufficient to sting, to give Barellan a reminder.

The effect was astounding. Barellan, acting under the unexpected, went forward with a final rush. His speed was so great that he caught up to the favourite in two strides; his head shot out, his nostrils red and wide, his eyes glared, his nose, then half a head, was in front; a fraction of a second's suspense, then he claimed a head advantage, then half a neck, a neck, and when this was realised the stands seemed to shake with the deafening noise. It was marvellous. Rounding the bend Barellan had fallen back a dozen lengths. His case seemed hopeless. He had made up all the lost ground in the straight, and now he had his neck in front of all the runners.

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Roland made a desperate effort, reducing the distance to half a neck again. Isaac drew up, so did Out Back. The four horses were all together.

Glen Leigh looked, and looked. He had a dim vision of blue, pink, black, white, red, orange, mixed together. Was the blue in front? He thought so. How he hoped no one else knew.

At last the struggle was at an end. The horses passed the post, four of them with not a length between them. An anxious pause; thousands of people could not tell which had won, the numbers were not up. The judge seemed a long time hoisting them, but up they went at last. He placed Barellan first, Roland second, a neck away, Isaac and Out Back, half a length away, dead heat for third place.

What a finish!

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CHAPTER XXVIII

A TERRIBLE SAVAGE

It was over. Barellan had won, and Glen Leigh was the fortunate holder of his number in the sweep. He had come into a fortune at one stroke. He elbowed his way through the crowd hardly knowing what he was doing, and went in search of his friends. It was not easy to find them in the great crowd streaming towards Tattersalls and the paddock. As he pushed through the ring he saw people gathering round bookmakers. Barellan must have been well backed; hundreds were drawing money. He saw nothing of Bill and Jim. He would go into the paddock. They might be there, thinking he had gone to look at the winner.

Nicholl had weighed in and was standing talking to the trainer as Glen appeared on the scene. They greeted him heartily, shaking his hand, congratulating him on his good fortune.

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"There's five hundred each for you," said Glen.

They thanked him; it was a generous gift.

"I never felt so queer in my life as I did when Barellan fell back just after rounding the bend," declared Glen. "What happened?"

"I thought he was going to crack up," answered the jockey. "It must have been his foot. I fancy he wanted to ease it as he came round the bend; it probably pinched him."

"That's it," said Hadwin. "There's no doubt about it. What a run he made up the straight. I never saw anything like it."

While they were talking Bellshaw came up, scowling. He did not look like the owner of the Cup winner.

"You see I was right," said Hadwin. "He won a great race."

"Which Nicholl nearly threw away," retorted Bellshaw.

"You're mistaken," said the jockey. "If Barellan hadn't been one of the gamest horses that ever

looked through a bridle he would never have got up and won."

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"You ran him out wide at the bend when you had a good position on the rails," said Bellshaw.

Nicholl explained, but the squatter was in no mood to listen to reason. He had won the Melbourne Cup, but Glen Leigh had won first prize in the sweep, and this made him rage. By all the rights of ownership he ought at least to have five thousand laid him if his horse won. When he thought how Leigh threatened him with exposure, he could have killed him without compunction. There was no more dissatisfied man on the course than the owner of the Cup winner. He had no pleasure in the victory. The cheering he knew was not for him but for the horse and jockey.

Glen Leigh walked away to avoid him. He saw the man was in no mood to be crossed and was almost beside himself with ill-feeling and disappointment. It was not, however, Bellshaw's intention that Glen should escape him. He wished to quarrel with somebody, and Leigh scented his purpose. He walked after him and said, loud enough for those standing near to hear, "You've won the sweep money by the aid of my horse. Are you man enough to give me something out of it?"

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Glen guessed by the way he spoke he meant mischief. There was menace in his voice. He stopped, faced him, and answered, "I'm man enough to refuse to give you a penny out of it."

Bellshaw swore, then stepping up to him said savagely, "I suppose you'll try and get Rosa Prevost—buy her with the money you've won? You'll not succeed. I'll outbid you. She's fond of money, besides she's been my woman for several years. Perhaps you don't know that. I never intended marrying her. She knew it, and was quite contented with my terms. She will be so again. You stand no chance. I can easily convince her she will be better off with me."

His insulting words made Glen Leigh's blood boil.

"Be careful what you say or it will be the worse for you," he said.

Bellshaw laughed.

"Can't you find another woman? Are you tied down to marry my mistress?"

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By way of reply Glen Leigh raised his right arm, clenched his fist, struck Bellshaw full in the mouth and knocked him down.

Ivor Hadwin, Bill Bigs and Jim Benny saw what happened; they hurried through the crowd and gathered round them. "Get out of this, Glen," said Bill, "or there'll be ructions."

Hadwin pulled Bellshaw away as he struggled to his feet.

"You can't fight here. They'll hustle you on the course if you do. A nice thing to happen to the owner of the Cup winner."

Bill caught Glen by the arm, dragging him along. Bellshaw seemed in no hurry to return the blow. He let the trainer lead him away. His mouth was bleeding, his lip cut. The blow was severe; Glen had hard hitting powers.

Bellshaw turned his attention to his trainer, calling him names, abusing him generally, then suddenly turned sullen and walked away. Soon after he left the course and went to his hotel.

He sat down and wrote a letter to Nick Gerard saying he would accept his wager of two thousand pounds to find a horse Glen Leigh could not ride for a quarter of an hour. The match must take place in Sydney the following week, the Saturday night, and there must be no other acceptors of the offer. He returned to Sydney by the mail train that night, and on arriving there journeyed to Mintaro.

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Glen Leigh received his cheque for the sweep money by the end of the week. It amounted to twenty-four thousand, six hundred pounds. He knew now what it was to possess money. He paid Luke Nicholl and Ivor Hadwin five hundred each, and gave handsome gifts to Bill and Jim and to Jerry Makeshift.

Nick Gerard showed Glen Bellshaw's letter, accepting his challenge, and asked him what he thought about it.

"I'll ride anything he cares to put into the ring," replied Glen. "He's got some horses at Mintaro that are terrible savages, almost mad, but I'll try and win your money, Nick. I'd like to beat him."

"Very well, then I'll accept his offer and withdraw the notice. He'll find you enough to do, I expect," said Nick smiling.

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"He will, you can depend upon that. He's pretty certain he can find something that will throw me, or he'd not have accepted," answered Glen.

"And will Saturday next week suit you?"

"Yes, the show goes back to Sydney on Monday."

"Capital; there'll be an exciting struggle. I suppose there's no doubt Bellshaw will play fair?"

"I don't see how he can help it. He'll pick out a nasty brute for me to ride, but that's part of the game," said Glen.

On all sides Glen was congratulated on winning first prize in the sweep. He was inundated with letters from all sorts of people, anxious to negotiate loans for the most part, others who wished to recommend safe investments. Land agents offered him ideal residences, owners of horses placed prices on their animals for him; charities solicited him, women wrote saying they were quite willing to consider him as a husband if he wanted a wife.

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Glen laughed at them all. He placed his money in the bank and went on his way contented.

When Bellshaw arrived at Mintaro unexpectedly he explained what he wanted—the worst horse that could be found, a savage, quite ready to kill and tear a man to pieces.

His new overseer, Sam Wimpole, he had appointed when Garry Backham left; he was a man of his master's stamp, cruel, unscrupulous. Already the hands hated him; more than one had threatened to do for him.

Bellshaw explained what he wanted, then added, "If you can find me a horse that will throw him I'll give you a hundred pounds. I want to win the wager. I want to see him injured for life, or better still, killed outright. Do you understand?"

Wimpole grinned. He understood. He knew the sort of horse. There was one at Five Rocks, ten times worse than The Savage. It would be risky catching him and taking him to Sydney, but once there he'd bet any money Leigh couldn't sit on him five minutes. It was more than likely the brute would kill him. It was a big powerful brown stallion, as big as old Tear'em, and worse tempered. He should say he was seven or eight years old and had never been handled.

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"The beast chased me five or six miles," he said. "If he'd caught me I shouldn't be here to tell you about him."

This news put Bellshaw in a better humour. The idea of maiming Glen Leigh was just to his mind. He ordered Wimpole to yard the horse no matter at what danger, or risk, and to take him to Bourke and from there to Sydney.

Next day Wimpole, taking the bulk of the hands with him, managed, after much trouble, to yard the horse, among others, lasso him, and throw him down, keeping him bound until he was exhausted with his struggles. On the way to Mintaro the horse savaged two men, lamed three horses, and had a tussle with Wimpole which almost caused the overseer to wish he'd not told Bellshaw anything about him.

When the owner of Mintaro saw the great powerful, unbroken, fiery stallion, and heard of the damage he had already done, he was satisfied. He had no doubt he would win the wager, and that Glen Leigh would probably be seriously injured.

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"It's worth a hundred to take him to Bourke," said Wimpole.

"You shall have it when he's trained," returned Bellshaw. "You must go in the same train with me."

"I'd best take a couple more hands with me," said Wimpole. "He's more than a match for me."

To this Bellshaw assented. All he thought about was injuring Leigh.

It was an awful experience taking the horse to Bourke, but after a lot of cruel treatment, which cowed him for a time, they succeeded. He was put in an ordinary cattle truck and securely lashed back and front; a band was also thrown round him and fastened to each side. Twice he broke the stout ropes, but finally he was tied securely.

Bellshaw watched the operation with evident pleasure. He was thinking what was in store for Glen Leigh. It made him smile grimly.

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The station master asked Bellshaw what he was going to do with the horse if he got him safely to his destination.

Bellshaw explained about the wager, and who was to ride the horse.

The station master made an ordinary remark, but when the train started he muttered, as he looked after it, "Leigh'll be killed if he attempts to ride that brute."

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CHAPTER XXIX

MAN AND HORSE LAY SIDE BY SIDE

There was some earnest conversation between Bellshaw and his overseer on the way to Sydney.

"You'll do it," said Bellshaw. "Promise me you'll do it, and I'll give you fifty pounds down."

"I'll manage it," said Wimpole.

"I shall be with the horse all the time, until he mounts, to see they don't tamper with him," he added with a wink.

Bellshaw laughed. They had hatched a wicked plot against Glen Leigh, and Wimpole was to carry it out.

"There'll be trouble if it's discovered," said Wimpole.

"You're not going to back down?"

"No, only if there's any danger of its being found out I shall bolt, and it will take more money than you offer to get me out of the country in comfort." [Pg 300]

"How much do you want?" asked Bellshaw.

"I must have five hundred planked down before I do it," replied Wimpole.

"Too much," said Bellshaw, but after an angry altercation agreed to Wimpole's terms.

"The risk's great. It will be a case of manslaughter right enough if anything happens to Leigh, and it's discovered."

The announcement in huge placards and newspaper advertisements that Glen Leigh was to ride an unbroken stallion from Mintaro for a quarter of an hour, for a wager of two thousand a side, between Craig Bellshaw and Nicholas Gerard, roused curiosity to its highest pitch, and there was a prospect of an enormous attendance. Glen Leigh was confident Bellshaw would be unable to find a horse that could unseat him. Bill Bigs did not like the look of things; he thought of foul play. He did not trust Bellshaw. He knew the squatter would give a good round sum to injure Leigh.

Glen had been to Manley and seen Mrs. Prevost; he asked her to be his wife, and she consented. When she alluded to the past he said it was buried; he had no wish to unearth it. Clara Benny, as she was still called, looked much better since she had been with Mrs. Prevost. There was no doubt her health would be completely restored, but whether this meant the recovery of her lost memory was uncertain. Mrs. Prevost tried to persuade Glen not to ride in the match. She was sure he would be injured, Bellshaw was such a vindictive man. [Pg 301]

Glen laughed her fears away, and made her promise to come and see him win the wager; he said Bellshaw would have no chance of using foul play against him.

"You'll give up the show after this match?" she begged.

"I'll hand my share over to Jim Benny," he answered. "I'll only go into the ring when you give me permission," he added smiling. He knew she would consent when he asked her.

The excitement caused over the two thousand pound wager was intense, and on Saturday night the building was crammed to suffocation. [Pg 302]

Sam Wimpole had the horse in readiness, saddled and bridled, as it would have been impossible to do this in the ring. The horse was in a savage mood. Since morning he had gradually grown worse. Just before the performance was to commence he was in a perfect fury, lashing out, and biting at his tormentors.

Sam Wimpole watched him with a peculiar smile. When Craig Bellshaw came to look at Lion, as they named him, Sam cautioned him not to go near.

"Have you done it?" asked Bellshaw in a whisper.

"Yes, gave him an injection an hour ago. He's had three. I'll give him another before he goes into the ring; it will drive him almost mad. I wouldn't mount him for a thousand pounds."

"I shouldn't like to try you," said Bellshaw.

"I wouldn't really. What's a thousand pounds against your life?"

"Is it as bad as that?"

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"Quite."

Bellshaw's smile was ugly. In imagination he saw Glen Leigh stretched out a crushed and battered mass.

The time drew nearer. A quarter of an hour before—the struggle was to commence at nine—Sam Wimpole took out a small syringe from his waistcoat pocket, crept up to the horse's side, and quickly made an injection. Lion shivered, then gave a snort, and tried to grab Sam as he nipped back into safety.

Sam wished to be rid of the syringe. It had done its work, but he dare not throw it away, and he could not go outside; he placed it in his trousers pocket for the time being.

Lion was led into the ring by two men who had long poles strapped on each side of his bit. No one was to be in the ring when Leigh took the bridle in his hand and the poles were loosened and taken away. There was a breathless silence as the horse stood quivering; it was broken by a deafening cheer as Glen Leigh came in. Lion reared and plunged at the sound, but was held fast. Leigh came towards him, a heavy whip in his hand. He walked straight up to the horse, looking him in the eyes; at that moment he fancied there was something wrong with Lion, who seemed frenzied. His eyes glowed like live coals, his breath was hot, steaming; Glen felt it on his face. He [Pg 304]

undid the pole straps, made a signal to the men, who hastily drew them away and ran out of the ring, and sprang into the saddle before Lion was aware of his intention. Glen knew if he once got safely seated half the battle would be won. Luck favoured him in this respect.

The horse had never been mounted until this moment, and for a few seconds he seemed paralysed with fright at the strange experience. This did not last long. With a wicked bound he tried to get rid of his strange burden. It was a vain hope. Glen stuck to the saddle like a limpet to a rock. Lion was a far stronger horse than the Savage, and Wimpole had given him a drug that would increase his strength and endurance until the effect died away. Never had Glen Leigh been on such a horse. He knew Lion possessed tremendous strength. The strain on his arms was immense, also on the whole of his body.

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Lion did not act like an ordinary buckjumper. He had his own plans of getting rid of his burden; they were quite original because they had been brought into play for the first time. He had a long reach, and whenever he tried to bite Glen's thigh he had to pull his legs back quickly. The horse showed no inclination to lie down, or to crush Glen against the posts. Without the slightest warning he set off on a furious gallop round and round the ring. After a dozen rounds he began bucking as no horse ever bucked before. Up and down he went like a rocking horse, then on all fours off the ground, his back arched to a point, all the saddle gear strained to bursting.

Glen felt the perspiration pouring off him. It was the hardest struggle of his life, but he intended winning. He would not be beaten.

Everybody in the vast audience watched the large clock as the fingers crept slowly on, the large hand gradually drawing nearer to the quarter-past. Bellshaw watched the struggle between man and horse with absorbing interest. He knew what had been done, and that the horse possessed demoniacal strength for the time being.

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Mrs. Prevost, her face white, her hands clutching nervously, watched every movement in the ring; how she prayed for his safety, and for the clock to point to a quarter-past nine. Never had she undergone such an ordeal. It would be in her memory for the rest of her life. Supposing he were killed? The horse seemed like some evil beast possessed of devils. She almost shrieked as a mad plunge nearly unseated Leigh for the first time, but he was still there. By some marvellous power he stuck to the saddle and the battle went on.

Glen Leigh knew the horse did not lose strength; rather had he gained it during the last few minutes. It surprised him, but he had no time to think.

Lion stood on his forelegs, his head almost touching the ground, his hind quarters straight up in the air. In this horizontal position he twisted like an eel, trying to wriggle Glen on to his neck. He leaned right back until his body was level with the horse's, then changing his whip quickly, he hit backwards, bringing the heavy knob hard on the root of the tail. This was too much for Lion. He came down on all fours and Glen shot bolt upright. There was a tremendous cheer. It was a wonderful piece of riding.

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"I've never seen such a devil of a horse," said Nick. "It seems to me he's mad. I hope no harm will come to Glen."

Bill was nervous. It was the first time he had felt such a sensation. He turned to the bookmaker and said in a low voice, "It's my belief somebody's doped that horse—given him a drug. He'd never go on like that if he hadn't had something."

"They'd hardly dare do that," answered Nick.

"You don't know Bellshaw. He's capable of doing anything," returned Bill.

There was no time for more. Lion was at it again, fighting more furiously during the last five minutes than he had done before. It was a question of endurance. Would Glen Leigh last out? Once, twice, a third time, he swayed in the saddle. A woman's cry echoed through the building. It was Mrs. Prevost. She had to be held up in her seat. It was only by exercising her will power to the uttermost that she recovered.

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Bellshaw stared at the strugglers with his eyes bulging. He looked at the clock—four minutes, and Glen Leigh was well nigh dead-beat. Not one person in that vast crowd thought the horse would throw him, but they dreaded lest he should fall off exhausted.

Three minutes and he still stuck on, but his grasp on the reins loosened, and Lion, feeling this, redoubled his efforts. The fight was terrific, too thrilling almost to witness. The horse possessed almost miraculous strength.

Two minutes, and for the next sixty seconds Lion bucked like a clockwork machine until every bone in Glen's body felt like cracking. Only one minute to the quarter and still Glen kept his seat. Half a minute more; a great gasp came from the crowd as Glen sank forward, clasping the savage brute with both arms round the neck, but he was still in the saddle. He was not thrown. The position was one of grave danger for Lion could reach his arms with his mouth. The horse stopped, panting, his nostrils blood red, his eyes shooting fire; they gleamed angrily.

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"Get off," yelled Nick.

"Get off," yelled Bill, and hundreds of voices took up the cry. A shudder of horror passed through the huge crowd. Women fainted. Strong men shook. Hundreds hid their faces.

Lion, with a sudden swerve of his neck, got his teeth in Glen Leigh's arm. The pain was terrible. The muscles burned like fire. He caught sight of the clock. Only a second or two and he would win. Could he stand it? Lion tore his arm, then tried to seize his leg, but Glen was too quick for him.

"Time!"

A terrific shout.

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"Time!" shouted the frantic crowd, and as Glen Leigh heard it he rolled out of the saddle in a dead faint; before anyone could rush up Lion planted his fore feet on his chest and bent his head towards his face.

"Shoot him! He'll tear his face," shouted Nick.

"You can't. He's my horse," yelled Bellshaw.

Bill rushed forward, an iron bar in his hand, and in the nick of time brought it down on Lion's head with a mighty sweep. He dropped like a log. Man and horse lay side by side in the ring.

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CHAPTER XXX

THE SWEEP WINNER'S HOME

Glen Leigh was taken to the Kangaroo and nursed by Mrs. Prevost. His chest was crushed, his arm lacerated, but he made a wonderful recovery, and in a week was removed to Sea View, Manley, where, needless to say, he received every attention.

The terrible fight between Glen and Lion was the topic of conversation for several days. Many trainers who were present were firmly convinced the horse had been drugged, or he would never have been so savage, or possessed such strength and staying powers. Nothing however, was discovered, and Sam Wimpole, in order to extract his money from Bellshaw, had to threaten him with exposure.

Glen was of this opinion. He, too, thought Lion had been dosed, but as he won the wager he thought it best to make no enquiries.

Craig Bellshaw was beaten. His temper was not improved. He heard Leigh was at Manley, and decided to go and visit Mrs. Prevost. Some years ago, when he was infatuated with her, he had made a will in her favour, leaving her Mintaro and all the stock on it; this he decided to alter as soon as possible. He would tell her when he reached the house.

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He landed from the boat, walking along the street to the sea-front. As he turned in at the gate he looked up at the bedroom window. What he saw caused a shock which almost deprived him of reason. He stood staring at what he thought was the ghost of the woman he had left to die of hunger and thirst. It was Clara looking out. She saw him enter. Her face changed rapidly. The seat of memory was no longer vacant. She recognised him, and with the recognition returned a flood of recollections. The horror on her face made it look unearthly. She fixed her eyes on Bellshaw with a glassy stare which he returned; he dare not move. Leigh told him the woman was dead and this must be an apparition.

What did it mean?

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Of one thing, in his confused state of mind, he was certain; he must fly from the spot. But his feet were rooted to the ground, and he could not take his eyes off.

The woman swayed to and fro, pointed at him with her hand. Then suddenly the thing vanished. She had fallen on to the floor in a dead faint.

Bellshaw knew nothing of this—he was horrified. His mind gradually became unhinged. He imagined the ghost disappeared suddenly in order to come out to him, perhaps seize him. In his frenzy he attributed supernatural strength to the apparition. It might carry him off, take him away to some dreadful place.

Bellshaw turned and fled, running along the sea-front like a madman, then turning towards the landing stage; reaching it, as the steamer was moving away, he ran on, and despite all the warning cries made a desperate leap. His head struck the paddle box; the wheel spun him round as he fell into the water. The boat stopped, assistance was at once rendered, but Bellshaw had disappeared. After waiting a quarter of an hour the captain left one of his men behind to report to the police, and proceeded on his journey to Circular Quay.

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Craig Bellshaw's body was recovered later on in the day. His head having struck the paddle box, he was rendered unconscious and he sank like a stone.

When Clara fell with a thud on the floor of the bedroom, Mrs. Prevost rushed upstairs and found her insensible. A severe illness of some weeks followed. When she recovered she remembered everything in her life at Mintaro, and how she came to Glen Leigh's hut. It was a pitiful story, and Glen Leigh, Mrs. Prevost, Bigs and Jim listened to it in sadness. As a young girl she recollected

being with Lin Soo. How he obtained possession of her she had no idea. There were other girls about her own age, and they were kindly treated for several years.

Then one day she recollected Bellshaw coming to Lin Soo's. She did not like him; she shrank from him when he touched her. She only had a hazy idea of how she was taken to Mintaro. She must have been drugged in some way. At first Bellshaw treated her kindly, doing all in his power to ingratiate himself with her. She refused all his advances, and this changed his whole actions towards her. He attempted to force her to his will and failed. Garry Backham assisted her as far as he dare. He smuggled a revolver into her room, and with this she felt safe. For a long time her life was one constant, unceasing watchfulness. She dare not sleep. When she dozed she awoke in a fright fearing Bellshaw was near her. She shot at him once, wounding him in the arm. It was soon after this he said he was tired of her and offered to drive her to Bourke and send her to Sydney.

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She related what happened when they reached the water hole; how he thrust her out of the buggy, sprang after her, and tried to push her into the muddy water. She struggled, then fainted. When she came to herself she was alone, lost in the great spaces surrounding her. She struggled on for several days, until at last she staggered into Glen's hut, and fell on his rough bed.

In answer to questions she said she had no idea who her parents were, nor did she seem to remember any home other than Lin Soo's. It could do no good questioning her further, so the subject dropped. She explained how she saw Bellshaw looking up at the window and he recognised her. Glen expressed the opinion that Bellshaw must have thought he had seen a ghost and the sight turned his brain.

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At the inquest held on him, death was stated to be caused by drowning, and that this was brought about in the manner already described. Craig Bellshaw's lawyer had his will. He came to Sea View. Great was Rosa Prevost's surprise when she discovered that Mintaro and all the stock on the station was her absolute property. Looking at the date of the will she knew he must have forgotten to alter it until too late. She consulted Glen Leigh as to whether she should take advantage of it, and he left it entirely in her hands. The lawyer strongly advised her to take over Mintaro as there were no direct heirs to it. This she decided to do, more for Glen's sake than for her own.

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Ten years had gone by since Bellshaw's death and other happenings. Glen Leigh and his wife, Rosa Prevost, lived at Mintaro, where everything prospered with them. They had five children, three boys and two girls, all well grown and strong.

The hands at Mintaro found Leigh a very different "boss" from Bellshaw.

Garry Backham sold out at Boonara and came back to Mintaro as overseer, and very glad he was to be there under such a master. Glen mustered all the stock on the station and found thousands more cattle and sheep than he anticipated. Many of the wild horses were shot, others tamed and used on the station. He bought a small stud-farm near Albury, and sent horses to be trained by Ivor Hadwin. There was a prospect of a successful year before the stable at the end of five seasons when Glen had a score of horses, most of them bred by himself, in training. The sweep money came in very handy to run the station and tide over one or two bad seasons; when rain and the good times came Mintaro cleared a fortune for them every year.

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Jim Benny and his wife, the woman who suffered so much at Bellshaw's hands, and whom Jim helped Glen Leigh to save, came to Mintaro, where Clara acted as nurse and governess to all the children until such time as the two elder boys went to school in Sydney; she then took charge of the three at home, and Mrs. Leigh found her a great help and a genial companion.

It took a lot of persuasion to get her to come to Mintaro, of which she had so many unpleasant memories, but eventually they prevailed when it was pointed out how advantageous it would be for her husband.

The show was sold as a going concern; Lion had to be shot; he never recovered from the blow Bill gave him. A post-mortem was made at Gerard's request and the veterinary surgeon said the horse had been heavily dosed with a powerful drug, which undoubtedly caused him to be in a frenzy in the ring when Glen rode him.

Lin Soo was tackled by Glen and Bill Bigs, and compelled to pay a large sum of money to Mrs. Benny in order to avoid criminal prosecution. Moreover, he was forced by them to leave Sydney and return to his own country. Chun Shan was installed as head cook at Mintaro, a position he worthily filled.

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Sea View, Manley, was not sold; the Leighs used it as their residence on visits to Sydney.

It was a great day for Ivor Hadwin when he won the Sydney Cup for Glen Leigh, whose white jacket, black belt and cap, were immensely popular. Horatio was the horse, and, as he started at two to one, the enthusiasm was immense. Later both the V.R.C., and A.J.C. Derbies fell to Glen's share, and he had hopes of landing a Melbourne Cup with a son of Barellan's, who was at the Albury Stud, and a most successful sire.

Glen never forgot the keepers of the fence, and when he came to Mintaro they soon discovered

they had a friend in the man who had once been one of themselves. Glen sometimes rode there and chatted with them, rendering their lives less lonely.

One day he drove his wife to the glittering wire and showed her where he had stood for long hours in the terrible heat and drought.

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"What an awful life, Glen," she said, with a shudder.

"I stood it all right," he replied, "but I was glad when it ended."

When Barellan's son won the Melbourne Cup, Bill Bigs, pointing Glen Leigh out to a friend, said, "He drew Barellan in the big sweep, and now he's won it with his son."

"That isn't likely to happen again," was the reply.

"No, I don't suppose it is," said Bigs.

Luke Nicholl came to Mintaro for a change, which he thoroughly enjoyed. Jerry Makeshift came with him; both were heartily welcomed.

"I shall never forget it was owing to you, Jerry, I bought the ticket in the sweep, and drew the winner," said Glen.

"You've made good use of the money, anyway," was Jerry's reply.

THE END

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SOME APPRECIATIONS OF MR. NAT GOULD

Among all lovers of sport the name of Nat Gould has become a household word. As sportsman, journalist, and globe-trotter, few men have gone through more varied experiences, and still fewer have used their experience to such excellent purpose. Since Whyte Melville and the immortal "Jorrock" no writer has depicted with so spirited a

pen the romance of a racecourse, the surprises of the cricket-pitch, or the hairbreadth escapes of the hunting-field. Writing in *Longman's Magazine*, Mr. Andrew Lang said: "A Sixpenny Academy would be a lively Academy. For President, I would, if consulted, select Mr. NAT GOULD, who shines by a candid simplicity of style, and a direct and unaffected appeal to the primitive emotions, and our love for that noble animal the horse."

Nation, 9th August, 1919:—"In the way of sale, his wares surpassed all others. To millions they were the breath of mental life. We have heard that a newspaper purchasing the serial rights of one of his stories could promise itself an increased circulation of 100,000 a day, no matter what its politics or its principles."

The Times, 26th July, 1917:—"Of Mr. Nat Gould's novels more than Ten Million^[3] copies have been sold; and when this can be said of an author there must be qualities in his work which appeal to human nature—qualities, therefore, which even the most superior person would do well to recognise. 'A Northern Crack' is one of those tales which set you down in an arm-chair and keep you there till it is pleased to stop."

[3] Since this was written ten million more copies have been sold to December, 1919, totalling over Twenty Millions.

The Times, 26th July, 1919:—"If art in any sphere in life finds a basis in the pleasing of a multitude, then Nat Gould was an artist with few above his shoulders."

Morning Post, 26th July, 1919:—"He was the most widely read of all modern story-tellers, and a genius in his downright way."

Athenæum, June 10th, 1911:—"All living writers are headed by Mr. NAT GOULD, and of the great of the past, Dumas only surpasses his popularity."

Truth, January 22nd, 1913:—"Who is the most popular of living novelists? Mr. NAT GOULD easily and indisputably takes the first place."

MISS BEATRICE HARRADEN, one of the Honorary Librarians to the Military Hospital, Endell Street, London, writing in the November, 1916, issue of the *Cornhill Magazine*, states: "We had to invest in any amount of NAT GOULD's sporting stories. In fact, a certain type of man would read nothing except NAT GOULD. However ill he was, however suffering and broken, the name of NAT GOULD would always bring a smile to his face. Often and often I've heard the whispered words: 'A Nat Gould—ready for when I'm better.'"

Transcriber's Notes:

Punctuation has been normalized.

Page 10: "more more than" replaced with "more than."

Page 71: "We'll make things gee" retained as printed.

Page 136: "too and fro" replaced with "to and fro."

Page 215: "No doubt it was Leigh who called" retained as printed.

Page 227: "suprised" replaced with "surprised."

Page 269: "convalesence" replaced with "convalescence."

Page 307: "horizontal" retained as printed.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SWEEP WINNER ***

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