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Memoirs of a Bastard Colonist  
III  
MELBOURNE 1874  
by  
Susanna Bonaretti



## CHAPTER 8

### Melbourne, Victoria

The efficiency of the Royal Victoria's desk clerk in Wangaratta astounded me. Not only did he send an electric telegraph to reserve a room for me at Melbourne's Menzies Hotel, but he also arranged for a hansom to collect me and my luggage at the terminus the Friday afternoon to take me directly to the hotel, only a few streets away.

There was a small problem, however, when only one of my valises was presented to me. After some energetic confabulation and checking of the manifest, the second, untagged case was found and agreed to that it was, indeed, mine.

Notwithstanding this minor setback, I was nevertheless most grateful for the desk clerk's organisation and made a mental note to send my thanks along to him once I was in a better frame of mind.

The Menzies Hotel was a magnificent three-storey stone building with a columned arcade and pavilion towers on each corner, and occupied the north-west corner of the block on Bourke and William Streets. As I entered the opulent reception room I was taken by the décor and the robustness of the furnishings. It was very obvious that no expense had been spared to make this the best hotel in a city which rivalled London in its wealth, thanks to the discovery of gold twenty or so years prior. Even the owner of the hotel, Mr Archibald Menzies, made his fortune in the gold fields. It seemed ironic that it was gold that brought me here.

I was checked in by the manager of the hotel, no less, Mr Romsford, who was impeccably attired in a formal morning suit and quickly shown to my room by a concierge who, also, was perfectly groomed and uniformed, the epaulets of which bore the Menzies tartan. My room was on the top floor, facing northward and overlooking busy Bourke Street, and was only a few blocks away from the Yarra River and Prince's Bridge at the end of

Swanston Street to the south. The décor here was equally as sumptuous: walnut panelling lined the walls and a French bedstead ornamented the bedroom—first class luxury, which did little to pull me out of my funk. I should have been delighted but my thoughts relentlessly hovered over the events that led me here.

Hanging my green overcoat in the immense wardrobe with my meagre belongings, and placing my underwear in one of the drawers in the dressing table, the only items left in one valise were my trousers and shirts, mackintosh and hat. The other held a thick wad of bank notes and a bag full of gold sovereigns. I stared at that small fortune, mesmerised, and it stared back at me rightfully accusing me of being a thief and murderess.

I should give myself up and accept the consequences of my actions but, if I were not to be hanged for my part of the gold robbery, I would surely be hanged for my part in Harper's murder, for murder it was and I was the instigator.

Giving up the bank notes and gold to the police would only raise questions that I would not want to answer; spending the bank notes certainly would lead the police directly to me; the notes had serial numbers and those would have been registered by the issuing bank and circulated to the authorities. While the gold sovereigns were untraceable, and I had what amounted to more than several years' wages, they would soon run out given the profligacy of my current style of living. I needed to find a ladies' boarding house and I needed to find a paying occupation; I certainly could not maintain this standard of lavishness indefinitely.

My head was reeling and it was all I could do to stop self-pity from appropriating my thoughts. Hunger pangs reminded me that I hadn't eaten since breakfast and, being three o'clock, I decided to avail myself of the coffee house located on the ground floor of the hotel.

As I descended the grand staircase, I noticed an elegantly dressed young woman in conversation with the desk clerk, a different one to the one who checked me in earlier, and couldn't help overhearing.

"...Miss Dubois, you know the rules," the desk clerk said firmly but politely.

"Mr Hemmingsworth is expecting me." Miss Dubois' voice was smooth and cultured and without a hint of annoyance in it.

"No doubt. But we do not allow unescorted...er, ladies into gentlemen's rooms. You know that."

"Please, Hobson—"

It was quite obvious to me that these two had crossed swords before but paid no further attention and made my way to the coffee house but I did hear Hobson suggest, "Perhaps you'd care to take a coffee while you await Mr Hemmingsworth...?"

I wandered into the coffee house filled with ladies and gentlemen enjoying light refreshments and was disappointed that there seemed to be no available tables. A matronly waitress accosted me from behind and kindly asked, “Table for one, Miss?”

I nodded and gave her a faint, appreciative smile.

“This way, Miss,” she said as she led me toward a small table against the wall not far from the door and handed me a bill of fare.

As I settled in and perused the menu, Miss Dubois presented herself at the doorway much to the disapproval of my waitress who approached her and informed her rather brusquely, “I’m afraid, Miss Dubois, there are no vacant tables at present.”

I watched her crane her neck to see if the waitress, indeed, was telling her the truth. Miss Dubois was elegant in both dress and speech, beautiful of face and shapely of frame, and was about ten years my senior. She intrigued me, this Miss Dubois. Before I could stop myself, I caught the waitress’s attention, “Miss...Miss, I am happy to share my table.”

“There,” said Miss Dubois triumphantly, “a willing confederate.”

The waitress was most displeased and, showing Miss Dubois to my table, said to the lady in a barely audible voice, “She obviously doesn’t know what you are,” which only earned her a broad smile.

I don’t know what prompted me to invite this person to join me—loneliness, desperation, comfort—it was done now, no uninviting her.

“Thank you, my dear,” Miss Dubois graciously said to me as she slid into the chair opposite, removing her gloves, “Madeleine. Madeleine Dubois,” and extended her hand to me.

I took it and shook it gently, “Rebecca Davies.”

The waitress stood waiting for our requirements.

I offered the menu to Madeleine, “Would you care to see the menu?”

“No, thank you, dear girl. I believe our waitress knows what I usually order.” She looked up to the scowling face of the waitress who turned her attention to me with a marked change of attitude, “And what would Miss like?”

“Oh, ah, coffee, I suppose, and perhaps a portion of cheese pudding, please.”

“Right away, Miss,” and with a swirl of her skirts, the waitress left us with a final disparaging glare for Madeleine.

We sat in awkward silence for a few moments while I took in Madeleine’s exquisite features; I didn’t know what to say. Thankfully, Madeleine broke the impasse, “Are you visiting Melbourne?”

“Yes.”

“On business?” The question flummoxed me. My quizzical look brought an explanation, “The Menzies has many commercial rooms. Thousands of pounds worth of property, fleece, wheat, gold change hands here every day.”

“Oh. I didn’t know. Is that what brings you here?” I said without even thinking.

She was momentarily stopped by my apparent insight into her ‘business’, “Yes. I suppose one could say that. And you, are you here with your parents on business?”

“No. I’m travelling alone.”

She was surprised, “How old are you? Fifteen? Sixteen?”

“Eighteen,” I answered a little more tersely than I should have.

“Still quite young to travel unescorted. From where do you hail?”

“Sydney.”

“And what brings you here?”

I could not answer that question. What did bring me here? I could not tell her the truth.

A younger waitress interrupted us, bringing our orders of coffee and pudding for me and a coffee for Madeleine. Madeleine sugared her coffee and, stirring it thoroughly, looked up at me and offered, “You are running away.”

My look of horror at being discovered brought further comment from her, “Perhaps from an unsatisfactory marriage arrangement?”

I didn’t deny her assumptions. She continued conspiratorially, “No need to fear, Rebecca, I will keep your whereabouts secret. Marriage is so constrictive. For women, that is. Men, on the other hand, can continue enjoying their premarital proclivities, so long as they have the wherewithal to support their indulgences. Thank God for that, I say,” she added with a laugh.

It was then that I understood what her ‘business’ was. I looked at her and wondered what it was that made her choose this profession. She had grace and beauty and could have had the choice of any number of suitable beaux.

“Are you staying long?” she enquired sipping her coffee.

“A week. I’ve booked in a week.”

“Perhaps I could show you the city sights, if you have the time?”

“Ah... yes. Yes, I’d like that.”

“Excellent. What room?” My questioning look prompted her to add, “So I can leave you a message.”

“Of course.” I looked at the tag on my room key, “Two thirty-two.”

“Oh, that’s a lovely room. You’ve chosen well.”

Our matronly waitress returned and addressed Madeleine curtly, “Your gentleman ‘friend’ is waiting for you.”

Madeleine turned in her seat to see Mr Hemmingsworth standing at the door. She smiled affectionately at the stout, well-dressed sexagenarian, then addressed me, “I’ll leave a message for you.”

I watched her interact with the portly gentleman and marvelled at how well she comported herself against the very obvious disapproval of her profession by those here. As they left, arm in arm, Madeleine turned to me and gave me a wave and a smile.

I no longer felt alone.

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After finishing my coffee and pudding in a far better mood than I had when I came in, I returned to my room but it wasn’t long after that there came a knock on the door. I opened it to a porter who informed me that Miss Dubois was in the foyer and requesting I join her. I was surprised by this invitation as I thought she would have been otherwise occupied for the evening and night.

Seeing Madeleine in the foyer, smiling that engaging smile of hers, made me happy.

“Rebecca, wonderful news. Mr Hemmingsworth’s wife has unexpectedly arrived from Geelong.”

I was mildly shocked to say the least, “Oh? Wonderful news?”

“Yes. My gentleman friend had arranged an evening at the theatre for us and supper afterward.”

“Oh, I’m sorry your plans have been spoilt.”

“Not at all. Mrs Hemmingsworth hates the theatre.” She produced two theatre tickets and continued, “and she hates wasting money on expensive restaurants.”

I was both elated and disappointed, emotions that did not evade Madeleine’s attention, “What’s the matter, my sweet girl? I thought you’d be delighted.”

“I don’t have...I didn’t bring the proper evening attire to attend such events.”

“Is that all? Don’t concern yourself. Come with me.”

It was a short hansom ride to her apartment above a haberdashery shop at eighty-seven Collins Street. Her abode was small, or so it seemed, as it was brimful of beautiful furniture, oriental vases, shawls draping the settees and Persian rugs cluttering the floor. I was most impressed; I had not ever seen such richness and luxury. Madeleine was pleased

that I was impressed and then told me to turn around. My jaw must have almost hit the floor when I took in the full-size portrait of Madeleine standing at the water's edge, looking wistfully at the breaking waves—completely naked!

“Do you like it?” she asked, obviously amused by my reaction.

“Ah...” I did not know what to say.

“It was painted by one of my clients. It's a copy of Andromeda by Poynter.”

“Is that really you?” I naively asked.

“In the flesh. Come.” She took my hand and led me to her bedroom; I could not tear my eyes away from the painting until we entered the room. There, two large mahogany armoires filled an entire wall. A matching dressing table with a full-length mirror, a wash basin and stand and a large bed with a superb bedhead each took their place along the other walls.

With a grand gesture, she flung open the doors to both armoires and declared, “Day dresses. Evening dresses. Which would you like to wear?”

I could not believe the Aladdin's cave of riches this young woman had. “How did you acquire so many wonderful things?” I asked enthralled by the splendour of her possessions.

“I have some very generous, and very rich, patrons and this is how they thank me for treating them in a way their wives will not,” she replied raising an eyebrow expressively.

“What do you think of this?” she asked as she took an evening dress from the rail and sized it up against my body. “It should fit you perfectly.”

It was a lush golden jacquard woven silk dress with ruching on the front skirt panel with a wide, shallow neckline abundantly trimmed with rows of lace that revealed the tops of my shoulders and more of my chest than I should have dared to show.

“Try it on,” Madeleine enthusiastically urged, helping me out of my coat.

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I felt like a princess when we entered the Theatre Royal. Even though my short hair posed a problem—no lady cut her hair short unless she had been ill—Madeleine hid it under a jaunty narrow-brimmed hat trimmed with feathers—much à la mode.

We had arrived by hansom promptly at seven and were ushered to the dress circle. The heads of whomever she passed turned to Madeleine, the men smiling in appreciation, some acknowledging her with a slight nod of the head, others with a sly look. Some ladies also admired her but mostly they either ignored her or looked upon her with mild contempt. Madeleine was unruffled and acknowledged only those who acknowledged her—I supposed it was a courtesy of her profession to be discreet.

At half past seven, the programme began with a farce and was followed by an original play specially written for the brilliant American actress May Howard.

My prior preoccupations and fears dissolved during those hours of excellent entertainments and we left the theatre in a lighthearted and jovial mood for a little supper at a nearby restaurant. I was excited and wanted to ask Madeleine a million questions. This was the first time I had been in the exalted company of dress circle attendees and the first time I had been to the theatre at night. I skipped along beside her down the street toward our destination. Along the way, we passed several narrow, darkened laneways of which Madeleine seemed to be very wary; villains ready to pounce on us, I thought.

We had almost reached our destination when a rough, hoarse voice called out from the shadows, “Maddie.”

Madeleine stopped dead in her tracks and her demeanour changed to one of dread. The owner of the voice approached from behind.

“Maddie, you haven’t been to see me,” he croaked.

Madeleine turned to face her accoster, an ugly brute of a man badly dressed in otherwise fine clothes and explained nervously, “I told you I’ll be there tomorrow.”

“And who’s this? A new recruit?” he slavered, looking me up and down.

“No. A friend. Only a friend.”

The man snorted then threatened, “Tomorrow. Don’t forget. You know what happens when you forget.” We watched him slink back into the shadows of the laneway; he reminded me of the rain-sodden rats I saw in the Suez Canal.

“Who was that?” I asked, both annoyed and afraid for Madeleine.

“Nobody. Come, let’s have supper.” Madeleine was visibly shaken and did her best to make light of the incident but she wasn’t the same after that. Throughout our meal, Madeleine was distracted by her thoughts. I could not help myself and had to enquire, “What did that man want, Madeleine?”

“Don’t concern yourself, my sweet child. You can’t do anything to help. Finish your jelly and I’ll take you to your hotel.”

“Will I see you tomorrow?”

Madeleine contemplated her reply for a moment then smiled warmly, “No. Sunday. We can cruise up the Yarra River in a paddle steamer.”

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I didn’t get to bed until two o’clock that morning and had very little sleep. Confused images tumbled incessantly through my mind: Madeleine laughing, the antics of the farcical actors,



the horrid implied threats from that disgusting man, the American actress May Howard, Madeleine's agitation and fear...why did that hideous man frighten her so much?

Madeleine said she would see me on Sunday as Saturday nights were always busy for her. So, given my lack of sleep, I decided to stay in bed a little longer than usual and make a lazy day of it.

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The train from Wodonga pulled into the Melbourne Terminus right on time, at one fifty-eight p.m. bringing with it visitors from New South Wales who had transferred from Albury, as well as Victorians boarding along the route. Alighting along with these passengers from the first-class carriage were two rough-looking men both carrying several heavy carpetbags and sleeping rolls: Johnson and Turner. They first made their way to the Left-luggage Office and emerged a few minutes later without two of their bags and headed for the cabbie's stand. There, they waited their turn to hire the next available hansom, furtively looking around them for constables.

When their turn came, Johnson pulled out a crumpled, bloodied business card and instructed the driver, "Menzie's Hotel."

The driver looked at each of these two slovenly, unshaven ruffians and queried, "The Menzie's? Are you sure?"

"Yeah, we're sure," Johnson insisted, quite annoyed and threw his bags into the cab as they both got in.

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It was now half past two and I was washed and dressed and had decided to spend the rest of the day, after a very late breakfast at the coffee shop, at the Melbourne Public Library in Swanston Street. I was missing my favourite pastime of reading and was particularly interested in reading more from Charles Darwin's book "*On the Origin of Species*". Finding me a suitable boarding house was something that I would ask Madeleine to help me with tomorrow, so today, I would spend with Mr Darwin.

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"You there!" Johnson's impatience caught Hobson off guard as he sorted the guests' registration cards with his back turned to the desk.

"Yes, s—" Hobson said as he turned to face the owner of the annoyed voice. He stopped mid-sentence when his eyes met the repugnant countenances of the slovenly Johnson and Turner. "Sir. May I help you?"

“You have a young man, a boy, here, goes by the name of Robert Davies. What room is he in?”

Hobson looked at each suspiciously, “I’m awfully sorry, Sir, but I cannot give out that sort of information.”

Johnson palmed three gold sovereigns onto the desk, “What about now?”

Hobson was more offended than surprised by the bribe, “I’m sorry, Sir, but we only sell rooms here, not information.” Hobson half-turned to resume his task.

“We’ll have a room, then.”

Turner looked at Johnson, “Wha...?”

Johnson ignored Turner and insisted, “A room,” then withdrew some notes from the inside pocket of his jacket and threw several ten pound notes onto the counter, “That should be enough for a few nights, right?”

An impasse was looming. Hobson clearly didn’t want this riffraff in his hotel but they had actually done nothing to warrant denying them a room.

With much reluctance, Hobson slid a blank registration card toward Johnson, “Please complete your details, Sir.” He turned to the board of keys and removed one.

Johnson filled out the form as required but with false information, and slid it back to Hobson, who, reading it, slid the selected key across the desk to Johnson, “Room two thirty-four, Mr Flinders...and Mr Spencer.”

Turner shot Johnson a half-witted look which earned him a surly look in return.

Hobson rang for the porter but Johnson declined, “We can carry our own bags. What floor?”

“Second floor and to the right.”

“And send up something to eat.”

“Yeah,” added Turner, “Lots of grub. I’m hungry.” He looked at Johnson and sniggered, “Mr Flinders?”

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My green coat and bonnet on, I checked that I had my room key and a few shillings in my purse for incidentals and opened my door just as two men passed by.

I stopped dead in my tracks. Those carpetbags! No! It can’t be!

I quickly shut the door just as Johnson turned his head to see who had opened it. Fumbling nervously, I inserted the key and locked the door. I turned and stood petrified against it, awaiting the dreaded moment Johnson would pound his fists against it, cursing me

and demanding to be let in. My heart felt as though it would burst through my chest, my mouth was dry and I could hardly breathe.

That moment seemed to last forever.

I gathered my wits and ran to the chest of drawers and pulled out my canvas satchel. With Pitt's gun in hand, I sat in my chair facing the door and waited for the inevitable. Questions raced through my mind: How did they find me? Who told them? Did Hobson say something? How would Hobson know I was Robert? Were they looking for Robert or Rebecca?

Think, think...

Johnson did not come to my door so Hobson didn't tell him. Then how did he know I was here?

Think, think...

The missing luggage tag! But it only had "*R.D. Melbourne Terminus*" written on it. Only the Wangaratta desk clerk knew I'd be staying here at the Menzies Hotel. Why would he give me up to these murderers? He wouldn't, unless they threatened him...

They've come for me and they've come for the money. I needed to leave this hotel immediately and the money had to come with me.

Heaving the valise with the wads of stolen banknotes and several bags of gold sovereigns onto the bed, I flung the lid open and took a handful of sovereigns and put them into my canvas satchel along with Pitt's gun and cartridge pouch and slung it over my shoulder.

Carefully unlocking the door, I cracked it open to see a waiter wheeling a trolley laden with covered dishes past my door and stopping two doors down.

"Room service," he announced as he knocked.

The door opened and I heard Johnson's distinctive gruffness order, "Bring it in."

They were just up the corridor two rooms away from me! Could it get any worse?

A few minutes later, the waiter returned sans his trolley and I heard the door to Johnson's room close and the key turn in the lock.

With my heart in my throat, I took a deep breath and quickly dashed toward the stairs. The bag was heavy but I managed to get it downstairs and to the front desk where Hobson, thankfully, was still on duty.

"Mr Hobson," I said in a breathless whisper, "I need to keep this valise safe and out of sight. It has some valuable...family heirlooms in it," I lied, "and I know you are careful about whom you—"

“Miss, I do apologise for lodging Mr Flinders and his associate on your floor but we had no other rooms available. I do understand your concern and I promise to keep your heirlooms safe and out of sight.”

“*Mr Flinders?*” I thought as Hobson came from his position behind the desk and relieved me of my red valise with a slight grunt.

“My, Miss Davies,” he commented, “you are stronger than you look.”

I gave him the best smile I could muster under the circumstances, “Thank you, Mr Hobson, I am indebted to you.” I hesitated and wanted to tell him of my anxiety over the reason these two murderers were here but thought the better of it; it would raise those awful unanswerable questions again.

“Is there anything else, Miss?” he asked with some consideration upon seeing my hesitation.

“Um, no, thank you, Mr Hobson. I, um, have an appointment I need to keep and may not be back until quite late. I would like to keep my key with me if you are in agreement.”

“Of course, Miss.”

With one final look toward the stairs, I thanked Hobson and made my way to eighty-seven Collins Street, Madeleine’s apartment, and hoped she wouldn’t be cross with me for arriving unannounced.

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I ran up the stairs to her apartment and reached the landing just as Madeleine was locking the door behind her.

“Rebecca! What are you doing here? I was about to leave.”

“Madeleine,” I apologised, catching my breath, “I’m sorry. I had to see you.”

“Goodness me! You look as though you’ve seen a ghost.”

“I...I have. I need your help. I don’t know what to do. I don’t know who to turn to.”

Madeleine put her arm around my shoulder to comfort me, “My sweet child, tell me what has happened.”

I could not tell her everything; I did not want to involve her in my criminal acts, I just needed a safe place to think things through. My reluctance was obvious.

“They’ve found you, haven’t they? Your parents?” she said quietly.

“Yes...yes, they’ve found me.”

Madeleine looked at me, searching my eyes for the truth. I could not hold her gaze.

“Rebecca, I cannot help you if you don’t tell me the truth. Who has found you?”

I looked around. While we were standing at the top of the stairs and hers was the only apartment here, I needed privacy if I were to tell all. “Can we go inside?”

She seemed agitated by this request but acquiesced and unlocked her door. As we stepped inside, Madeleine glanced at her mantle clock then showed me to the sofa. I removed my bonnet and we sat next to each other. Taking my hand, Madeleine gently said, “Now tell me all. The truth.”

“I am running away,” I began, telling the truth but not the whole truth, “but not from a marriage, from two men who believe I stole from them. I haven’t. The money is mine, I earned it. They want it back. They arrived at the hotel this afternoon. But they don’t know it’s me they’re looking for.”

“Don’t know it’s you?” Madeleine queried.

“No. They’re looking for Robert.”

“You’re a boy?” The surprise in her voice was almost comical.

“No. I’m a girl but I was dressed as—”

“That explains the short hair. Just who are those men? Private detectives?”

“Madeleine, please don’t ask questions. I don’t want to involve you. All I need is a place to stay while I work out what to do next.”

Madeleine glanced around the room and looked at me apologetically, “My sweet, I sometimes conduct my business here—”

“Anywhere. I don’t know where to go.”

“Obviously, going to the police is out of the question,” she said perceptively, “Rebecca, I need to meet someone and I am quite late already,” she said with some controlled anxiety. “You’re very welcome to stay here until I return then we can work out what to do next.”

Just as she finished her sentence, the door was flung open, catching us both by surprise. Madeleine’s look of horror as she stood up shocked me; she was always so calm and self-possessed. The man who burst in uninvited was the same bully that accosted us in the laneway after the theatre.

“Harry...” Madeleine’s words were filled with fear, “I was on my way to see you, I swear—”

“Yes, I can see that,” Harry gruffly replied with a smirk on his ugly face, “by the way you two were canoodling. Where’s my money?”

“Here,” she said standing abruptly and rummaging through her purse, “I have it here.”

Harry grabbed the folded bank notes from her grasp, gave them a quick glance then grabbed her by the arm, “You’ve got more. I know you’ve got more. Here somewhere.”

“No, Harry, please, there’s no more. You have your cut. Please leave.”

“Oh, you owe me more than this,” he threatened with a lecherous grin that showed his tobacco-stained teeth.

“I know. I’ll give you what you want but not here. Not now. Please.”

This beautiful woman was begging this ruffian. I stood up beside her very aware of the weight of the revolver in my satchel; I watched the play between them, fearing what was to come.

Harry pulled her closer, “You missed our appointment.” and dragged Madeleine by the arm toward her bedroom.

I was horrified.

Madeleine struggled and begged, “Harry, please, not in front of the child.”

He stopped and turned to me, “Your new recruit? Do you want to watch? Learn a thing or two?” He then turned back to Madeleine, “You know the cost when you’re late,” and pushed her further along to the bedroom.

Madeleine looked at me as I removed the revolver from my satchel. She screamed, “No!”

Harry assumed she meant for him to stop and sneered but he didn’t know how close to meeting Satan he had come as I reluctantly replaced the gun in my satchel. The bedroom door slammed shut behind them. I just stood there, transfixed and angered, knowing what he was doing to her and I did nothing. This was my fault. I delayed her. This wouldn’t have happened if I hadn’t come to seek her help.

It didn’t take long. The brute emerged from the bedroom with self-satisfied contempt, doing up the buttons to his trouser front. He shot me a glance then snatched up Madeleine’s purse and removed the few remaining bank notes from it. All I could do was to glare at him as he passed by me, shouldering me almost off my feet.

He left, giving me one last loathsome grin before closing the door behind him.

I went to the bedroom, fearful of what I would find there. Madeleine was standing with her back to me adjusting her skirts and turned when she heard me approach. All her mirth had drained from her being.

“I’m so sorry, Madeleine,” I started, “I didn’t know—”

“It makes him feel powerful, to have control of my body. But he will never own me,” she said in tones that were both resolute and vengeful. “It’s not your fault, my sweet child. Come,” she continued with an ironic smile, “I have time now.”

She led me back to the sofa but stopped by a cabinet and found two glasses. After pouring brandy from a flask into each, she joined me on the sofa and, handing me one, she asked, “Have you tasted brandy before?”

I smiled and, taking the glass, confessed, “I’ve worked as a barmaid since I can remember. There is nothing I haven’t tasted before. To the Queen.”

Madeleine added derisively, “To the king of Dudley Mansions.” To my puzzled look, she explained, “Mr Harry Kepple grew up in a shanty on the Dudley Moors and rose to riches on the backs of whores, larcenists and burglars, and by fencing stolen goods. He now lives in Carlton, in a new, fancy pile on Grattan Street. His taste in clothes extends to his taste in architecture. His is the gaudiest, most repulsive townhouse on the street. Long live the king.”

We sipped the fine brandy in reflective silence and, after another sip, I asked her, “Did he hurt you?”

Madeleine laughed, not a laughter of joy but one of irony, “He has a very small penis and even when it is fully functional, is hardly anything to crow about. No, the only thing he hurt was my pride. This is the only aspect of my profession that I detest but one which I can do nothing about.”

“Why can’t you?”

“He is my protector.”

“Protector?” I was confused, “but he...he raped you.”

Madeleine tried to console me, “Rebecca, my sweet child, this is a means to an end. I won’t be doing this for the rest of my life. I will be leaving Melbourne and Australia for good as soon as I have enough saved for my passage and to start a new life in the Mother Country.”

“How much more do you need?”

Madeleine regained her good humour again and gave me a wonderful smile, “Do you intend financing me?” She became quite serious and confessed, “I would have had enough by now if it were not for that limp-cock demanding his exorbitant protection money.”

“Can’t you leave him?”

“Nobody leaves Harry Kepple. I knew a young Irish girl, Aoibhin, who took to this trade, under Harry’s protection. After a few months, she wanted to leave...”

“And?”

“She was found floating in the Yarra, strangled. She was such a beautiful young girl.” Madeleine’s eyes glistened with tears. She composed herself and reiterated, “Nobody leaves Harry Kepple.”

“How will you, then?”

“By keeping my plans secret. By not telling Harry everything I earn. By keeping my savings hidden here and not in a bank. It won’t be long now.”

“Why are you telling me this? Aren’t you afraid I’ll tell someone?”

“My darling Rebecca, I think you are holding greater secrets than I. I know of no other young lady who carries such a large weapon in her canvas bag, or who confesses to have masqueraded as a boy, or who can afford the most expensive hotel in Melbourne yet has not a change of clothes to her name. If, in fact, your name is Rebecca Davies.”

“It is.” Now was the time for truth, “I have done things, Madeleine. Worse things than you could ever imagine. Two men are after me. They are cold-blooded killers. And they will stop at nothing to get what they believe is theirs. I intend leaving Melbourne and Australia, but I don’t have a plan. That’s why I came here. I need to sort my head out. I’m so sorry, Madeleine, I caused you this grief. I will find somewhere to stay—”

“Nonsense!” she insisted, “you’ll stay here tonight and we’ll work something out together.” Madeleine downed the last of her brandy and stood up, “Now, I must get ready for my paying appointment this evening. But first, I must wash the fetid discharge from that disgusting limp-cock mongrel bastard off my body...” Madeleine was quite appalled by her choice of words, “Oh my, I do hope I haven’t shocked you with my vulgar language.”

All I could do was smile.

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An hour or so later, when Madeleine emerged from her bedroom, she was resplendent in a magnificent crimson silk gown studded with brilliant rhinestones and with an almost immodest décolletage; a vision that awed me. Her face, beautiful as it was before, was now powdered and enhanced with rouge to her lips and cheeks. It was at that moment, and the only time in my life, that I wished I’d been born of the other gender, for the desire I had for her made me forget my tribulations.

“Don’t look at me like that, Rebecca,” she said with a seductive smile as she floated to me, “or I may change my mind and stay,” and tapped my nose with her gloved finger, “and I believe that’s yet another secret you hold.”

All I could do was flush with embarrassment; was I so readable?



Taking a fur-trimmed stole from the closet near the door, she turned to me and advised, “Lock the door behind me. Make yourself at home. I won’t be back until the small hours of the morning. We’ll make plans then.”

I did as she asked, locked the door then removed the satchel and my coat and hooked them both on the coat rack near the door. Her apartment certainly was full of treasures, new and old, but what I appreciated the most was the painting of her as Andromeda. I could not help but stare at it in admiration and wonderment and, perhaps, a little lustfulness.

My attention was diverted to a key being twisted in the lock to the front door and, anticipating Madeleine had forgotten something, I turned to meet her. Instead, to my horror, the door was opened by Harry Kepple who wasn’t at all surprised to see me. He strolled in and closed the door behind him then stood and regarded me with perverse disdain.

My satchel and the gun within it were hanging by the door beside him. All I could muster was, “What more do you want? You got what you came for.”

“Ah, the new recruit,” he said malevolently taking slow and purposeful steps toward me, “sit down on the sofa and stay there and you won’t get hurt,” he snarled.

I made a dash for my satchel but he caught me by my arm and swung me around, throwing me into the sofa, “I told you to sit!”

With renewed vigour, I jumped up and pushed past him but, again, he overwhelmed me with his brute strength and punched me in the stomach, winding me. A savage backhand to my head sent me reeling and I stumbled backward, striking my head against the wall. I slid to the floor, gasping for breath, the pain in my head so intense I began dry retching.

“Get up from there and I’ll beat you senseless,” he warned then set about ransacking the place, pulling out and emptying drawers, upturning vases, upsetting tables and chairs before moving to Madeleine’s bedroom.

I was fading in and out of consciousness, a million cicadas were screeching in my ears, my eyes could not focus and my lungs were labouring to get some air into them. It wasn’t long before the whoremonger returned and grabbed me by my neck.

“Where is it?” he shouted in my face, “Where does she keep her stash?”

The best I could do was emit a groan but, even if I had known, I wouldn’t have told the lowlife scum. He tossed me back to the floor then looked about. The only piece of furniture he hadn’t despoiled was the sofa. With a rage borne of wanton greed, he upturned the sofa and stopped. He snorted in triumph when he found what he was looking for: Madeleine’s hiding place. Cleverly stitched into the canvas covering to the base of the sofa

was a deep pocket. He savagely ripped it open and bundles of neatly folded and tied bank notes fell out and lay strewn about the floor.

“Ah, Maddie, you lied to me,” he smirked as he looked upon the destruction of Madeleine’s life, “You will pay dearly for this. No one leaves Harry Kepple.”

He stooped to collect all the packets of notes and stuffed them into his coat pockets. Not satisfied with ruining Madeleine’s dreams, he loomed over me and prodded me with his boot, “You. Recruit. You tell Maddie to come and see me tomorrow, you understand? Do you hear me? If she doesn’t show, I’ll come after her. And I’ll find her. She can’t hide from me. You understand? You tell her.”

He was going kill her.

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Madeleine found me propped up against the wall on the floor next to the door. My satchel lay beside me and Pitt’s revolver in my hand. Blood from the gash to my head when I hit the wall had dried and covered my ear where it had pooled. I still had buzzing in my ears but my vision had cleared. Upon hearing the door open, I raised my gun; if that was that mongrel again, he wasn’t going to leave this place alive.

The first thing that met Madeleine’s shocked and horrified eyes was the utter destruction of her apartment, “No, no, no!” she cried in anguish and disbelief. She then caught sight of me and screamed, “Rebecca! My dear God!” and dropped to her knees to comfort me. “Rebecca—”

“I’m all right,” I managed to utter as I lay the gun on top of my satchel, “Kepple came back.”

“Look at you,” the pity in her voice made me fear my injuries were worse than I felt them to be, “My God, my sweet Rebecca, we must get you to an infirmary.”

“No. I’m all right now, just a little dizzy. Madeleine, you’ve got to leave. He might come back again. He knows you were going to leave. He wants to kill you.”

Madeleine slung one of my arms over her shoulder and put her arm around me, “Let me help you to a chair,” she said as she lifted me upright. We hobbled over to an upturned armchair and with great dexterity, righted the chair and sat me in it. Examining the gash to my head, she confirmed, “Thank goodness it’s only a small cut. Sit still.” Madeleine quickly went to her bedroom and returned just as quickly with a basin of water, a blue bottle of carbolic acid and what appeared to be a clean menstrual cloth. Carefully washing the congealed blood from my face and hair, she assured me, “He won’t return—”

“He found your money, Madeleine,” I interrupted with much anxiety for her safety, “he knows you were going to leave. He wants to see you—”

“First we’ll fix you. Then we’ll fix Harry.” She daubed some carbolic acid on my wound, which made me flinch and brought back memories—bad memories. Madeleine continued, “I’m sorry. This must be quite painful.”

“I’ve survived much worse,” I quipped.

She cupped my chin and looked me squarely in the eyes, “You are an enigma, Rebecca Davies. Another secret?”

She wasn’t listening to me, “Madeleine, he wants to kill you!”

“He won’t. I’m his best asset. He may rough me up a little and insist on more frequent coital access but he won’t kill me.”

“How can you be so complacent? How can you give yourself to that animal? Look what he’s done to your place! And he’s stolen all your savings!”

Madeleine stopped pampering me and took in the utter destruction of her beloved apartment and possessions. She finally confessed, “This isn’t the first time this has happened, my sweetness, and it won’t be the last. I will pick myself up again. I will leave this place and I will make a new life for myself in England.”

She was a pessimist and an optimist all rolled into one and she called me an enigma. “How much did he take?” I asked quietly.

“One thousand, six hundred and twenty pounds.”

I was astounded, “That’s a small fortune. Why didn’t you keep it in a bank?”

“Harry has spies and informers everywhere, even in a bank. He would have found out that I was cheating him soon enough. And, do you know what the upshot of all this is? He does the same.”

“What do you mean?”

“All his money—and now all of mine—is hidden in his place. He doesn’t trust the banks. ‘Who needs the piddling interest when I’ve got my little whores and footpads,’ he says. Come, let’s get you something to eat and into bed.”

“I could do with a measure of your fine brandy...”

“Of course.” Madeleine went to her cabinet and found two unbroken glasses amongst the debris and poured a good quantity in each.

“You’re not going to see him?” I asked desperately hoping she would say she wouldn’t.

“I’m not going to run, Rebecca,” she said handing me a glass, “To the Queen.”

It saddened me to watch Madeleine survey her broken treasures lying strewn around her apartment along with her dreams of a new life. I was determined that this time another person would not pay for my stupidity.

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The hotel foyer was almost deserted when the large longcase clock chimed the half hour after three. A porter sat beside his trolley quietly reading the previous day's newspaper. The desk clerk, his back turned to the room, fingered through a file of reservation cards on the back wall shelf and one dishevelled guest sat sprawled on the richly upholstered Borne settee in the centre of the lobby, snoring.

After sneaking away from Madeleine, I had made my way to the Menzies and entered the lobby. It was with horror that I came across this scene for I recognised the incongruous pile of mismatched attire that clothed Turner. I quickly rushed by him, my head bent and my face concealed by my bonnet, ignored by both the desk clerk and the porter, and silently ran up the stairs toward my room, without interrupting the rhythm of Turner's wheezing.

Sauntering down the stairs, too intent on cursing Turner for sleeping on the job to register who I was, was Johnson. My heart to skipped a beat as we passed each other on the first floor landing.

Reaching the top of the second floor, I ran to my room, my hand so jittery, I could hardly insert the key. Once unlocked, I hastened inside and secured my door to the outside world.

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Johnson reached the dozing Turner and kicked his boots. "Is this the way you keep a lookout for the boy?" Johnson's whisper demanded.

Turner sat up and stammered, "It was only for a second, Boss."

Johnson looked about then approached the desk clerk. "Where's the other fellow, Hobson?" he asked curtly, startling the clerk.

"Mr Hobson doesn't work Sundays, Sir. May I assist you?"

"Yeah. He was going to tell me if you had a Robert Davies staying here. From Wangaratta. The Royal Victoria."

The young man hesitated, "Sir...I do apologise...but I am not permitted to divulge that sort of information."

"You got the cards right there in front of you. Take a look."

"Sir...I can't..."

Johnson withdrew the revolver from his belt and placed it on the desk, his intention clear, and said, “Yeah, you can.”

The shocked desk clerk looked around nervously, catching the eye of the porter who stood, discarding the newspaper. Johnson noticed this and nodded to Turner, who, despite his lack of mental acumen, understood and rose to block the porter.

“Look!” Johnson demanded of the clerk.

The clerk fretfully fingered through the file of cards and announced, “Sir, there is no Robert Davies here.”

“Give me that!” Johnson demanded. With shaky hands, the clerk passed Johnson the file box. He rummaged through quickly and found no Mr Robert Davies. He went through the cards again and, this time, stopped at Miss Rebecca Davies and pulled the card out. Further down the card, the clerk had written, ‘*Referred by the Royal Victoria, Wangaratta*’.

“Room two thirty-two,” crowed Johnson, “Found you.” He turned to Turner, “This way,” and led the way loping up the two flights like men possessed of the devil.

The desk clerk called to the porter, “Fetch the constables!”

On the second floor, Johnson and Turner stopped in front of two thirty-two, guns drawn.

“This ain’t our room, Boss.” Turner astutely observed.

“Shut up, you idiot. The molly boy’s here.”

Turner’s confusion was obtuse, “Two rooms away?”

Johnson tried the door knob. Locked. With a massive effort, Johnson kicked the door open and they burst into the room. What they saw there was no one. A quick search of the room—under the bed, inside the wardrobe—confirmed the room was empty except for a red valise. Johnson grabbed it and flung the lid open. It, too, was empty save a mackintosh, trousers and shirt, and a crumpled cabbage tree hat. The chest of drawers contained little more: some under clothes, a rolled-up bandage and personal grooming items.

Turner picked up a pile of clothing from the floor: a skirt, bodice, bonnet and a green overcoat. “Wrong room, Boss, this is sheila’s clobber.”

“He dressed as a slammock, you moron. That’s why we couldn’t find him.” Johnson wandered to the window and peered out into the predawn darkness and saw a figure running down the street, away from the hotel, “There!”

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After I locked the door behind me, I tore off my outer clothing and fumbled quickly through my valise, frantically donning my trousers and shirt. I had managed to climb out of my

window and gingerly work my way along the face of the building to an open balcony which led inside to the corridor just as Johnson and Turner burst into my room. I was grateful that the hotel provided these quiet open-air areas for their guests. Making my way stealthily along the corridor, I found the service door and ran down the servants' access to the rooms to the ground floor and out the side door.

There, I ran for my life eastward along Bourke Street, then turned into Queen Street toward the river. I thought I could find refuge in St Paul's Cathedral, even though it was Anglican. My plan to help Madeleine had fallen apart and what I needed now was a safe haven to think. The gun in my satchel thumped heavily against my side as I dashed through the deserted, gaslit streets, and dark, unlit alleyways, empty of all traffic save a night soil cart going about its business. Soon, in a couple of hours, worshippers would be on their way to early morning mass.

Running down Elizabeth Street, I finally reached Flinders Street and saw the cathedral only a block away. I looked behind me and was aghast to see Johnson and Turner in pursuit. I turned into Flinders Street and ran for my life toward the cathedral. Reaching Swanston Street, I made a hasty decision and turned toward the Prince's Bridge, deciding not to cross over it but to jump the railway lines and make a dash down to the river's edge to hide beneath it.

My boots slogged in the river's swampy verge, slowing me down considerably. This was not good. Scaling back up the incline to the grassy rise, I fumbled for Pitt's revolver in my satchel and, just as I took it out, a shot rang out and the projectile whizzed by my head. I stumbled and fell, losing the grip I had on the gun.

"Don't shoot, you idiot!" I heard Johnson yell to Turner, "We need him to get the money back! Get him!"

I groped around in the dark desperately trying to find the gun and could see Turner closing in on me followed a few feet behind by Johnson. Turner was upon me just as I got to my feet and turned to run. He walloped me from behind knocking me off balance and, once again, I was on the ground smarting from the blow to my back.

Johnson ambled over and found Pitt's gun in the grass. Slipping it into his belt, he stood over me and said, "Keep calm, you little prick, and you won't get hurt."

Staggering to my feet, I sputtered, "Yeah, I'm sure I can trust you," as I painfully straightened up to meet my nemesis, face-to-face.

Turner, standing behind me, emitted his shrill maniacal laugh, his foul-smelling breath hot on my neck.

“You killed my boy Pitt,” Johnson accused.

“He was going to kill me,” I said defiantly.

“Then you killed Perce.”

“No, Pitt killed Perce but you know that. You told him to.”

Johnson found humour in my correct assumption and snorted a derisive laugh.

“Where’s the money?”

“Seems to me if I give you the money, I’m dead.”

“Seems to me you’re dead either way, boyo. The question is whether you want to die quick or slow? Where’s the money?”

I considered my options: none. “In my valise,” I said, “in the police station.”

This caught Johnson by surprise, “You’re bluffing. You’re a defiant little prick, aren’t you?” Without warning, he punched me in the ribs. I fell to the ground, the pain to my newly mended ribs was so intense I lay there cradling my ribcage, trying to alleviate the excruciating pain.

“Pick him up,” Johnson ordered Turner, who gleefully obeyed immediately, grabbing me by the shirt and lifting me upright to face Johnson once more; I was the meat in this repulsive sandwich of putrid bread.

“Let me have a go at him, Boss,” Turner urged Johnson over my shoulder, “I’ll make him talk. Then I can shoot him, yeah?”

The thought of Madeleine and Sarah kept running through my mind; these were violent times but why were the submissive and weak sought, humiliated and hurt? If the meek were to inherit the earth, then it seemed to me that it would be only when the strong were done with it.

I could not—would not—allow these two thugs to stand over me. I had only one chance and I took it.

With all the force I could muster, I elbowed Turner in the stomach and pushed Johnson backward and made a desperate dash for the bridge. Both thugs recovered quickly and, in less than four strides, Turner was on me and tackled me to the ground. I turned and he was on top of me, attempting to grab my flailing arms as I pummelled him with all my remaining strength.

It didn’t take long for him to subdue me, pinning my arms to the ground, his stinking body completely covering mine. I gave up the fight and glared at him, his malevolent grin telling me he was relishing in the thought of harming me further. A look of befuddlement momentarily overcame him, then realisation. To my utter disgust, he slid his filthy hand over

my chest and, with a sneering, debauched grin informed Johnson, “Hey, Boss, the boy’s got paps,” and ground his pelvis into mine. I struggled to free myself from this animal when Johnson pulled him off me and pulled me up to face him once more.

“Is that so?” Johnson remarked as he tore open my shirt to reveal my camisole and the form of my breasts beneath. “Well, well, well,” he said, looking at me with pruriency, “that explains much.” The glint of Sarah’s silver locket around my neck caught his eye. “A nice little trophy,” he sneered, “I’ll have that when we’re through with you.”

Turner got himself to his feet and slavered, “Let me have some fun, Boss.”

“Maybe we’ll both have some fun. You little trollop. Then you’ll tell me where you hid the money.”

Johnson tore open the rest of my shirt and grabbed me around the waist. I closed my fist and hit him as hard as I could about his head. He released his bear-like grip and grabbed my throat with his large hand and squeezed hard. His other hand struck me across the face with such force that scintillas of light shot across my vision. He raised his hand again...

No more!

The look on Johnson’s face was one of disbelief and horror when he realised that I had shot him. I had grabbed my gun from his belt and fired at point-blank range into his stomach.

Turner stood transfixed, “Boss?”

I stepped back and watched as Johnson’s knees buckled and he fell to the ground, blood gushing from the gaping wound.

Turner raced to his side, skidding to his knees next to him, “Boss? Boss, what happened? You all right?”

I could only stand and watch as the life drained from Johnson’s body, Pitt’s gun hot in my hand.

Turner’s confusion finally cleared when he felt the stickiness of Johnson’s warm blood on his hands and pooling around his knees. He swivelled on his haunches to me, grabbing at the revolver in the pouch on his belt only to see the gun in my hand pointed at his head only a few inches away.

“Don’t,” I warned, “you don’t have to die. Just let me go—”

“You bitch!” he yelled, as he pulled out his gun. In that instant, I fired. The bullet penetrated his skull under his eye and exploded from the back of his head sending shards of bone and brain onto his now-dead boss. Turner’s hand spasmed, causing the gun to discharge twice into the blackness and his limp carcass slumped to the ground.



All was quiet—deathly quiet. The drama that ended with the death of my pursuers went unobserved and unmourned. I looked at their blood-soaked corpses and felt nothing: no remorse, no pity, no grief; I did not even feel the relief that this should have brought me, relief that this was finally at an end.

With renewed determination, I rifled through Johnson's and Turner's pockets and found some cash, a pocket watch and other miscellaneous items and ephemera, all of which I left. In Johnson's waistcoat pocket I found their hotel key and a receipt from the Left-luggage Office at the Melbourne Terminus. Also there, was my missing valise tag and, smeared with dried blood, a business card for the Menzies Hotel. That's how they found me! And by the looks of the card, the Wangaratta desk clerk did not give me up easily.

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I crested the bank of the Yarra as the faintest glint of first light became discernible in the east.

Something had changed in me; something took hold of my conscience and shook out all empathy and remorse. Nothing mattered anymore—not what I had just done, not what I had done to Pitt or Harper, not what I was about to do. My soul would surely burn in hell when my time came but now it was my heart that burned fiercely, with hatred, retribution and a primal rage for justice.

Reloading and securing the gun in my satchel, I did up the few buttons that remained on my shirt and ran my hands through my hair in an unsuccessful attempt to make myself presentable to the first person I met. And the first person I met was a railway waggonette driver loading the last of the previous day's parcel arrivals at the railway goods shed in Flinders Street.

I fronted the wiry fellow and my soiled, dishevelled clothing and my dour expression gave him a start. He must have heard the shots but made no mention of it.

“Can I help you there, matey?” he asked warily.

“Carlton. How do I get there?”

“It's about one and a half miles straight up Elizabeth Street. I'm taking this load to the university. Carlton's on the way if you want a lift.”

I gave a slight nod of my head. This was much gratitude I could muster.

“Right-o. Hop on,” he instructed as he secured the last of the few parcels on the tray. Pulling himself onto the bench beside me and taking up the reins, he gently flicked them on the horses' hindquarters and urged his team on with a click of his tongue and a quiet, “Walk on.” He gave me a sideways glance and remarked, “Looks like you could do with a visit to the hospital.”

“Grattan Street,” I said ignoring his concern, “you know it?”

“I’ll say.” then looked at me square-on, “Now what would a young fellow like you be wanting in a fine place like Grattan Street?”

I sat looking forward, oblivious of his question.

He persisted, “You’re not looking to do any thieving, are you? Because I won’t be—”

“I’m looking for someone.”

This seemed to placate his fear of being an accessory to a crime. He smiled, “Right-o then. What’s the address?”

“The gaudiest house on the street.”

The wiry driver chortled, “Ah, the Kepple eyesore. And what would you be wanting with that ‘gentleman’?” The tone of his remark told me much about the snake who manipulated Madeleine’s life like a puppeteer.

I gave the driver a cold stare and said quietly, “You need not know.”

It was then that the driver noticed the blood spattered on my trousers and shirt and his friendly demeanour changed to one of concern, not for me but for himself this time.

Situated on higher ground east of Elizabeth Street and near the Carlton Gardens that only thirty years prior had been a grassy forest, the ‘Kepple eyesore’ stood brazenly among the more elegant piles of stone and brick. What the new, three-storey mansion lacked in taste was more than made up for in size, taking up two allotments and protected from intruders by a six foot high wrought-iron fence topped with spearpoints. I gazed at the garish monolith from across the street in the dim early morning light. No one was on the street even though the church bells at the nearby Roman Catholic churches were calling. The rich, obviously, attended the midmorning mass, not early morning. But I doubted that Harry Kepple was a man of faith. What I didn’t doubt was my ability to get inside.

The utter lack of remorse and the single-minded determination that had consumed my very essence saw me enter through the front gates and try the front door without a care that anyone saw me. It was locked, as I had expected, so I made my way around the periphery of the building until I came across the door to the kitchen at the back. Turning the knob, I found the door was unlocked. I momentarily hesitated. Godfrey Saunders and his words came to mind: *Your path is predetermined by God. There’s no choice. Whatever you do, God has chosen for you. You can’t go against God’s will.*

“If God has predetermined my life,” I thought, “and my destiny is to die here, so be it.” With renewed resolve, I withdrew the revolver from my satchel and entered. All was

quiet. There were no servants scurrying about as should have been the case, no fire had been rekindled in the stove, no aromas of cooked food; perhaps Sundays were the servants' free day.

I stole my way through the kitchen, along the passage, through the green baize-lined door and into the foyer. Not a soul to be seen and not a sound to be heard. I climbed the two flights of stairs without any interruption. The house was, for intents and purposes, completely deserted.

At the top of the second-floor landing, a faint whimpering caught my attention and I stopped and listened. It sounded like a dog and it was emanating from the last room at the end of the short corridor. As I neared the room, I noticed the door was slightly ajar and, accompanying the whimpering, I could hear sibilant grunting.

Carefully looking about me and making sure I was alone in the corridor, I slowly pushed the door a little further open and what I saw made my contempt and loathing boil the surface: there, on a narrow bed in this small, windowless room, was the object of my hatred, Harry Kepple, completely nude and lying on top of a young, naked girl, engaging in coitus. She was not more than twelve years of age and her arms and legs were bound to each corner of the bed. She was struggling, whimpering and in obvious pain, her eyes screwed shut, her childish face distorted into an anguished grimace.

This despicable, fat, repulsive being that I refused to call human, was destroying another life. How I abhorred him and how I wanted to put my gun to his head and put him down, and out of everyone's misery.

Neither heard me close the door behind me or saw me approach.

I stuck the muzzle of my gun against the back of this bastard's head and ordered in a low, controlled tone, "Get off her."

He stopped in mid-stroke and turned his head to me.

"I know you. The recruit." In an instant, his reaction was to make a grab for the gun. My reflexes were much sharper than his despite the beating I had just endured, and I evaded the grab, retaliating with a brutal smash of the gun against the side of his head. This only stunned him momentarily and, once again he reached for the gun, so I hit him again, and again for good measure.

Subdued, still conscious and with blood oozing from the blows to his head, he groaned but remained in place. The girl struggled violently but, tethered as she was, she was pinned down by this beast. I reiterated in the same tone, "Get off her. Now!"

Groggily, he stumbled off the bed and stood bent over, trying to gain his equilibrium. Looking at this vile apology for a creature made in God's image made me sick to my stomach.

"Untie her," I ordered, pointing my gun at his corpulent, hairy body.

From his doubled-over stance, he slowly turned his head to me and a malevolent sneer crossed his face. A few drops of blood dripped onto the floor. "You will pay for this, with your life," he promised savagely.

"What makes you think you will survive this?" I countered calmly, "Untie her now."

He stood to his full height and faced me. The sight of his swollen belly and the rest of his flabby, hirsute body, was truly repugnant. "Or what?" he snarled.

"Or this," I said and shot his foot, the bullet passing through it and lodging in the floorboard.

He screamed an unholy cry and collapsed to the floor in agony. The girl screamed and became more distressed, crying and struggling in desperation.

"You bitch. You fucking bitch. I'll kill you and that whore, Madeleine," he yelled.

"I said untie her."

"You're dead," he panted, less resolutely than before as he lifted himself off the floor with great effort and grunting with pain. With intense exertion, he undid the bindings to the girl's wrist and ankle closest to him. She immediately lifted herself up and with much agitation, attempted to undo the knot to her other wrist, crying uncontrollably all the time.

"The other side," I said.

He understood me, and hobbled around the end of the bed, his face even uglier, contorted by the pain to his foot.

"You won't get away with this," he threatened as he undid the two remaining constraints. The girl immediately got off the bed and ran to a corner of the room and huddled down into it, sobbing uncontrollably.

I was appalled to see blood smeared on the sheet. She must have suffered tremendous pain by this callous monster when he forced himself into her. He was going to pay for this and he would never do this to anyone else.

"Get on the bed," I ordered, "face up."

He hesitated. "What do you want?" he said, his rancour changing to appeasement and expecting to placate me, "You want Maddie's money? Is that what you came for?"

"Yeah, I want Maddie's money. And much more. Get on the bed."

"I'll give you her money. Let me get it for you."

“Kepple, on the bed. I’m not going to tell you again.”

He finally acquiesced, groaning as he lifted his damaged and heavily bleeding foot onto the bed and lying down on his back.

I slowly approached him and warned, “If you move, I will shoot you again. In the head. Stretch out your arms.”

He complied. I quickly lashed his arm with the same binding he had used on the girl, then went to the other side and did the same, stretching out his arms as far as they would go. He cried in agony as I tied his ankles, pulling his legs as far apart as he had done to the little girl. I looked at his penis, shrivelled and flaccid and prodded it with the end of my gun.

“You know, the Mohammedans punish offenders by removing—”

“You won’t get out of this house alive,” he threatened, panicking, “They’ll be here soon. And they’re not as nice as I am.”

“Then we’d better get on with it,” I said, calling his bluff. “Where’s Madeleine’s money?”

His reply was to scowl at me.

I shot his other foot, not a clean shot, unfortunately, grazing his ankle but the result was the same—an indescribable shriek of agony followed by unmanly sobbing.

The girl cried in fear and shrunk lower into her corner. My intention was not to make the girl more frightened than she already was. Strewn on the floor were some soiled pieces of clothing, which, when I picked them up to cover her, realised they were hers. She must have been a street urchin picked up by this mongrel to sell off in his whoremongering trade.

Handing the rags to the girl, I said gently, “Everything will be all right. Put these on.”

She hesitantly took the items, looking up at me with her tear-soaked face and pleading eyes, her sobbing abating to a hiccough.

“What’s your name?”

“D...Daphne,” she choked.

“Daphne, put on your clothes. You’re coming with me as soon as I finish with this...man.”

Daphne rose to her feet and it was then that I saw the brutality she had suffered by the hands of this animal. Her small, emaciated body was covered in welts and bruises, mostly to her inner thighs. There, too, was evidence of blood, her blood, and emissions from that animal.

“He won’t hurt you again. Ever,” I promised, controlling the anger and hatred I felt for this vile destroyer of lives.

I turned to the perpetrator of those heinous acts on the girl, “You’ll pay for this, Kepple. And for what you did to Madeleine. And not just by returning the money you stole from her.” I was by his side and put the muzzle of my gun to his shoulder, “Where. Is. The money?”

Kepple was sobbing, writhing, hurting, bleeding—everything Daphne experienced—but he would not answer me.

“I have no qualms about shooting you—”

“I know where it is.” Daphne’s feeble, quavering voice offered Kepple a reprieve. I turned to her and saw her pleading face looking up at me, fearful and trembling, “I saw where he put some money.”

Kepple turned his head and spewed out an invective, “Shut up you little guttersnipe! Shut up!”

“Show me,” I asked.

Daphne led me downstairs, the pain to her small frame was obvious as she gingerly took each step. She led me into the kitchen and pointed to the wide, square flue that connected the kitchen stove to the chimney stack, “There.”

If the cache was there, it would explain why there was no fire in the stove. I removed the access cover that was about a foot up along the flue and felt down inside it. My hand connected with a metal handle, which, in turn, was connected to the lid of a metal strong box that fit neatly inside the venting shaft.

I pulled it out and was dismayed when I saw it was locked.

“He put the key there,” Daphne proffered, now a little more composed than before.

I pulled out the drawer she pointed to and found a small cluster of keys tied together with string, nestled amongst the knives in the drawer. Also hidden at the back of the drawer was a new snub-nosed revolver. I understood now why he was so willing to lead me to the money.

It took me only two tries to find the correct key. The box was filled to capacity with bank notes and gold sovereigns. I recognised the wads of notes on top as being Madeleine’s and, without hesitation, I emptied the entire contents of the strong box into my satchel, filling it to overflowing.

My mission was almost complete. Replacing the box in its original cavity and securing the cover to the flue, I turned to the youngster who stood, statue-like, following my every move, “Daphne, where are your parents?”

Her eyes lowered to the floor, “I don’t have any,” she whispered apologetically.

“Do you want to come with me?”

She looked up at me confused, scared and undecided. Her eyes darted from my face to my trousers, back and forth, until it dawned on me how I presented to her.

“Daphne, I’m a girl. Like you. I’m not like that man up there.”

I could see the confusion and turmoil this was causing her and I gently reassured her, “I won’t hurt you, I promise. Will you come with me?”

Even though her face was crinkled with doubt, she gave me an almost indiscernible nod, then returned her gaze to the floor.

“Will you stay here and wait for me? I have to do something.”

She looked up at me again and gave another slight nod.

“Promise?” I asked.

“Promise,” she said quietly.

I gave her a smile and went to the knife drawer and tossed the keys back in, removing the small pistol and a knife. “I’ll be right back,” I said, “wait here, all right?”

With her nodded confirmation, I left.

When I returned a few minutes later, Daphne was exactly where I had left her; she kept her promise just as I had kept mine—to Kepple.

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There was an ample number of hansom cabs running along Grattan Street, ferrying worshippers from midmorning mass back home or to the numerous entertainments around town but I had trouble hiring one. We didn’t offer a picture of the normal Sunday recreationalists, Daphne and I, she, wearing oversized shoes and one of Kepple’s jackets, which she obstinately refused until she realised how chilly it was, and I, dirty, dishevelled and spattered with dried blood, carrying a canvas bag heavy with secreted gold, bank notes and firearms. However, once I showed the next cabbie the two gold sovereigns I would pay him, he begrudgingly took us to our destination.

Once arrived at eighty-seven Collins Street, I knocked on Madeleine’s door—I needed her assistance once more and to explain why I had left without notice or warning.

The door opened to a cautious crack but, once she saw it was me, Madeleine flung it open and exclaimed, “Where did you go? Why did you dis—” She stopped mid-sentence when she took in my appearance. “Why are you dressed like—Are you hurt?” She was even more bewildered when she saw Daphne, “Who is this?”

“May we come in, please?” I asked gently in an attempt to allay her alarm.

Madeleine stepped aside, baffled, as I ushered in Daphne.

“This is Daphne,” I began, “and she needs our help.”

Madeleine looked from me to the girl and back to me, “Is that Harry’s coat?” she asked fearfully.

My reticence only confirmed what she suspected. Madeleine’s reaction was one of shock and disbelief, shaking her head and envisaging the terrible consequences my actions would most likely bring upon her.

Madeleine looked about the room and took in what little she had left, the rest having been destroyed by the wrath of this maniac. She had worked diligently all morning to remove the aftermath of Kepple’s fury and her apartment was tidy but it was bereft of her gregarious personality.

She visibly blanched and her knees gave way as she sat on an armchair to ponder her fate. Her next utterance was filled with fear, “What have you done? Do you know what he’s capable of doing?”

“He won’t do anything,” I quietly assured her and took Daphne’s hand in mine. “Daphne’s been hurt. She needs someone to help her. Where’s the nearest infirmary?” I asked, fully expecting Madeline to ask us to leave.

Madeleine’s demeanour changed, “Oh, child, I am so sorry.” She looked up at me, “What happened?”

I was reluctant to be specific, for Daphne’s sake; I didn’t want to frighten her any more than she already had been. “Do you know the little windowless room on the second floor?”

Madeleine was horrified; she knew that little room very well and she knew what went on in it.

“That’s where I found her,” I continued, “He was there...”

Madeleine got to her feet immediately and took Daphne’s hand and questioned me only with her eyes.

I replied, “I made him stop. She is in a lot of pain.”

“Come with me, Daphne.” Madeleine said, leading her into the bedroom, “We’ll try to make the pain go away.”

The satchel was heavy on my shoulder. Opening one of the drawers to the display cabinet, I emptied the notes and sovereigns quietly into it, retaining both firearms, then sat myself down on the sofa. I was dead tired. All I wanted to do was sleep. From the bedroom, I could hear Madeleine talking kindly and gently to Daphne, reassuring her that she would mend and everything would be all right as she washed the girl’s body and tended to the



callous inflictions. She asked questions but Daphne was withdrawn and unwilling to relive the trauma she suffered.

My mind was numb, devoid of any feeling. My entire body was in pain where it had been punched and pummelled by three of God's most despicable creations. I must have dozed off for the next thing I heard was a rapid and frantic rapping on the door.

Madeleine flew into the room from the kitchen, terrified. I leapt to my feet, pulled out Pitt's revolver and aimed it at the door—no one was going to harm any of us anymore.

The pounding on the door became louder, insisting to be let in.

"Maddie!" called a female voice, "Maddie, are you in there? Open up!"

"That's Christine," Madeleine said as she ran to the door and unlocked it.

The second it was opened, an hysterical young woman pushed her way in and blared, "Have you heard? Have you heard? Someone's done Harry in! Harry's dead!"

"What are you talking about? Harry? Dead?" Madeleine glanced at me with a look of panic.

"Yes! Georgiana went this morning to pay her dues and found him in the Chamber tied to the bed... with his throat slit."

Madeleine gasped in horror. I replaced the gun in my satchel and sat down, reluctantly reliving the events.

"He was totally naked! And," continued Christine, with a certain amount of glee coating her shock, "both of his feet had been shot off!"

Madeleine looked at me in wide-eyed disbelief as Christine gave further gory details, "And his cock-a-doodle was cut off—"

"Oh, God," Madeleine cried; I sat unmoved by the details or my actions.

"...and shoved in his mouth!"

This was too much for Madeleine; her legs gave way in a swoon and she crumpled to her knees to the floor, her back to me. She buried her head in her hands and her shoulders convulsed. Christine was immediately on her knees beside her, consoling her.

I couldn't believe that news of the demise of that extorting mongrel would bring Madeleine any sort of grief for him.

Madeleine looked up at Christine, her hands still covering of her mouth, and asked, "Do the police know who did it?"

"No, and quite frankly, I don't think they give a damn."

"What about his hoard? Has anyone found it?"

“Georgiana said she was going to get some of the girls and tear the place apart and find it.”

I watched them both as they sat there, looking at each other and digesting the news and its ramifications. Finally, Madeleine whispered, “My God, Christine, do you know what this means?”

All Christine could do was nod her head and agree when Madeleine added, “We’re free of that bastard.”

Madeleine turned to me. Her initial look of shock and disbelief slowly turned to one of realisation. I watched her as the fear she felt was replaced with hope. She turned back to Christine and asked, “Who else knows?”

“Apart from Georgiana and the police, you’re the first I’ve told,” she said as she made her way to her feet, “He treated you the worst, even though you were the best.” She made her way to the door and declared, “I’m off to tell the rest of the girls,” and, with a big smile on her face, added, “And to look for that money!” She disappeared through the doorway as quickly as she had appeared, closing the door behind her.

Madeleine rose to her feet and approached me, “Rebecca—”

“Please don’t ask me anything,” I said, then added as an excuse, “Consider this another of my secrets.”

I was exhausted and desperately needed rest, a bath and sustenance.

“Daphne’s settled and I’ve given her a draught to help her sleep,” Madeleine said sitting closely beside me. “Let’s tend to you.”

With much gentleness, Madeleine took care of my bruises and helped me wash. Her ministrations were loving but borne of gratitude, not of desire. She prepared a meal for the both of us and then I slept for the rest of Sunday. Mass and confession were discounted; God didn’t abandon me, I abandoned God.

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“There are things I have to do,” I said to Madeleine as we finished our late breakfast. “May I borrow an outfit, please?”

My last task, before I left Melbourne for good, was to finalise my dealings with the Menzies Hotel and the occupants of room two thirty-four.

Madeleine provided me with a fresh outfit from her ‘day dresses’ armoire and, in the early afternoon, I made my way to the Left-luggage Office of the Melbourne Terminus. There, I produced the receipt I had taken from Johnson’s vest pocket and was shown the two carpetbags he had left there only two days prior—it seemed like a lifetime ago.

They were heavy and, opening them in a private room, I was not too surprised to find they contained the proceeds from the gold escort: wads of bank notes, a few bags of newly minted gold sovereigns and twenty pounds of pure gold ingots. Quickly calculating the value of those ingots alone, at the current Royal Mint rate of four pounds, five shillings, per ounce, resulted in a total of one thousand, three hundred and sixty pounds, or about ten years' wages.

Once again, my conscience was in turmoil. Once again, my need won out over rectitude. "*They would have been insured,*" I thought, ameliorating my guilt.

I emptied all the bank notes into one bag and returned it to the Left-luggage Office, paying a week's further storage on it and the storage due up to now: two shillings and ten pence, and advising that my 'cousin' would be back from the country to collect it then—a lie, of course.

My next stop was the Menzies Hotel.

With Johnson's heavy carpetbag in hand, I struggled to the cab rank and lifted the bag into it, requesting the driver to take me to the hotel. "And, driver," I added, "I need to make several stops. Will you attend me at these stops, please? It will be worth your waiting."

"Certainly, Miss."

It was only a short ride to the Menzies. As I alighted, I handed the driver threepence—half the fare—and reassured him, "I shan't be too long. I need to collect the rest of my luggage. Thank you, driver, for waiting and for trusting me."

"My pleasure, Miss. If you can't trust a well-dressed young lady going to the grandest hotel in Melbourne on a beautiful Monday afternoon, the world is lost to the devil."

I smiled at his good humour and hurried inside where I was met by a scene of some commotion. The foyer was abuzz with several porters and a few guests still discussing the events of early Sunday morning: a door was kicked in and a guest was kidnapped! Or, at least, that was the gossip.

Mr Romsford, the hotel's manager, was frantically busy behind the desk when I approached.

"Miss Davies!" he exclaimed, confounded, "We thought you were lost to us." This brought the unwanted attention of all those around.

"Ah, no, Mr Romsford, I am safe," I reassured the manager, adding with as much feigned surprise as I could muster, "Whatever made you think otherwise?"

"A dreadful incident, Miss," he announced with much drama, "two ruffians, unknown to us, gained access to your room by breaking down the door and, when you didn't return

yesterday, we all assumed the worst scenario, that you had been taken by force and held for ransom.”

I laughed, not only to allay his fears but at the absurd theatrics of his proclamation. “As you see, Mr Romsford, I am well but I do confess that, if what you say is true, I am quite shaken by the fact that this could have taken place here. I did notice that you admitted two rather...shall we say...odd persons to take up residence on my floor. A Mr Flinders and friend?”

“Hmm, ah, yes. I’ve spoken to Hobson with regard to that however, they have been very quiet and reclusive and have been of no trouble at all.”

“Ah...” I replied, relieved that their true identities had not yet been discovered and I hoped that their bodies had been found and lying unidentified in a cold morgue somewhere.

“Miss,” Romsford hesitated, “Detective John Stevens would like a word with you. Only so that he knows you are safe.”

“Of course,” I said, inwardly cringing at any contact with the police lest they suspect anything of me, “is he here?” I hoped he was not.

“Not at present but I can summon him.”

“Do not bother him. I will drop in on my way out.”

“You are leaving us?”

“Yes. My cousin has offered me a room—in Toorak—until I can find other suitable accommodation. May I retrieve my belongings from my room?”

“Of course.”

“And Mr Hobson stored a red valise of mine for safe keeping. I will take that when I leave.”

“Of course, Miss. We are sorry to see you go.”

With that, I hurriedly climbed the stairs to room two thirty-two, my legs quivering at the thought of being found out in my litany of lies.

The door to my room had been quickly and expertly repaired and, once behind my locked door, I packed all my belongings, few as they were, and left my second valise just inside the door.

I opened the door a little and made sure there was no one around in the passageway. Sneaking out and quickly making my way to room two thirty-four, I slipped the key I had taken from Johnson into the lock. It worked and I entered their room. The chambermaid had tidied it up and possibly had not informed Mr Romsford that neither ‘Mr Flinders’ nor his companion had availed themselves of the room Sunday night.

Rummaging through Johnson's and Turner's bed rolls and carpet bags turned up very little of value, except a few gold sovereigns, which I pocketed. I left all their other possessions in place, including two rifles. From my purse, I retrieved the Left-luggage Office's receipt for Johnson's remaining carpet bag and I placed it in a prominent position on the dressing table. With a final survey of the room, I was content all was in place and, as discreetly as I entered, I left and locked the door behind me.

One last act was to dispose of Johnson's room key. Back in my room, I opened the window and, making sure no one could see me, I threw it as far as I could across the road. If anyone should find it, it would surely be returned to the hotel and questions asked.

I collected my valise and headed downstairs where Mr Romsford had retrieved my stored valise ready for me. With a few more pleasantries exchanged, the porter took both valises and loaded them into the waiting cab. The last words to Mr Romsford were my promise to see Detective John Stevens on my way to Toorak, which would become another broken promise to be added to the deficit side of the Eternal Reckoning Account.

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I stayed with Madeleine and Daphne for another few weeks until the departure of the Nubia, a steamship of the Peninsular and Orient Steam Navigation Company destined for Europe, Egypt, India, China and Japan. During that time, I had directed Madeleine to the drawer full of Kepple's ill-gotten gains—an immense sum of money that had been dishonestly garnered from all his working girls—and left it to her discretion to disseminate. She would share it fairly and equitably with all the mistreated women he had had under his misogynistic control.

Daphne recovered from her injuries and, in time, also would from the traumatic abuse by that monster. She grew stronger day by day and was able to tell Madeleine of her kidnap and brutal rape. She also confessed that she was glad he was dead and that she wished that I had actually shot off both of 'that man's' feet, as Christine had so dramatically reported. I said it was lucky that I had found the kitchen door unlocked. Daphne put forward another revelation: late on Saturday night, after his destruction of Madeleine's apartment, Daphne had been spotted by Kepple on the streets and enticed her by the offer of a free meal to accompany him to his house. There, he took her in by the back and locked the kitchen door, which immediately alarmed her. She witnessed him hide Madeleine's notes, and the keys to the strong box and, being wary of his intentions, unlocked the door when his back was turned, so that she could escape. Unfortunately, his strength overcame her and he carried her away to the 'Chamber'.

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Madeleine and Daphne would form a strong bond that would see them travel to England together and start a new life as adoptive mother and daughter away from brothels and whoremongers.

The steamer Nubia would take me to India and to my adventures in the subcontinent and the East. It would be some twenty-five years before I set foot in Mother England for the first time.

How different my life would have been had I gone with them. Then again, I would never have met Wills.

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