

**Gallery of the Past:  
Writing historical fiction with 19<sup>th</sup> century photography in  
Canada and Australia**

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## Synopsis

This thesis, consisting of a novel and dissertation, explores the writing of historical fiction, and the use of photography as research in visualising the several settings that the characters inhabit. As the novel is set in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the conventions of Victorian-era photography came to the forefront of the research. The story sees two fictional brothers leave their home on Vancouver Island in Canada, each traveling alone, and each with a different weight on his heart. They find themselves in towns with very real, and very documented, histories, and this is where my research into photography began. Joseph Richard, the younger brother, finds work in the town of Yale, on the Fraser River in British Columbia during the early days of the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Yale was a boomtown and major depot during railway construction, and there are many photographs from the 1880s to chronicle its buildings and denizens, its remote and wild surroundings, its place in history.

Paul Richard, the older brother, travels to Melbourne in Australia, and then heads into North-Eastern Victoria to a little town called Glenrowan, where he finds work on the railway as it builds north towards the New South Wales border. The year is 1880 and there is a great deal of ill blood stirring between police and a group called the Kelly Gang. The events taking place around the little camp that Paul shares with his railroad crew form a significant chapter in Australia's history. There are several iconic photographs from the saga of Ned Kelly, and many, many more photographs that document the friends and foes of the bushranger, and the part of North-Eastern Victoria that came to be known as Kelly Country.

The photographs from these histories started my research for the novel, and I quickly found that I needed to learn how to look at them properly, how to try and understand the conventions of Victorian-era photography, the effects it was having on people in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the way that Victorians were learning to see themselves. Nancy Armstrong's book *Fiction in the Age of Photography*, and Allan Sekula's essay 'The Body and the Archive' form two crucial influences to my reading of images, guiding my exploration into how the lower classes were displayed through photography, and how stereotypes were formed and reinforced by the camera.

The exegesis, focused as it is on Victorian-era photography, and on my own research trips to the settings in the novel, is not so much an explanation of the novel, as an exploration of the very interesting world of early photography and the legacy of images that we are left with, as well as the distancing effect of old photographs when one sets out to bring the world in those black-and-white pictures back to life through fiction.

Chapter 1 examines the first pictures I used and the questions that arose for me, once I began to analyse the depictions of Victorian-era people and places. The chapter works through my developing relationship to the material, to the settings of the novel in place and time, and to the characters, both fictional and historical. Chapter 2 records my road trip to Kelly Country in mid-2009, in order to photograph the towns and landscape as a method of immersing myself in that world, and to look at how to best stride the distance between the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 21<sup>st</sup>. I also refer to my early-2009 research trip to Canada, a trip I made in order to photograph what has become of the railway construction town of Yale, and to experience the severe winter beauty of the Fraser Canyon. Chapter 3 furthers the research by focusing on the conventions that arose for Victorians through photography. It explores how industrial and institutional advancement began to categorise the lower classes, how Victorians came to see the lower class as a stereotype, as obsolescent.

## Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed)\_\_\_\_\_

Christopher M. Bowman

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Chapter 2 of the exegesis has been published previously as 'Road trip to the past: Finding a setting through photography', in *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, volume 14:1, April 2010. *TEXT* is an A ranked ERA journal, and I owe editors Nigel Krauth, Kevin Brophy and (previously) Tess Brady many thanks for publishing two of my articles, and for giving me the opportunity to referee the work of academic writers.

Sincere appreciation goes to my partner Ira McGuire, for her patience and love, and her superior cooking, and too many other things to list. I would like to thank my parents John and Gayle Bowman, and my brothers Quentin and Nicholas Bowman, for their unwavering care, and for hours of great phone conversations and distraction. Many thanks to my fellow PhD sufferers: Sue and Mary-Ellen, Brady and Raphael. Thanks as well to the Griffith Centre for Cultural Research, for organising annual symposiums which allowed me to present my ideas, and to assist with conference coordination.

## **Acknowledgement of sole-authored published paper included in this thesis**

Included in this thesis is a published paper in *Chapter 2* for which I am the sole author. Appropriate acknowledgements of those who contributed to the research but did not qualify as authors are included in the published paper.

The bibliographic details for this paper are:

Chapter 2: Bowman C 2010, 'Road trip to the past: Finding a setting through photography', *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, 14:1, <<http://www.textjournal.com.au/april10/bowman.htm>>.

(Signed) \_\_\_\_\_

Christopher M. Bowman

(Countersigned) \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor: Associate ~~Professor~~ ~~Supervisor~~ Nigel Krauth

## Chapter 1 Gallery of the past: Writing historical fiction with 19<sup>th</sup> century photography

My aim in this PhD project is to explore the writing of a historical novel set in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Canada and Australia, particularly the aspect of using photography as research. What happens when we look at a photograph of the past? Can the author truly utilize a photograph from a bygone era, and adapt it—with any authorial conviction—to a story? In that regard, how ‘truthfully’ correct is a photograph from 1880? At a time when a photograph being taken was an event, was a one-shot deal, when technology required a still pose for (depending on the technology) anywhere between a few seconds and over a minute, how accurately could a photograph represent what was supposedly happening, especially since the textual explanation to many photographs has gone missing?



1.1 *CPR engine 1154*, 1904. (Archives of British Columbia: Canadian Pacific Railway)

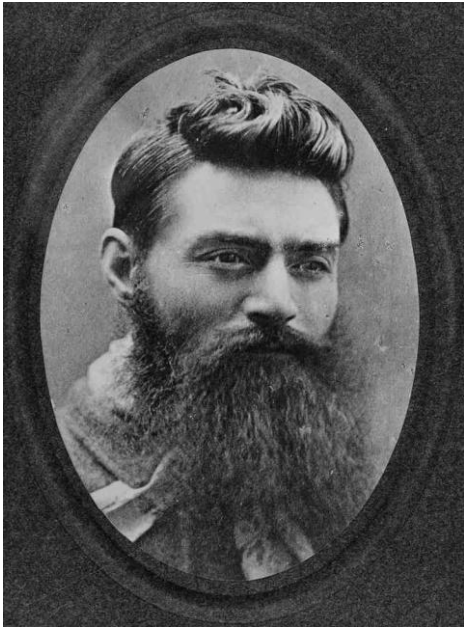
The relevant literature in this project considers contemporary and historical photography, writing on photography, fiction, biography and archival data. I will consider the actual photographs that have caught my attention, and the historical texts that utilize and explain these photographs, where available. Many photos in the research have ‘spoken’ to me in different ways and for different reasons, and with different messages. The message may be that there is a hidden story behind the subjects’ eyes, or that the physical feat being photographed begs further exploration. Before the idea of

writing a novel that takes place during this part of history occurred to me, I was already familiar with two photographs in particular that were ingrained in the histories of Canada and Australia.



1.2 *The Last Spike*, Nov. 7<sup>th</sup> 1885. (Berton 1971, p. xiv)





1.3 *Ned Kelly, photograph taken shortly before execution, 1880.*  
(McMenomy 1984, p. 238)

I have lived a stone's throw from the Canadian railway my entire life. The sound of a train whistle is so familiar that—if not for the scheduled time—I hardly ever register whether the four o'clock day-liner has just gone past or not. The construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway took roughly five years, creating a track that linked Canada from Atlantic to Pacific coasts, at the time the longest railway in the world and one of the largest construction projects in history. 'The Last Spike' photograph above was taken when Donald A. Smith drove the last spike at Craigellachie, British Columbia, on November 7<sup>th</sup> 1885.

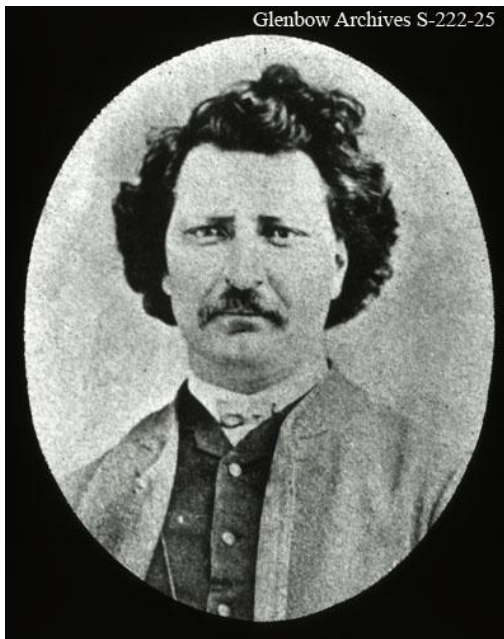
Five years earlier, on the other side of the world, a section of railroad had been torn up by a small group called the Kelly Gang.



1.4 Repaired railway outside of Glenrowan, 1880. (McMenomy 1984, p. 167)

I had read Peter Carey's *The True History of the Kelly Gang* and was enthralled by Ned Kelly. When I finished reading it, I couldn't shake the image of this young man in his twenties making the decisions, he did, fighting with such ferocity and passion, ending up in home-made armour and dragging himself off to tell his small army to stay out of the tragedy. Then I saw the movies, and realized that they weren't the same story I had read. So I read *Our Sunshine*, and *The Jerilderie Letter*, and began to research the complexities of this history, the many sides of the story.

As a Canadian schoolboy, I learned about Louis Riel, and something called the Métis uprising, or the Northwest Rebellion of 1885.



1.5 *Louis Riel*, 1869. (Glenbow Archives)

The epic saga of Louis Riel is just as fascinating as the Kelly story, and maybe more so, as Riel, who was so *insane* that he rode into battle armed with nothing but a giant crucifix, actually held a seat in Canada's federal parliament. Riel was hanged for treason exactly five years and five days after Ned Kelly. He remains the most controversial figure in Canadian history, the subject of dozens of books, novels, histories, at least one play, and an opera. In 1880 the Kelly gang almost derailed a police train. The police on the train were joined by more police, and the Kellys were brought to an end. In 1885 the incomplete Canadian railway moved thousands of militia troops to the prairies within days. Many of them had never fired a shot. Through sheer number, they defeated the Métis and Indian uprising. The two novels that I'm writing (the PhD novel and its sequel to come later) take place in the margins of these stories.

The texts that are the cornerstone of my research are Ian Jones' biography *Ned Kelly: A Short Life* and Pierre Berton's two-volume history of the Canadian Pacific Railway, *The National Dream: The Great Railway 1871-1881* and *The Last Spike: The Great Railway 1881-1885*. Ian Jones is the foremost Kelly historian, and to his surprise, “... Ned Kelly has been dead for almost 129 years, and I am struck by the sobering thought that I have been studying his life for more than half that time” (Jones 2008, p. xv). Pierre Berton's two books on the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) broke all publishing

records in Canada when they were released in 1970 and 1971. A Canadian home is simply not complete without these twin volumes on the shelf.

Of course, these books led to a mountain of research, textual and photographic. Beautiful photographs kept cropping up, demanding attention and pointing to the relationship between photographer and subject, between people in the Victorian era and the world around them. Victorians were experiencing changes to the way they saw their environment, brought about by the camera, by the railway, by industrialization. The far corners of the Empire were being photographed and brought home, but the *near* corners of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century urban landscape were likewise being illuminated for scrutiny.

Every portrait implicitly took its place within a social and moral hierarchy. The *private* moment of sentimental individuation, the look at the frozen gaze-of-the-loved-one, was shadowed by two other more *public* looks: a look up, at one's "betters," and a look down, at one's "inferiors." (Sekula 1986, p. 10)

The photographs that I have found so far in books and archives form a narrative of waypoints that I use as references while I write. When my characters walk the muddy streets of Yale, British Columbia, in 1880, I have pictures of Yale from 1880 to draw upon. When the siege at Glenrowan takes place in my story, there is a catalogue of disturbing photographs taken on the day that can help me imagine the horrors these young men would have gone through, the grief their families would have experienced.



1.6 Corpse of either Dan Kelly or Steve Hart, 1880. (McMenomy 1984, p. 195)

What is amazing about the Kelly saga is the sheer number of photographs that it produced, especially at a time when a photographer needed a tripod, cumbersome equipment, all his paraphernalia, long exposure times, a portable development lab if using wet-plates, and so forth, just to take pictures in the first place.

Photography's contribution to visual stereotyping was a strong one. Victorians came to see their world as images, to absorb a growing catalogue of pictures ranging in theme from the exotic world to the architecture of local buildings, from the countryside to the alleyway, from the Queen's dwellings to the asylum, the prison, the open-pit mine. Photography allowed for a pocket-sized version of the planet's offerings, visible in huge exhibitions like those in Paris and London, where the 'world' came to town to entertain.

Exhibitions doubled the visible world, offering a copy of a reality presumed to be somewhere else, where most Europeans could not see it. By appearing to put viewers directly in touch with its subject matter, the exhibition collapsed seeing into knowing. The visitor to the Cairo exhibit in Paris could see what he would see were he actually to go to Cairo. But the exhibition not only set the world on exhibition outside and apart from the viewer as a spatial field the viewer could survey, it also represented that world as though it actually existed primarily to be seen. Convinced of the fundamental difference between text and world, Europeans began to go looking for the world in other places and usually found it disappointing. (Armstrong 1999, p. 82)

Photography was offering the 19<sup>th</sup> century a visual means of defining where in the world each man and woman stood, giving cues that differentiated between classes and allowed members of society to quickly summarize what and who they were looking at. Photographers, preoccupied with their finicky technology, and bombarded with possibilities, would have fallen into a certain complacency when it came to *seeing*.

As the subject matter of empire grew more diverse, the generic protocols for classifying, posing, shooting, and naming that subject matter grew increasingly predictable... Each new photograph not only repeated a composite or prototypical image of families, celebrities, criminals, street people, natives of the world, and so forth, but each photograph also made that image seem capable of accounting for new and variant details. (Armstrong 1999, p. 21)

Victorians could only see each repeated image as its own representation for so long before beginning to dismiss individual details in favour of finding themes and homogeneity; when bewildered by an overload of information, our natural defence is to categorize, to simplify, to recognize pre-emptively in order to cope. As mentioned, members of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century society would have had to find tools to deal with the growth

and change of their world, from technology to the sciences, to photography, to the standardization of world time, to the speed of railroads and steamships, to the industrialization of labour. Glancing at a photograph and *seeing* a criminal, a noblewoman, a soldier, a chimneysweep, finding a generic recognition instead of taking the time for detailed gazing, would be just one way for people to adjust to the growing archive of photographic images available.

However, the power of owning photographs also allowed for a privatization of the world, an appropriation of the lower classes through images. Victorians became fascinated with the exotic in poverty, in decrepitude and deviation. The powerlessness of the disenfranchised to refuse photography allowed for the photograph itself to resemble control. The poor, the non-white, the 'unfit', became trapped between phrenology, physiognomy, and photography, guilty at a glance of fitting into assumptive categories and unable to fight back. For the middle classes, owning and looking at pictures of the lower classes created reassurance, and a confirmation of place in a progressive society. In a Victorian world, the photograph was a whole new power.



FIGURE 2.7 Loading up at Billingsgate Market, Cutout Figure (c. 1894). Paul Martin.

1.7 Martin c. 1894, *Loading up at Billingsgate Market*, Cutout figure. (Armstrong 1999, p. 101)



FIGURE 1.8 Loading up at Billingsgate Market (c. 1894). Paul Martin.

1.8 Martin c. 1894, *Loading up at Billingsgate Market*. (Armstrong 1999, p. 104)

This understanding of the camera's intent, and of the end result, would not be apparent to all subjects. What is compelling about the photographs of human subjects is their level of involvement: not everyone having their picture taken would know who or what the picture was for. It is much easier to find archival photographs than it is to find their explanations, so the relationship between subject and camera in many cases begs further research.

As mentioned above, I am examining the layers inherent in photography as research, primarily 19<sup>th</sup>-century photography and how a writer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can begin to confidently approach that photography, armed with some understanding of the levels of interaction taking place.

As part of my research for this novel, I went to Canada in order to access archived photos from the era and area in which the story occurs, and to compare the archived images to my own photographs that I took while exploring the remains of that history. These archive photos are important in that they give clear research outcomes: what people wore, both at work and on the street or for trips into the city; what facial hair was in style; what houses and hotels and horse-carts and hats looked like.

The stiff, ponderous and serious gaze of nearly every photographic subject gives the people of the past such an epic and stoic look that it is tempting to assume that seriousness and formality was the order of the day. But how accurate is this

assumption? The question arose with frequency as I studied more photographs and read more about photography.

Take a photo of workmen on a section of railway.



1.9 CPR employees, day of Last Spike, Nov. 7<sup>th</sup> 1885. (Archives of British Columbia: Canadian Pacific Railway)

A man, who would work in shirtsleeves rolled to the elbow, might borrow a waistcoat and put on his finest overcoat, pocket-watch and stovepipe hat for the ceremonious event. He'd freeze for the cameraman as his neighbour muttered jokes out of the side of his mouth, sweat rolling into their eyes and knee-joints creaking. The cameraman would look up from his pocket-watch and thank them, and everyone would collapse away from the pose. The workman might immediately shuck the outer clothing and replace his beaten and dusty hat on his head, roll up his sleeves and pick up a shovel.

One hundred and thirty years later, the viewer of that photograph is amazed that anybody could get any work done with four layers of clothing on in the middle of summer. Likewise for social events or completion of public works: would a huge crowd, standing in mud wearing their Sunday best, have attended if there was not a scheduled photograph happening?

By reading histories, biographies, essays, non-fiction and fiction written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and about the 19<sup>th</sup> century in both Canada and Australia, I have been able to cross-reference and compare literature and to establish what I believe is a solid base for writing and thinking critically and conscientiously about the subject, and for knowing



where to look for more information that I will undoubtedly need as the writing progresses. There will never be enough research done; I will never be finished learning about this part of our histories, but I must be able to say that I have learned enough to begin writing about it, and about the conceptualising of my relationship to the characters.

In an earlier essay, I explored the relationship between a writer and a protagonist when narrative voice and distance—in more than one sense—become issues of concern. I established the metaphor of a type of house, churning and adapting its rooms and window-views to the whims of its inhabitants, as they negotiate an understanding of voice through which to tell a story.

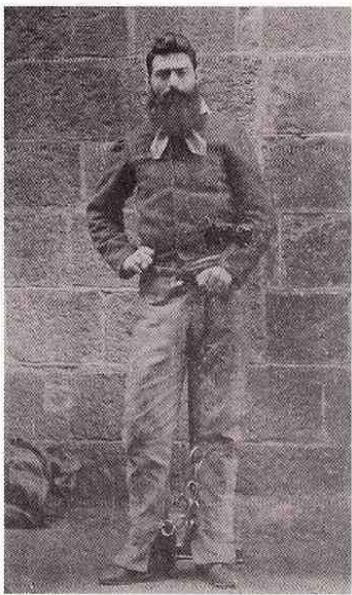
My attempt here, with the creation of a visual “house” inhabited by Joseph Gaines [my character] and me, is to contribute to a more creative analysis of this process, in particular the development of the narrator’s unique voice. I can stand at my “end” of the house, which looks a lot like the place where I live in Australia, and I can shout something down the hall; by the time my voice reaches my character’s end of the house, which is on Vancouver Island and is cluttered with dirty work clothes and remnants of his family life, it has changed to sound like him. He’ll step into his living room and it will emerge behind me, a room borrowed from my past. I’ll rewrite a scene in his front yard and watch out the window as our environment changes shape. (Bowman 2009, ~~parenthesis added.~~)

In this current PhD project, I return to that house, tear the sheets from the furniture and banish some of its ghosts, and begin building anew. This time I have built a communal dwelling, a long common room off of which the many characters live. It is a boarding house of which I am the proprietor, as well as a gallery of all the photographs that I’ve been studying and collecting. They are from the past, present and future of the characters’ place in the story. The sitting room and library are full of the books I’ve been reading as well as those read by my guests. There is a battered copy of *Lorna Doone* (Ned’s favourite), and several copies of *Ocean to Ocean*, brought by the Canadian lads.

In this boarding house, we eat together and lounge on the sofas and wood-backed chairs in the parlour of an evening, or wander out to the porch for a cigar or a plug of tobacco. The constellations are sometimes of the northern hemisphere, Orion and Ursa Major clear, while some nights there is a Southern Cross and something called the Saucepan floating up there above the black earth.

The photo-gallery runs the length of the building, patterned so that between each door is a selection of framed images. I and my characters—both fictional and historical—emerge from our bedrooms in between portraits and landscapes, icons of Canada’s past and icons of Australia’s past. These photographs are our damning truths and our aspirations.

Edward comes out of his room, bearded and overpowering, looking with some apprehension at a photograph of himself taken in what appears to be a prison-yard.



1.10 *Ned Kelly just before execution*, 1880.  
(McMenomy 1984, p. 238)

In the photo, his arm is shrunken, and the other is placed on his hip to hide the fact that it is useless. The stand used to keep him steady for the exposure is just visible behind his legs. Turning his back on the photo, Edward blinks in the lamplight and goes out to the stable to curry his horse.

Joseph Richard, my fictional protagonist, ducks his head to clear the doorframe and turns to study a photograph of a large group of men standing on a railroad track in Canada.



1.11 *Last Spike*, 1885. (Berton 1971, p. xiv)  
\*manipulated by author: fictional J. Richard in background.

It must be a momentous occasion for so many to be gathered there. An old man in a stovepipe hat by the name of Donald A. Smith is pounding a rail spike. Joseph sees himself and someone who must be his brother at the back of the crowd, towering over the other men. He knows that his brother is in Australia, and hasn't responded to his letters in over a year, so the photograph fills him with hope that somehow, in some future universe, they may see each other again.

In December and January 2008 / 2009 I went to Canada to access the British Columbia Archives, book stores, family and friends' libraries, university and public libraries in search of information, literature and photography from the history of the CPR's western division. I travelled up the Fraser Canyon, following the route of the railway from Vancouver on the west coast to Yale, a major hub of railway construction where a large part of the novel takes place, taking photographs to compare to their historical counterparts, and experiencing the harsh geography of the area in the middle of winter.

The next research trip, mid-2009, took me to the Old Melbourne Gaol, Ned Kelly's home in his last days. His mother, also imprisoned there, was allowed to visit her son the day before he was hanged. She worked in the prison laundry while he fell through the trapdoor of the gallows.

From the Old Melbourne Gaol, I drove up the Hume Highway north into 'Kelly Country', again taking my own photos, standing in the places where this history

unfolded. I felt a much deeper relationship to the material once I had submerged myself in the landscape of the infamous exploits. I felt a certain disappointment as well. The area is compelled to cash in on tourist dollars, and is decorated accordingly. In winter, Ned Kelly statues gaze out on dead streets, on bundled locals. For its part, Yale was an alarming reality in its 21<sup>st</sup>-century small town drabness. It is hard to block out the rundown houses and cars, and see back a hundred and thirty years to that world I am working to recreate.

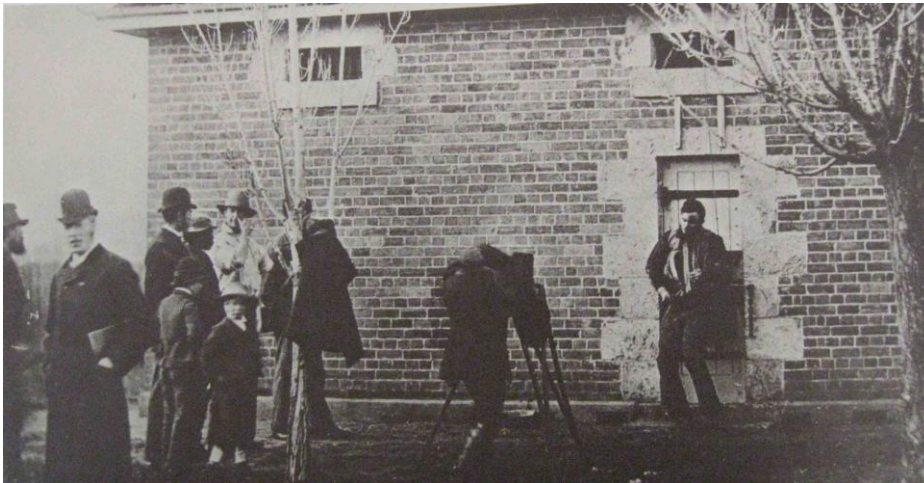
As mentioned, I am writing two novels that encompass the five years between Ned Kelly's hanging and Louis Riel's. The first novel I now submit as this PhD project. The story follows two fictional brothers, exiled in different ways from their home on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Joseph Richard heads to the wild construction city of Yale, where he is employed by the Canadian Pacific Railway, first as a labourer, then as a foreman for a private outfit, where he also earns a living as a reluctant street fighter. His estranged brother Paul Richard has sailed for Australia, and found himself imprisoned in Melbourne. He is released and employed on the railway as it builds north through Glenrowan towards the New South Wales border. Confined by his routine, he becomes fixated on the gang of young men eluding police and holding sway over the district.

The narrative voice is contemporary, purposefully sparse in description—influenced somewhat by the stark voices of writers like Cormac McCarthy and David Adams Richards—as I want to embody a simplicity of vision and a focus on the impressions the characters might have had, rather than an overwrought stuffing of historical trinkets into the narrative, which is tempting when serving up a world that has provided the researching writer with a magnitude of incredible details.

Like Victorian furniture, the Victorian photograph had the inclination to give its best side to the recipient of its charms. The sensuous fabrics, hand-carved hardwood and plump padding are a seductive invitation to accept what is in front of me, and write romantically about this bygone era. But I cannot sit comfortably in the stuffed chair, marvelling at this new (old) world that I have 'discovered' and have decided to write about as if everyone were larger-than-life and unknowable in the sepia-tones of historical distancing. I see a loose thread and I pull at it; the stitching comes slowly apart and there is a glimpse of raw material. Unable to stop, I claw away at the opening,

and as more of the guts appear, I jump up and slash open the furniture, rip out the stuffing and springs, and examine the frame beneath until I am satisfied that I have *seen* the chair.

The photograph offers a frozen moment. I want to explore, through my writing, the moments before and after the exposure, the storytelling and the truths. I find one picture from the Kelly Gang's history particularly disturbing. It is of Joe Byrne's body, hung on a door by the police, for photographers to capture. A few men, a couple of children, mill around.



1.12 *Joe Byrne's corpse*, 1880. (McMenomy 1984, p. 204)

The photographer takes a picture of a photographer taking a picture of a corpse, in broad daylight, trussed up like a trophy. I keep coming back to this image. It makes me want to write about the levels of interaction, the familiarity with death in the Victorian era, the exile of criminals. If a picture is worth a thousand words, I may be writing about these photographs for a long time.

## Chapter 2 Road trip to the past:

### Finding a setting through photography

The first stop on my research trip of Kelly Country was the Old Melbourne Gaol. I had flown into Melbourne, rented a car, and picked up an RACV map titled ‘Kelly Country: 1st Edition’. I was ready for anything. The plan was to follow the little iron Ned masks on the map as they conveniently appeared along the Hume Freeway north into High Country.

I had done my research; I knew the importance and significance of each town, the robbed banks, hangouts, lock-ups and landmarks. What I needed was to *see*, to feel these places in order to write about them.

As mentioned, I had gone on a similar research trip earlier in the year while I was in Canada, following the British Columbia section of the Canadian Pacific Railway as it led from Vancouver, up the Fraser Canyon into the mountain ranges of interior BC. Yale, the culmination of that trip, was a port for the sternwheelers that fed the earlier gold rush and the railway construction. At a few stages of its life Yale was one of the largest cities in North America; now it is a diminished little town overshadowed by the black cliff faces on both sides of the mighty Fraser River.

Two very different research trips for the same novel, to be set in Canada and Australia in the 1880s. The Yale trip moved me through an imposing and stagnant ghost story of one of the largest construction projects in human history, and the inadvertent killer of hundreds of men, most of them Chinese construction workers. The railway formed the backbone of what is now Canada.

This trip, this Kelly Country tour, took me through far-rolling farmlands and busy little communities, each staking their claim on the Kelly legend. Ned Kelly posters, pens, t-shirts, coffee mugs, foam helmets, key chains, bottle openers, stuffed Neds, welcome mats, number plates, a giant statue—everything that has ever turned a tourist dollar. There are at least 20 replica suits of armour to be found among the museums, pubs and gift shops. But there is also a wild and open land that is about farms and vineyards, hiking and silence.

I went to feel these places, these two countries with similar and disparate histories, to dig my boots into the dirt and listen to the wind through eucalypts and cedar. I also went to photograph the remains of dead worlds with my own camera, to compare my photos with their 130-year-old counterparts. The research originated in books, archives and libraries where, one after another, beautiful and striking old photographs kept cropping up, demanding attention and hinting at a bounty of untold stories in both countries.



2.1 *Railway snowshed construction camp, c. 1883.*  
(Archives of British Columbia: Canadian Pacific Railway)

There emerged a narrative in images running parallel to the textual history. As my own archive of images grew, I realized that I was very quickly filtering images I wanted and images I didn't want, those that seemed important and those that could be ignored for my purposes. The relationship between the photographs' subjects and the camera began to take on significance, as did my relationship to the images. I was looking for photographs that would agree in some way with the ideas I had for my narrative; those pictures that did not support my vision of the settings in my story were discarded.

Taken at face value, the photograph is the purest of archival documents, in that it maintains a special closeness to whatever original it happens to copy... But there is a corrosive side to archival desire, and photography pictures this for us as well. As Derrida explains, the archive contains the theory of its own institutionalization, essential to which are the rules determining what the archive must contain in order to be complete and what must be kept out in order for it to seem unified. (Armstrong 1999, p. 16)

In the Victorian era, photography was a new process, developing at different speeds in

different countries; the equipment was expensive and private photography wasn't happening yet, at least among the common class. And yet there are many, many pictures to chronicle the Kelly story and the Canadian railway story.

I use these archival images like a screenwriter would use storyboards. I can lay them out on the table in a sequence. When the novel's hero first arrives in Yale in 1880, I have pictures of Yale taken in 1880 that I can use for visual reference. Chinese workers huddled over a barrel gambling. Men leading pack-mules over a trail hacked into a cliff face. Later in the novel, when another character stands by watching the siege at Glenrowan, there are clear photographs of the police smoking out the Kellys, and a horrifyingly crisp picture of the corpse of either Steve Hart or Dan Kelly, laid out at the feet of the gathered crowd.

Why were these scenes photographed? Why did they appeal to a photographer? Were they spontaneous, or were these images the result of a long set-up and preparation?

What did photography mean to the Victorian era? In Queen Victoria's declining years, she:

... took a keen interest in the progress of the Boer War, and kept an album of photographs of all the officers killed: an agonizing task for the equerries who had to write to all the widows asking for these pictures. Having compiled it for a year she tired of it, saying it was too sad to look at. (Wilson 2007, p. 321)

If Victorians saw in photography a new form of cataloguing, then it is important to understand motivation. From its inception, it was the child of a custody battle between science and art, yet for the general public, personal interest in photography might not have gone beyond the photographer's studio with its painted backdrops and borrowed costumes. I remember the early days of that magical thing called the 'internet', which to a young teenager was nothing more than a place to search for pictures of my favourite bands, new video games, or images of bikini babes. The public does not always leap at the cultural importance of new things in the way that the sciences and arts do. To understand the social impact of early photography, I can't take for granted my own presumptions of images as research, an acquisition of views from that era, what they meant, and what they mean.

Photography is acquisition in several forms... through image-making and image-duplicating machines, we can acquire something as information (rather than experience)... This is the most inclusive form of photographic



acquisition. Through being photographed, something becomes part of a system of information-... Reality as such is redefined—as an item for exhibition, as a record for scrutiny, as a target for surveillance. The photographic exploration and duplication of the world fragments continuities and feeds the pieces into an interminable dossier, thereby providing possibilities of control that could not even be dreamed of under the earlier system of recording information: writing. (Sontag 1978, pp. 155-56)

Reality as a target for surveillance. The invention of the camera's eye introduced the subject to the idea of being viewed by a machine. Before the camera, ~~we could be written about, but if we were illiterate, what did it matter? We could perhaps be painted if we belonged to the upper classes, but what painter stooped to the level of the poorhouse or the alley for more than a lampoon, and wouldn't caricature work its way into the highly subjective painting, but portraiture was expensive, and subjected to the artist's notion of what we looked like.~~ However, with this machine, the camera, we could be shown ourselves, ~~perhaps even frequently,~~ and become newly self-conscious. Conscious of ourselves, as seen through an eye that proposed to show us what we really were, what category we belonged to. 'People came to visualize themselves and others not only in terms of gender, class, race, and nation, but in terms of intelligence, morality, and emotional stability as well' (Armstrong 1999, p. 17). Like Bentham's Panopticon, as written about by Foucault, the camera forced us to acknowledge how we were being seen.

The panopticon is a system that disciplines through surveillance. A central watch tower is surrounded by multi-storeyed cells, each of which holds an inmate, well-illuminated and completely visible at all times from the tower. The supervisors inside the tower are not visible from the cells. 'Never certain of invisibility, each inmate therefore had to behave "properly" all the time: thus they disciplined themselves and were produced as docile bodies' (Rose 2005, p. 84).

~~I see the act of photography as akin to this changeable surveillance. Could Foucault's 'docile body' not be seen to some extent in most photographs of human subjects, even in the process of photographing?~~ The empty eye of the camera points at a person, and that person positions himself in a manner that he wishes to be seen. There is a fear of being un-photogenic, of having 'bad' pictures taken of oneself. When the camera enters a room, do we not tense inwardly, and try to look normal, knowing that we may be surveyed at any time by the machine?

The power of surveillance is the self-discipline that it inflicts. The eye of the camera, the blank sentinel, even in the hands of the closest people in your life, changes the way you *act*. You see yourself from its eye and want to look *right*, to reiterate and confirm the image of you that (you think) has been established. *He doesn't hold his fork like a shovel. She doesn't watch TV with a slack mouth.*

Visibility is a trap... [The inmate] is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication... Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power... It is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power. Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up... Consequently, it does not matter who exercises power. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine... The more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed. The Panopticon is a marvellous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power. (Foucault 1995, pp. 200-2)

This power is exercised in the Foucauldian manner: it operates from more than one level (Rose 2005, p. 80). It is arranged by those in control, but also maintained by the subject, the recipient. Power is a constant, in that its presence (surveillance) is assumed to be taking place at all times and is therefore effective in controlling the behaviour of the subject.

Couldn't the flood of photographic images have had a similar control over Victorian subjects? The idea of seeing oneself through the eye of a camera, a machine that proposed to capture one's reality, would awaken a sense of self-consciousness regarding class, identity, self-worth, a place in the fabric of society that could be certified visually. Adding to the self-discipline of self-consciousness was the concept of the archive, and photography's acquisition of people as archival information, to be categorized. This idea of acquisition through photography had a consequence: a further distinction between different levels of society. It reiterated that those capable of acquisition had the advantage over others, again, through this new means:

Photography endowed the image with a capacity to reduce its subject matter to the visible traces of virtually any person, place, or thing, much as if an adjective were replacing a noun. Rather than the image of an object pure and simple, a photograph offers its viewer an image marking a specific position within a larger field of vision, a position the viewer could recognize instantly. (Armstrong 1999,

What photography was giving to the 19th century, or at least to those in a position to receive it, was a new tool for ingraining the concept of *us* and *them* and being able almost instantaneously to capture and reproduce evidence to support these views, like an unfortunate and irrefutable stereotype. See? Poor people really *are* goofy looking. What Charles Dickens had done in writing to show us how poverty might be vividly imagined, the camera could immediately corroborate in its own visceral terms. Seeing poverty in front of one's face was one thing; a viewer in such circumstances would have to acknowledge the fact that he or she was both viewing and being viewed, producing a certain level of self-consciousness. But seeing poverty in a photograph, privately, as often as one liked, brought an intimacy to the sway held over the lower classes. In a Victorian world, the photograph was a whole new power: a selective and voluntary 'reality'.

I realized the importance of learning the place this new technology would have had; if I am inside the head of my character, what do I think when I look into a camera's eye? At a photograph of myself? How different does my world look in the photograph? Like hating your own voice in a recording, disagreeing with pictures of yourself is an experience we all share to some extent. Thankfully my digital camera can hold about 600 images, so I just keep clicking until the stupid thing gets it right. This was not the case in 1880. Some of the pictures I'm using in the research were done in a studio, but the majority were taken outdoors. Each photo required a long set-up and preparation, and depending on whether it was dry- or wet-plate technology, the photographer might have had to lug around a portable development studio, or store the plate until he returned from the field, finding out much later whether the exercise was futile or not. To the subject, say a railroad employee far from home, working seven days a week in an inhospitable environment, the appearance of a photographer on the scene would be cause for excitement. For many, this would be their first and only picture ever taken. What potential for a warped self-impression. What potential for a researcher, more than a century later, wrongly to sum up the meaning or significance of the image.

~~For an illustration of some integral methodologies related to visual materials (including, of course, photography) see Gillian Rose's chapter 'Visual Methodologies' in *Research methods for English Studies* (Rose 2005: 67-89). However, what I am interested in here, and what I have not been able to find much of, is self-reflective discussion on the use of~~

photography as research by fiction writers. I think that this is an important area, and I hope to be able, by writing about my own experience, to generate some discussion on photography as fiction research.

Writers use photography whether they write about it or not. They might go somewhere and take their own pictures, or they might find them through research. Writers take notes and photography is a visceral form of note-taking. A picture is worth a thousand words. Save your writing hand or your typing fingers for more important things.

If I can, as part of my writing practice, I'll go somewhere and take pictures to refer to later, or I'll find pictures if I can't go there myself. Like the concept of the storyboard, visuals to write around, to write to, appeal to me. I have a picture taken [in 1902](#) ~~1885~~ of men at a lumber camp. They are lined up to get their hair cut and their beards shaved. The barber chair is a [keg tree stump](#) and the barber looks like a lumberjack himself. It is obviously a Sunday. The image is [immortal](#), comical and [engaging striking](#), and so I [may, or may not](#), find a way to work a scene like it into the novel. How many novels, poems, movies have sprung from a single photograph?

I knew that with this project, simply collecting archival photographs and reading biographies and histories of the Victorian era wasn't going to be enough. I had to go and physically stand in these spots. The danger in only seeing something as it *was*, black-and-white or sepia, locked in a posed eternity, is that the writer can re-present that time as something unreachable, precious. Stereotyped.

So, there is a stage of research that submerges in libraries and archives, books, photos, newspapers, journals. The author [investigates](#) ~~learns what he needs to about~~ the culture surrounding the story, gathers and retains a way of seeing into the setting. This can take days, weeks, years. There will never be 'enough?' research done, and at some point we have to leave the library and face the real world. Preferably with a camera in hand.

When I write I want to create visual sensations; I look at something, walk around it, smell it, hear it, leave it. Taking pictures is not the only way to preserve what any of the senses experience, but it is the most feasible, the most immediate. A sound recording? Perhaps of a train whistle, unusual birds. A smell-jar? Any young boy can tell you stories of failure in that field. Pictures. Sight-vision. Show, don't tell.

But before I can show, I have to go look. So I went. Old Melbourne Gaol was the first stop. I expected a dark awe, standing under the gallows where Ned's life ended, walking the iron platforms as he had done for months, listening to the hollow booming creaking and clanking of doors and counting the days until the blackness. But the other tourists irritated me. Why was this couple smiling? Why did that kid force his mother to buy him a foam Kelly helmet in the gift shop as I was buying my entry ticket? Couldn't they see? The death, the suppression and de-humanizing, all around us. Two teenagers were standing at the gallows. One wrapped the rope around his friend's neck while their girlfriends told them to stop being, like, gross. A large, badly-Photoshopped picture of Ned wearing an orange prison jumpsuit was on the wall. The caption above it read "Was Ned Kelly a Terrorist?"

I knew my irritation was only able to emerge because there was nothing there to overpower it. I wasn't feeling anything. The writer, the vacuum of feelings, the sponge that sits at the next table, gleefully taking notes as your relationship ends over a candlelit dessert. Unable to *feel*? Ridiculous. I panicked. Took some pictures. Took a breather, thought of my own arms strapped behind me, the hood lowered, my neck wrenched by 90 kilos at the end of a perfectly calculated rope-length. Nothing. What was going on here?

I had to get out of this funk. I walked over to the replica suit of Kelly armour on a stand. I lifted the helmet and began to put it on.

"Dude," my research assistant said, "how many sweaty schoolkids have licked the inside of that helmet?"

I put the helmet back on its stand and tried not to sink to the floor. Was I too late? Had it all become a cartoon?

I wandered into one of the cells. Inside that cell there is a display cabinet. The cabinet has several items in it. One of the items is a mask. A calico hood, rather. It is white, slightly peaked, covering the whole head and hanging down below the face. It looks a lot like something a Ku Klux Klan member would wear. The placard above the hood explains that it was worn by prisoners in solitary confinement whenever they were taken out of their cells. The purpose was to alienate them completely from fellow inmates. The eyeholes are very small. This hood brought Old Melbourne Gaol into perspective

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for me. It stares blindly into the faces of the tourist horde, their camera flashes. It is a damnation. It would be *humiliating* to have to wear something like that every time you stepped out of your cell, a constant reminder that you would one day soon have the hood with no eye holes lowered over your face. My failure to be *impressed* by the Gaol up until this point was suddenly embarrassing.



2.2 Calico hood, Old Melbourne Gaol. (Bowman 2009)

It takes something out of left field to jar us and open up our receptors. This calico hood was not in anything I had read on Ned Kelly, on the system of incarceration at the time, or any type of memoir I had picked up. It was a shock, the type of shock that a writer sometimes needs to remind himself that he will always have research to do.

At the Victoria State Library, Ned's armour, his rifle and one boot are on display. The lighting is dramatic, shadowed. The artefacts do not seem attached to the realm of mortal man; they almost appear to glow, are as unreal as a display of dragon scales or the weapons of a centaur, something beyond a man's capacity. This is what Ned Kelly has become, in many ways. A juggernaut. Superhuman. Nonhuman.

If, by some quirk of fate or tactics, Ned Kelly had survived to live out a life sentence in prison, he would have wasted away—an increasing [*sic*] pathetic figure. The crippled left arm, right hand and right foot would have accelerated his deterioration... he had suffered at least 28 gun shot wounds in that final battle. And not all the lead had been removed...

Over long years of imprisonment, the legend would have survived. But it would

have been blighted by the reality of a man old—e—even decrepit—bt—before his time; withering away in absolutely inevitable and accelerating decline.

The end result of the regrettable campaign to rush Ned Kelly into an unmarked grave was to guarantee that he would be eternally twenty-five—e—eternally a man in his remarkable prime. He would be an immortal enemy...y...y...  
(Jones 2008, p. 399)

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In Melbourne, the *human* that was Kelly feels truly dead. Melbourne was the end of the line for him. It was a solid and unchallengeable authority. There were not the bumbling detectives camping out overnight for nothing, or the fistfights with police officers easily won by a teenage Ned. Melbourne was the *system*. Incarceration, dehumanisation, execution. No petitions would appease it. No appeals would override. Here was death at the end of a rope.

The next day, gas tank full and coffee in the cup-holder, as I emerged from Melbourne onto the open farmlands, I realized that a dank gaol was a strange starting place. I was working backwards through this history. My story was not about Ned's death, his caged ending. It was about life. He saw much more than a bluestone cell and a three-storey hallway. He was not a city boy.

The first stop out of Melbourne was Avenel, where as a child Ned rescued young Dick Shelton from drowning, and was awarded the silk sash that he wore around his waist on special occasions, such as the siege at Glenrowan fifteen years later. Here was Ned's boyhood, this creek gurgling under a stone bridge, orange with eucalypt leaves and silt.

In the absence of others, alone with an elusive idea of a past, I could imagine properly. I was familiar with this: creeks, farms, bridges, silence and small towns. I was not familiar with Melbourne, and certainly not accustomed to being in a prison. Kelly spent considerable time behind bars, but it was the Kelly at home I wanted to find. On his horse. Splitting wood. At the pub.

It wasn't necessarily Ned himself that I was looking for, but rather his world, as a place for my own characters to appear and to live during those years. Their setting, I suppose.

My first research work for a fiction is always an investigation of settings. I go to places, I live in them for a time, take photographs and write notes. I attempt to allow the invisible story to emerge.

Sometimes, if the story already exists, I find the process to be like that of a filmmaker seeking locations, or a forensic detective looking for clues with

which to piece together past action. (Krauth 1999, p. 33)

For a week I followed the little black iron helmets across the map, spending an hour here, a full day there, collecting pictures and conversations and email addresses, learning the distances between towns that until now had only been a series of words in books connecting to various Kelly Gang activities.

Some of the icons on the map led to signposts next to empty fields or small plaques on banks, hotels, a courthouse, an old boot-maker's shop, a pub, in towns otherwise ordinary. Some led to towns deeply engraved with the Kelly legend; these places embrace the tourist army and want to feed, shelter and clothe them in Kellyana. Burger joints, motels, museums, souvenir shops, named after Ned and bursting with bushranger bargains. Glenrowan, where the attempted derailing of the police train was botched and the final showdown took place in 1880, is home to one of Australia's finest signature landmarks: the big thing. I've driven past the Big Avocado dozens of times, witnessed the Big Joint in Nimbin, seen the Big Bicycle and Big Muffler on the Gold Coast, but here was the real deal: Big Ned Kelly standing six metres high. He guards the entrance to the Ned Kelly Memorial Museum. The owner informed me that it is the best Kelly museum, according to *Getaway*. I was not going to argue with that. It was the off-season, and it was a week-day, so I had the town to myself. I wandered Glenrowan from morning to night, collecting every landmark from all angles inside my camera and my body. Most of the photographs from the 1880 siege were in my head, and I knew where to stand to re-take them. It helps also that there are numbered signs to guide the tourist on a walking tour through those final hours. The signs have many of the photos on them, and a description of what the tourist is seeing. In the quiet wanting-to-rain air, watching horses run and listening to dogs bark, it was not hard to imagine the town as it may have been 130 years ago. Beechworth, to that effect, is largely identical to the Beechworth of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The tour guide assured us that, were Ned to cruise through downtown Beechworth today, he would recognize almost all of it, save the paint jobs, automobiles and business names. This was an affirming and relieving thing to hear for the researching writer. We stood in front of the house where most of the studio photographs from the Kelly saga were taken, and passed by the Ovens & Murray Advertiser offices where a lot of the news on the Kellys was sent to the printers. We blocked the footpath in front of the barrister's office frequented by the Kellys, and stood in front of the police lock-ups, male and female, that Ned and his mother had been

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held in. We stood under the balcony of the hotel where Ned looked up at Aaron Sherritt's widow and doffed his hat, as he was carted through town by the police.

The Beechworth Gaol sprawls at the end of town, privately owned and empty. The owner is reluctant or unwilling to open it up to the public as the Old Melbourne Gaol has been. There are still bodies there, awaiting a Christian burial.

After my Kelly tour of Beechworth, I purchased the four-part miniseries aired on Channel 7 in 1980, titled *The Last Outlaw*. In terms of sheer research and a devotion to *facts*, this series is light years ahead of all other Kelly-related entertainment. Of course, it was also co-written and created by Ian Jones, author of the definitive biography.

Jones' name is hard to escape when one tours Kelly Country. He is quoted and referenced on plaques, signs, pamphlets all over the district, anything asking for an authority.

Probably the biggest surprise of the research trip was the involvement and the investment by the tourist sector, public and private, in maintaining the history of the Kelly gang and their sympathizers, their detractors, their surrounds. There are some people in these towns who have dedicated their whole lives to preserving and presenting Ned Kelly. Few of us can or will ever have to experience what true discrimination feels like. He was very old for his 25 years. At one time or another, the *majority* of his family and friends were imprisoned on dubious charges. If given more time, if given to a greater sense of destiny, if he had not steered his gang directly towards the authorities, the uprising could have had a much stronger, if not as dramatic, impression on the political future of south-east Australia, perhaps the entire country. On a national level, this episode of Australian history is alternately a stain, overrated, a cartoon, a metaphor of struggle against an authoritarian England, a cause for pride, a personification of the larrikin spirit of an entire country summed up in one simple and iconic image: an iron helmet made from the very machinery that tills the land.

Bill Bryson is certainly one of those detractors who see Kelly as overrated. In his book *Down Under* (2000; (released in North America as *In a sunburnt country*), Bryson not only writes off Kelly completely, he proceeds to verbally bash the entire Kelly history and any real significance that Australians supposedly mistake it for having, offering comparisons to (presumably more well-known and more important) Americans from that era:

It is an interesting fact, and one that no doubt speaks much about the Australian character, that the nation never produced a law enforcement hero along the lines of Wyatt Earp or Bat Masterson in America. Australian folk heroes are all bad guys of the Billy the Kid type, only here they are known as bushrangers-...

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The story of Kelly is easily told. He was a murderous thug who deserved to be hanged and was. He came from a family of rough Irish settlers, who made their living by stealing livestock and waylaying innocent passers-by. Like most bushrangers he was at pains to present himself as a champion of the oppressed, though in fact there wasn't a shred of nobility in his character or his deeds. He killed several people, often in cold blood, sometimes for no very good reason-... [Here follows an excruciatingly faulty description of the Glenrowan siege, wrapped up as a Keystone Kops-style farce.]

Not exactly the stuff of legend, one would have thought, yet in his homeland Kelly is treated with deep regard-... Even serious historians often accord him an importance that seems to the outsider curiously disproportionate. (Bryson 2000, pp. 219-20)

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(Bryson 2000: 219-20)

I suppose 'Weary' Dunlop is not a folk hero *per se*, but I took photos of this memorial statue before My next visit was entering the Benalla Costume and Pioneer Museum, home of Ned's green silk sash and other artefacts: an old bridle, firearms, a witness box that Ned stood in, replica armour, the portable police cell that held Ned. The cell door on which Joe Byrne was strung up for photographs is here. I have seen the photos of Joe's body, crossed with rope to hold him upright, his calm half-smile for the camera as police bristling with rifles hung around waiting for their publicity pictures. Here was the door that a human had hung from, trussed up like a side of beef. Behind me was the glass display case with Ned's sash. I was getting myself ready to examine it. 'The historical people show up at about noon,' said the museum attendant. 'They might let you take a picture of it if you can turn off your flash.' I declined. The sash looks as old as it is; it is faded by sunlight and age. The gold tassels are stiff and brown. There is a lot of blood on the silk.

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I am not Australian, yet I am capable of being deeply affected by this story, enough to read the biographies and histories, make the trip, attempt to make connections between the old photographs and my new photographs. There is nothing about this history that invites an off-hand irreverence. There is no reason to say that only a country like Australia could be fascinated by Kelly.

It had been ten days. After photographing my fifteenth replica suit of armour, helping myself to a stack of Ned beer-coasters, throwing an apple core off the cliff at Power's

Lookout, filling my backpack with brochures, and boring every museum owner and tourist info centre employee out of their minds with my repeated questions, I was approaching a danger of becoming desensitised, overexposed. I sat my last night in the hotel room, slightly drunk, deleting dozens of pictures I had taken. They were disconnected, repetitive. They did not fit the story. They did not belong in the archive.

The fact that I knew they didn't fit was enough indication that my trip was over. I could see this place, in photographs and inside my mind. I had what I had come for.

When I returned home with a few hundred pictures (thanks to 21st century technology) I transferred them to the computer and began categorizing and naming the images. Even after my ritual purification of the other night, there were still too many that now seemed useless. It was with some disappointment and concern about my photographic abilities that I noticed in many pictures, even those taken because I was enthralled and inspired by what was around me, the end result appeared flat and dull. Clouds that had roiled across the sky in an awesome and deep sky-scape now looked boring. Hills rolling away to the horizon, incredible distances, were hardly visible. Photographs are a flawed beauty, a drunken journalist. Half the reason for this trip was to take photos to compare to those taken 130 years ago, in order to compare landscapes and buildings, to bring vibrant colours and random angles to the shadowed and iconic images from the turbulent saga. And here I was, looking at pictures taken only a few days ago, already disagreeing with the way they presented the world I'd been standing in.

This sensation was not new; it had happened on my Canadian research trip. Black wet mountains that roared up into a freezing winter sky, almost vertigo-inducing in their sheer angular height, looked small and tame from the computer screen. Back in Australia a couple of weeks later, sweating in board-shorts and looking at these safe little images on the screen, it struck me how difficult it is to re-live something, to bring it to life on the page when it is a world away, both in time and location. As an example: I was comparing a photo from 1880 and a photo from 2009, taken in exactly the same spot. In the old image, there is a cliff-face that is completely missing from the new one. Okay, it has been dynamited. That's fine. Wait, the railroad ran on the other side of the river. Why is there a railroad on *that* side? It was built by a rival company. What year? Does it have anything to do with my story? No, but it still happened; therefore I have to find out. The two companies eventually agreed that they would share the parallel tracks and one would be for east-bound trains and the other for west-bound. Of course, hours

of research taking place over a few days were necessary for me to answer these questions, and get the relevant dates, names and so forth. Will I use the information in my novel? Probably not. And here I was again, comparing the old Kelly photographs with my rambling series of settings taken over ten days, pictures that I had taken myself and was already unsure about. I could feel the oppressive and familiar weight of trying to write with any claim to authenticity coming down upon me.

This is a genuine concern and, as any writer knows, a potential project serial-killer.

How can I write about this? I'll have to do so much research that it won't be worth it. Journalists, theorists, novelists, biographers, playwrights, historians, anybody writing anything eventually faces this beast. Handing something that feels untruthful to readers, and the potential backlash mire writers in a bog of time-waste and redundant reading. One could spend years trying to read and learn enough to begin writing about something, and then give up completely and start over on a new project. The fear of misrepresentation is real; it is a shadow-lurking book strangler, and I am somewhat envious of those prolific writers who bang away at the keys, seemingly unconcerned with the details, the cringe-inducing mistakes of truth or content. It would be nice to write recklessly at least once in a while.

Recently, the so-called 'History wars' in Australia have drawn attention to the concept of creative writers being wrong, not being truthful, and consequentially subservient to historians. It is impressive to witness the lambasting that historical fiction writers can receive from prosecuting historians. The charges can range from blasphemy to libel to defamation of character, and as Camilla Nelson points out:

Another interesting feature of the debate... is the way in which novelists are quick to flee the historical terrain and surrender to the authority of history—in a way that highlights the pressing need for writers working within the academy to negotiate a critical and theoretical stance in relation to other disciplines in the humanities. For instance, [Inga] Clendinnen [a key figure in the 'history wars'] approvingly notes how Peter Carey, under attack from Kelly historians, would "slide further and further down into his chair". (Nelson 2007; emphasis added)

Yet historians must also admit that any claim to a 'truth' is born of a certain amount of speculation and a level of subjectivity. Clendinnen herself says:

God-historians hovering somewhere up and beyond the texts win no knee-bobs nowadays. We are increasingly ready to admit that a human hand pushes the pen

or taps the keys of the word processor, -that there is a needle 'I' between the past and the reader through which everything must pass. (Clendinnen 1996)

To simplify the debate might suggest that historians cannot claim an easy authority, yet they can still stand between fiction writers and *their* attempts to grip history. Emily Sutherland creates an excellent formula for explaining the position that writers have in relation to historians and biographers:

There is a difference between historical people portrayed by historians and biographers and those by fiction writers. This difference is the subject of debate and contention between historians, biographers and novelists. Think of a spectrum. On the left are totally fictional characters (TFC). On the right are accounts of people written by historians (HA). Nearer the centre, but still on the right, are the subjects of biographies (B). Historical characters in fiction (HCF) are placed near centre left between biography and fiction.



Those writing nonfiction regard fiction as having the potential to be a distortion of the facts, if not a total fabrication. (Sutherland 2007)

So, the historian admits to being human. The writer admits to being subaltern to the historian. Where does this leave the photographer? More to the point, where does this leave the writer who uses photography as note-taking, as research for an historical novel?

In regards to Clendinnen's admitting that a human hand pushes the pen, it is obvious that a human hand, of course, holds the camera as well. And a human eye selects the subject of the camera's focus. It is important to acknowledge that using photography as research—with any kind of truth claim—can be murky. My own photographs can lose the meaning I thought they had, or become relevant for reasons I hadn't expected, so the ideas behind Victorian photography as a means of acquisition, as a kind of mass-cultural collecting, need to be understood to some extent before I can utilize these random and researched visions from the past. I need to acknowledge the limitations, and

also the reasons for inclusion and exclusion from my own archive.

What is behind the old photographs? Are they the truth of history, or are they a cataloguing of the world in reference to Victorian ideals, and thus, in themselves, a form of fiction? And what sort of ‘truth’ do my own photographs capture? What sort of fiction do they comprise because I take them to service a fiction?



2.3 *Front Street, Yale*, c. 1882. (Kamloops Art Gallery)



2.4 *Front Street, Yale*. (Bowman 2009)

[Front Street](#), Yale, was home to dozens of saloons and brothels in the 1880s. This was a

roaring gold rush and railway construction town. Fights every night, fires, shootouts, a wild history. Any remains of that spirit are long gone. Today, Yale looks like any other small town dotted along the highway, and because of this I may have to work even harder to conjure up those wild and violent nights than if I'd never gone there to take pictures.

Perhaps a contemporary writer can use photography from that era to re-envision and re-create, maybe not *that* past, but the idea behind how that past wanted itself to be seen and preserved. The pictures we take are not our lives, they are a glimpse at moments: sometimes completely out of context, other times rehearsed into numbness. A spontaneous and beautiful picture that captures the essence of its subject or scene is rare. A posed studio portrait, a caricature of oneself, is capable of gross misrepresentation. Understanding the motives of photographic subject selection and the desires of audience is necessary to conceptualising the reasons that Victorian photography and its conventions developed the way that they did, and the legacy of the photographic catalogue that we are left with.

I have found, through taking my own pictures of the exact locations in the photographs that make up my research, that there is an essential difference, and it is not just a difference of technology, or of the ravages of time. Of course, buildings now stand where there was forest, or thin trees now stand where there was a thriving railroad community, but the difference goes beyond that. The viewer brings a context to the image. This is a simple, but very important fact, one that is crucial to heed if I am to write around the iconic photographs that attempt to capture and catalogue huge portions of our histories. I am not writing a book of photography; I am writing a novel. The pictures have personal significance in that they trigger specific reactions in me, different to those reactions that anyone else would have. Barthes describes an effect that is incredibly self-specific while looking at pictures of his mother: '—contemplating a photograph in which she is hugging me, a child, against her, I can waken in myself the rumpled softness of her crêpe de Chine and the perfume of her rice powder' (Barthes 1981, p. 65). It is up to me to take these personal sensations and translate them into my medium: words, words that, hopefully, can pull the reader into that world with me.

We think these photographs speak to us, but we hear with 21<sup>st</sup>-century ears. Would the local newspaper give future researchers an accurate representation of my values, my self-image? I want to get inside the heads of these people, feel the itchy Victorian suit

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and be annoyed by the photographer's insistence that I hold my chin up more or crook my arm so that I take up more frame. Smell the chemicals and listen to the assistants as they argue over how best to conceal a woman's hairy upper lip in this portrait or re-paint the trees in that portrait.

I want to bring 'real' life to the characters, not superhuman attributes or iconic and simplified poses of indigence. In Ron Hansen's novel *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, he gives a vibrant treatment to the American outlaw Jesse James. It is an inspiring work for any writer striving to show respect for his or her very human subjects. They are not the immortal legends that media create (both now and then). Hansen avoids painting with cartoon colours, and he writes about Robert Ford's 'research' of James done with the glassy eyes of a schoolboy, and the consequent distancing and misunderstandings between them. Their moods, fears, awkwardness and weaknesses are Hansen's gift to the reader. What he accomplishes through dogging these historic figures almost to the point of redundancy and tediousness is a thorough humanizing. There are no good guys or bad guys. These are just guys.

A photograph is frozen time. A moment is there, available forever as long as the end result is preserved. What I'm interested in, and what I want to show through my writing, are the moments before the frozen second, and the moments after. These people had lives before they posed for photos, and they went immediately back to these lives once the photographer left with his plates and his tripod. I want to be there, inside the pose and the detached glare, and I want to stay while the men remove the watch-chains and bowlers, the waistcoats and overcoats. I want to watch while they untie Joe Byrne's body from the door and maybe catch one of the bystanders pausing for a guilty moment to consider the frailty and beauty of human life, and ask him why he was so intrigued by that macabre spectacle.

I sat down to watch the first episode of *The Last Outlaw*, the miniseries I had purchased in Beechworth. There is a scene in Her Majesty's Prison Pentridge. Ned emerges from his cell for an appointment with the chaplain. He is wearing a white calico hood.



### Chapter 3 Workingman, poor man, criminal, corpse: Exploring the Victorian relationship to photographic categorization

I have mentioned my interest in the large number of photographs taken during the course of the Kelly Gang's history of notoriety, a number that is notable especially since the pictures were taken at a time when photography was still relatively new, progressing outward from city centres into the country, considerably expensive. In the Victorian era, the photograph became a stronger claim to truth, to reality, than sketches or paintings. Photography was being utilized by the authorities—and by the public—as an information system, a new measurement of certain facts. The camera's lens took in many willing sitters, and also many captive, many reluctant or unwilling subjects.

What happens when a more contemporary Australian public, familiar with photography for well over a hundred years, is required to submit to an archive of photographic identifying? Geoffrey Batchen points to the “attempted introduction of a national identity card system between 1985 and 1987 by Australia's federal government” (2002, p. 48) as a potent example of social control being handed down by a government in the form of a photographic archive, and strongly resisted by both the public and private sectors.

Despite the fact that photography had been well and truly incorporated into homes and media for over a hundred years by this stage, “the widespread opposition that this card induced in the Australian populace... was such that the government called a general

election to decide the issue<sup>22</sup> (Batchen 2002, p.: 48), indicating that Australians' discomfort and distrust of surveillance, and the government's insistence on seeing the scheme through, was worth fracturing the country's leadership over.

Public figures from both left and right united in opposition, with the debate focusing not only on the card's potential infringement of civil liberties but also on the government's determination to submit every citizen to the penetrating gaze of the camera. For the first time it would have been compulsory for every Australian, from outback Aborigines to urban grandmothers, to be inscribed within the isolation cell of the photograph. The card would have meant the formation of a vast network of portrait photographs coordinated by the state, each person's image to be regularly scrutinized by fellow citizens for signs of criminality and deviance. The systematic exercise of disciplinary power... was about to be firmly established in Australia. Never before in Australia's history has photography itself been the subject of such a heated and politicized public debate. (Batchen 2002, pp.: 48-9)

As Batchen points out, the idea that a person's face could *tell* facts about him or her, or indicate something about character, was seen as legitimate. A case in point from the era of the Australia Card was the trial of Lindy Chamberlain, convicted for murder after her infant daughter, Azaria, went missing in 1980. Making ~~she made~~ the claim, 'A dingo ate my baby,' Chamberlain could have had no idea the life that statement would take on, and the inherent disbelief that it would generate.

“Caught within the masculine gaze of law and media, Chamberlain was condemned by both for her refusal to conform to the expected photogenic gestures of maternal grief. As one newspaper headline put it in 1986, “The Face Tells the Story.” (Batchen 2002, p.: 49)

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Of course, Chamberlain eventually was exonerated. The face does *not* necessarily tell the story, yet we are liable to base our assumptions on facial features, on outward emotional display, and we each are guilty of regularly stereotyping ~~incessantly~~ based on those very details.

The Australia Card scheme was ultimately cancelled due to a legal technicality. However, the Federal Government then introduced the Tax File Number as a system of identification, paving the way for photographic credentials. And not so many years later I can open my wallet and find two pieces of identification bearing my likeness. My Canadian (and therein lies a whole other conversation about North America's relationship to surveillance) driver's licence not only has a photo of my face, it also provides the following information: I wear corrective lenses, my eyes and hair are

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brown, I am 183 centimeters tall and weigh 89 kilograms. The other piece of ID is my student card, bearing a photograph and the student number that the university uses predominantly to identify me. Somewhere between the indignation of twenty-five years ago and the complacency of today, photographic surveillance has won the debate.

So what are the “signs of criminality and deviance” (Batchen 2002, p. 49), and where did we get the idea that those signs can be read in the physical makeup of our faces? Phrenology and physiognomy were, by the mid-nineteenth century, firmly entrenched as legitimate paradigms for reading the human body. “Both shared the belief that the surface of the body, and especially the face and head, bore the outward signs of inner character” (Sekula 1986, p. 11).

I am interested in exploring the development of that filtering system which allowed Victorians to construct visual stereotypes when looking at one another, not only based on clothing or livelihood, but on facial structure and variations, leading to distinctions of class as seen through photography. Conventions of image-reading and an increasing ready availability of photographs made for a visually conceived ranking of all society, seen through visual representations, from the queen’s quarters to the nut-house. Middle-class Victorians could see the upper-classes through photography, and they could scrutinize the visual digressions which characterized the lower classes.

“Every portrait implicitly took its place within a social and moral hierarchy. The *private* moment of sentimental individuation, the look at the frozen gaze-of-the-loved-one, was shadowed by two other more *public* looks: a look up, at one’s “betters,” and a look down, at one’s “inferiors.” (Sekula 1986, p. 10)

The Victorian era was responsible for changing the way people saw each other, saw the world, saw themselves. The advent of railways brought the blur and disorientation of speed. The propulsion of industry brought about a serious demand for productivity on grander scales, and a subsequent need to keep workers moving. Social sciences made us look deeper into the mirror.

“Eyes attuned to the pace and intimate perspective of the stagecoach were cautioned not to scrutinize roadside attractions but to focus on distant objects... in order to avoid nausea, or worse, a disorientation that could lead to madness. Passengers had to develop “panoramic vision” to compensate for the... treacherous glimpses of a blurred foreground.” (Blaise 2001, p. 144)

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The railroad forced people to relearn *seeing*, in order to keep up with technology, with the confusion and uncertainty brought about by the train's pace. "Inhabited landscapes, viewed from a moving train, dissolved into a series of blurs, mere impressions, shadows in doorways, distant shapes bent in fields, two-dimensional glimpses instead of long, perspectival approaches" (Blaise 2001, pp. 144-5). Huge iron locomotives, mammoth iron ships, the juggernaut of industrial advancement, would have given Victorians pause, and an unease concerning their own place in the world, especially as technology and the sciences advanced into the later stages of the Victorian era.

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Technical inventions such as Frederick Taylor's stopwatch and the high-speed camera demonstrated our inherent physical frailty, our unconscious reliance on habit, and our physiological capacity for self-deception. Those vulnerabilities foretold the intellectual enterprise of the new social sciences—sociology, anthropology, scientific management, political science, psychology. For the most part, the social sciences brought unwelcome news: we're less in control than we thought we were; less free, less virtuous, less enlightened. (Blaise 2001, p. 162)

Of course, the natural reaction to uncertainty is to create certainty, to find solace in being better off than someone else. Through photography especially, people could compare themselves to others, to solidify notions of belonging, of empowerment. Middle-class Victorians could discern exactly where they fit on a societal ladder by referring to the rapidly growing catalogue of photographs of the world, local and global. Beyond that system of categorizing their own homelands, they also learned, through various forms of tourism (exhibitions in major cities, adventure literature, photographic safaris) to visualize other countries in stereotype, in easily readable signs.

In representing their own environment in certain ways, those who produced and consumed the spectacles of primitive and Oriental cultures also divided that environment into "us" and "them" on the basis of rather crude visual distinctions. As they did so, these same people grew fascinated with life in the squalid neighborhoods, and they made those economically just below them want to occupy the well-ordered spaces of that city, possess the goods, and inhabit the bodies of men and women stationed luminously above them. (Armstrong 1999, p. 84)

Photography was seen to be legitimate because of its factualness; the viewer knew that, unlike a painting, the subject of the photograph had to have existed at least enough to be photographed, and therefore the image was able to represent a reality.

All the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence.

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This production by automatic means has radically affected our psychology of the image. The objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making. In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-presented*, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction.  
(Bazin 1967, pp. 13-4)

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Although this statement comes many years after the incorporation of photography into *how* we see the world, and what we come to expect from the world as a result of photographic seeing, it could have been written during the Victorian era, when the camera's link to art was barely a murmur, especially as the quote refers to man's absence from the machination of picture-making, and his *creative* absence as well.

It was perhaps because photography was anything but original and made no claim to creativity of any kind that it so quickly acquired the authority to represent what was real; it could take whatever had already been seen in even the most artificial and stereotyped way and provide those people, places, things, scenes, and events with material grounding and particularity. It could do to the sordid, the exotic, and the private pockets of nineteenth-century life what the eye could do to the most accessible of public spectacles. (Armstrong 1999, p. 77)

The photography in these colonial states (Canada and Australia) forms an archive, a catalogue, a safari of the soon-to-disappear, simultaneous with a chronicle of industry as it advances to replace the already-historic world being photographed and stored away as information, already becoming musty with *pastness*. And I've found places and events in those histories that have interested me enough to want to write about them, to create characters and insert them into the histories, and watch them rub against the world in the photographs.

When we define the Photograph as a motionless image, this does not mean only that the figures it represents do not move; it means that they do not *emerge*, do not *leave*: they are anesthetized and fastened down, like butterflies. Yet once there is a *punctum*, a blind field is created (is divined)...



3.1 Wilson 1863, *Queen Victoria*. (Barthes 2000, p. 56)

Here is Queen Victoria photographed in 1863 by George W. Wilson; she is on horseback, her skirt suitably draping the entire animal (this is the historical interest, the *studium*); but beside her, attracting my eyes, a kilted groom holds the horse's bridle; this is the *punctum*; for even if I do not know just what the social status of this Scotsman may be (servant? equerry?), I can see the function clearly: to supervise the horse's behavior: what if the horse suddenly began to rear? What would happen to the queen's skirt, *i.e.*, to *her majesty*? The *punctum* fantastically "brings out" the Victorian nature (what else can one call it?) of the photograph, it endows this photograph with a blind field. (Barthes 2000, p. 57)

We know that the Scotsman is John Brown; perhaps Barthes truly did not know the man's identity, or the unawareness speaks more to the idea of *Camera Lucida* being a study of something beyond photography, a narrative about the act of looking at photographs, an act that is subjective and individual. For my purposes, the idea of a blind field is useful; the atmosphere of life in and around the framed photograph is exactly what I seek out as a writer.

Perhaps Barthes' grasp of Bazin's 'blind field' (Barthes 2000) is what attracts me to the photos that make up my archive; the images allude to their fitting into my parameters: the narrative, the setting, the ideas of what men and women would look like, for the purpose of my research. The 'blind field' that constitutes the world off-screen can describe the world I pack in around the selected photographs, the life and action of the setting.

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Barthes admits that this “blind field,”<sup>2</sup> where cinematic figures emerge from the screen as alive for the viewer, is “a power which at first glance the Photograph does not have”<sup>2</sup> (CL 55). But Barthes goes on to explain that the punctum allows certain photographs to create a “blind field”<sup>2</sup> of their own and thus grant the photographed subjects a life beyond the borders of the photograph for the viewer. In other words, the punctum animates the photograph with a cinematic power.<sup>2</sup> (Lowenstein 2007, p. 63)

The narrative in this cinematic power draws me to certain images when I use photos to help write a novel. Portraits in a studio lend themselves to the idea of frozen time, to a life paused while the sitter’s impression is recorded. The images that stand out for me, on the other hand, are of life interrupted by the photographer who seeks out moments to capture, the photographer *in the field*.



3.2 CPR construction gang, c. 1890. (Archives of British Columbia: Canadian Pacific Railway)

Once he finishes setting up his camera and tripod, his wet-plate, the photographer calls the men around; they freeze, they go back to life once they have been catalogued. Out into the blind field.

———When I look at pictures taken during the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, namely the construction based in the town of Yale, I can begin to imagine my characters inhabiting the streets and buildings, working alongside men from all corners of the globe on an immense project. But for me, as mentioned already, the urge to go and stand on the earth of history is a must. I need to feel the place in order to approach writing about it with any fidelity; I am wary of appropriation ~~al~~ ~~arrogation~~ already when

setting out to write historical fiction, and I don't need to compound it by never having set foot in the towns and cities I write about. There is also that elusive question of Victorianism, how it manifests itself, whether it can be pinned down and scrutinized, or whether it is all pitfalls and danger of over-prescribing what I see in photographs, when I try to bring those scenes to life. “The Victorians continue to exist in the absolute and paradoxical present of the photograph, always there yet gone forever: both in, and out, of history; always already dead, yet still alive.” (Green-Lewis 2000, p. 53)

Yale was home to dozens of saloons and hotels throughout its incarnations of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, first as a roaring gold rush town in the late 1850s-early 1860s, then as a depot for the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880s, and consequently a wide-open western town. ~~Fights every night, fires, shootouts, a wild history.~~ I had to go there myself and photograph the remnants of that history, the space in time out of which my archive formed.

I traveled up the Fraser Canyon, following the route of the railway from Vancouver on the west coast to Yale, where a large part of the novel takes place, taking photographs to compare to their historical counterparts, and experiencing the harsh geography of the place in the middle of winter. I went looking for the blind field, in order to hopefully extend the field not only out of the physical space of the archived photograph, but out of that time, and into *this* time with some lucid connection. Can this grasp include the passage of time: years, even decades? It must, for to limit the notion of a blind field to cinema is to imply that we can't envision a life outside the constraints of the film we've just watched, thereby refusing the very idea of the blind field. I'll clarify: if a film gives those characters life either side of the frame (the room), we are just as able to give that story life either side of the opening and closing credits, once we've come to be familiar with the narrative. If a photograph *speaks* to me (has a *punctum*), I want to know the blind field. This is not necessary to appreciate a photograph, but it is necessary to put the photo into a context, a narrative, an archive. We don't compile an archive unless we want to create or believe in a narrative, a relationship; we can gather an archive of decidedly random images, but even there, the relationship is that they are random, and someone is liable to see anything but randomness in them. There is a concept, and therefore a narrative. A book of poetry, or a collection of essays, for example, always invites a perception of theme.



Narrative is a useful way to see a structure in the archive, and this speaks directly to the research for a novel. Once I have decided that I will need to *see* someplace, someone, something (in this case, Yale from *this* year to *that* year) as dictated by the story, I can compile and exclude images at least referring to that guideline. This narrows the archival search to specific years, to the argument: ramshackle town, crowds of Chinese, European and Native laborers, ~~Chinese and European and Native~~, steamboats, muddy streets. These are the included. What the selected archive does, however, is make me form in my mind a town existing as it did in only one period of its life, a narrowing down in order to perceive, to *picture*. This excised chronology is where I place my characters, my own narrative. The history of the town growing up to that point, and the town's eventual deceleration and decline once the railway construction had ceased, are outside of the archive.

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———The story, the narrative, that I work to put my characters into, and that I work to enliven in my head as I write, is brought to me in a large sense by photographs. The pictures are proof that at least someone, something was happening there, that there was life and sound and humanity, the great machinery of industrial work and the suddenness of accident, the irreversibility of death. Barthes sees a *punctum* in photographs that speak of death:

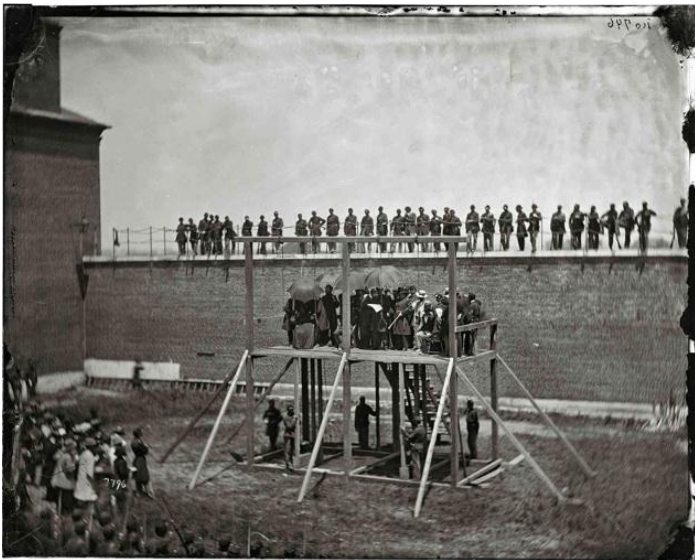
This new *punctum*, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* (“*that has been*”), its pure representation.

In 1865, young Lewis Payne tried to assassinate Secretary of State W.H. Seward. Alexander Gardner photographed him in his cell, where he was waiting to be hanged. The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the *studium*. But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What *pricks* me is the discovery of this equivalence...

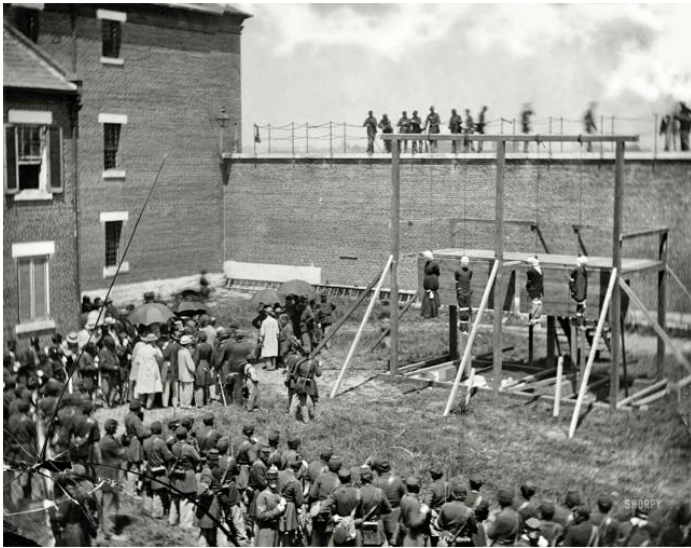
———This *punctum*, more or less blurred beneath the abundance and the disparity of contemporary photographs, is vividly legible in historical photographs: there is always a defeat of Time in them: *that* is dead and *that* is going to die. (Barthes 2000, p. 96)



3.3 Gardner 1865, *Lewis Payne*. (Shorpy)



3.4 Gardner 1865, *Four condemned Lincoln assassination conspirators*. (Shorpy)



3.5 Gardner 1865, *Hanging hooded bodies of the four conspirators*. (Shorpy)

There is awareness when looking at old photographs: here is a past as it was happening, and here is a photo of a past that can now be utilized, can be appropriated. It is *safe* to do so, for it is very much of the past. And Lewis Payne's handsomeness adds greatly to the murk of feelings brought on by knowing that he is waiting to be hung, that he stares into the camera and is about to be snuffed out, about to become history.

“A beautiful subject can be the object of rueful feelings, because it has aged or decayed or no longer exists. All photographs are *memento mori*... Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt.” (Sontag 2001, p. 15)

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The striking photos of Lewis Payne make his death by hanging all the more stark. The camera is drawn close to his face, his pose. His self-conviction overrides his worry, or at least in those seconds with the photographer. Then we see him in company of his co-conspirators, in the ‘before’ hanging photo, with the military and civilian crowd gathered. The view is drawn back as far as possible, and Payne's face is invisible behind the post of the platform. The umbrellas invite query: to shade the condemned, out of consideration? To hide their faces until the hoods can be put over their heads? Or to deny them the warmth of sunlight even at their end? And in the ‘after’ photo, the umbrella-carriers leave with the crowd, the soldiers on the wall are drifting away. All the pomp departs, and only the reality of four bodies hanging in the sun remains. The

life and the death are recorded, forever frozen, instant and remarkable. The punctum of “*that* is dead and *that* is going to die”<sup>22</sup> is what remains to be considered.

Towns can be subject to this same contemplation, especially those in proximity to railroad construction or gold rushes. Their teeming lives, the human swarm dictated by industry or easy fortune, can be snuffed out so completely that one is hard-pressed to imagine anything but the dreary little community left there. Yale, very much so.

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Here are photographs and written records of a town absolutely bursting with inhabitants, far too many for the existing buildings to accommodate. Therefore, muddy tents in rows along the forest’s edge, for the Chinese workers. Log bunkhouses hastily constructed and already filthy, dripping inside with rainwater or melting snow. Thousands of men employed on the various stages of railway construction, a veritable city of industry. Constant dynamiting, carts and rolling stock and steamships loaded with supplies, day and night activity for the roughly five years that Yale was used as a central point of the huge project. As head of navigation on the Fraser River, and an existing town, it was a natural choice for its history as a depot, home to as many as 3,000 citizens during its peak, not to mention those living in satellite up and down the right-of-way. That was 130 years ago. My archive of Yale, my *imagined* Yale, has a permanence to it, mainly because the town seems so important to the history of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Museums and tourist info centres, re-enactments, gimmicks and tourist traps are built on far less prestige. Accounts depict a town of roaring activity with roots being put down for a permanent and articulate population.

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My tour-guide, my father, asked me if I was ready to see it, as we cruised along the darkening Trans-Canada Highway on a freezing January afternoon. The Fraser River sat below, black, barely moving, rimed either side in thin ice and banks dusted with snow. The mountains rose up ancient and heavy, carpeted in evergreen trees, bald patches of snowy rock. It looked eternal and dead, not unfamiliar as far as Canadian landscapes go.

‘Here comes Yale. You ready?’ he asked.

‘Yes sirree,’ I said, raising the camera against the passenger window. A few buildings drifted past: some houses, entrance to a trailer park, a gas station, rafting expedition headquarters, more houses. Then trees, and the river again with a tunnel looming ahead. My dad pulled the car over so I could catch my breath.

‘Where the fuck is Yale?’ I said.

The camera sunk into my lap, as he slowly got the car turned around in the slushy gravel.

‘That was it,’ he said. ‘We just drove through it.’

It is the relegation of Yale to the history books that lends it nostalgia. If I knew nothing of its past, its significance, I would conceptualize the small town in a very different way. This goes for small towns in Northeast Victoria as well. Other than Glenrowan, which wears its historical significance everywhere one looks, blaring Ned Kelly’s name and image, the towns of Kellyana look pretty much like any other non-famous community.

The history, intangible physical thing that it is, must be understood in order for the place to take on that meaning. There is no way to stand in the middle of present-day Yale and *see* its history, except to imagine what was there, or to refer to photographs or narrative visualizations, and then be faced with the disparity between the two versions.

The beauty of 19<sup>th</sup> century Yale photos, and the consequent disappointment of Yale today, allows for the sentiment of nostalgia to be acute, and for the desire to re-live that past through a narrative, to engender an understanding through fictional re-creation.

“Despite the illusion of giving understanding, what seeing through photographs really invites is an acquisitive relation to the world that nourishes aesthetic awareness and promotes emotional detachment” (Sontag 2001, p. 111). This emotional detachment, this readiness to blame Yale for not being beautiful like the old pictures (my own concept of beautiful, at that) is a direct result of the lure of photographic knowing, which can prove to be diaphanous, ready to disintegrate as soon as it is touched or pulled at. This is embodied by my standing in the middle of Yale, unable to accept that it doesn’t show its majesty, its significance, to me.

The force of a photograph is that it keeps open to scrutiny instants which the normal flow of time immediately replaces. This freezing of time—the insolent, poignant stasis of each photograph—has produced new and more inclusive canons of beauty. But the truths that can be rendered in a dissociated moment, however significant or decisive, have a very narrow relation to the needs of understanding. Contrary to what is suggested by the humanist claims made for photography, the camera’s ability to transform reality into something beautiful derives from its relative weakness as a means of conveying truth.  
(Sontag 2001, pp. 111-2)

Historical photographs are so appealing because we can see that the subject is so distant; the distance of time brings out the exotic, the comfort of appropriation. We can use this photo to mean something else, to fit neatly into a catalogue.

So what about a small, boring town that displays its past on every building large enough to host a painted mural? How is the past carried forward, and is there a cohesive narrative between the contemporary lives and the past?

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Chemainus, the town that the novel opens in, is and was a typical small town in that its history is not seemingly notable. It is ideally located in a protected bay on the inside coast of Vancouver Island. The town has had a boom and bust history as a direct result of its lumber mills. A recession in the lumber industry in the early 1980s had disastrous results on the town, and a rejuvenation project was conceived whereby the downtown core was given a facelift, and the decision was made to paint murals depicting the town's past.

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——— I have grown up looking at these murals, images telling the area's history, spread across huge walls all over the town. The murals have made Chemainus an international tourist destination, filling the streets in summer with busloads of visitors.

There now number more than forty painted scenes, with new murals being painted continually. Many are copied from original photographs taken in the Chemainus area, from as far back as the 1860s. Their subject matter, in relation to the murals, doesn't seem to follow any narrative, any relation from one mural to the next. The archival claim, that these are all pictures of the town's past, seems to suffice by way of chronicle, and accordingly a painting from a picture taken in the 1880s will appear next to a likeness from the 1940s. The images are many and arbitrary: there are the stoic faces of First Nations chiefs, a parade scene from the late 1930s, stevedores posing in front of a lumber ship, several depictions from Chemainus' vanished Chinatown, logging scenes, local heroes, a Sunday in a lumber camp in which a rail spike keg is being used as a barber chair. The murals' subject matter spans roughly a hundred years of the town's history, multifarious selections from its archived past.

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So many years of my childhood and youth I walked by the giant paintings, irreverent to the stories depicted in towering scale overhead. Chemainus is a small industrial town with a history that evades recognition, a lack of murders and scandal. Many of the locals are surprised to see their town filled summer after summer with tour buses and day-trippers, and yet half the businesses in town are geared toward that very crowd.

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Again, like Yale and the towns of Kelly Country, there is in Chemainus a present disproportionate to its visualized past. The town itself is nothing more than a functioning small community. There's a post office, a few chemists, coffee shops, antique stores, bakeries, rival grocers, police station, elementary schools and a high school. The industry is still in lumber. There are sawmills and manufacturing mills, a pulp mill one town over. It's like Twin Peaks sans Bob. Chemainus Bay has a port used for shipping lumber, and log booms fill the harbour.

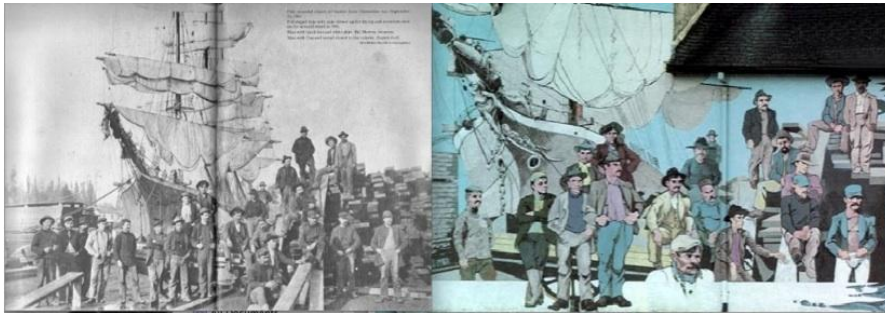
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—There really is little that would be assumed as worth bragging about. Yet, the painted murals throw up giant images from the town's past like billboards, and year after year ~~after year~~, tourism thrives. Apart from the aforementioned coffee shops and drugstores, there are boutique soap shops, chocolatiers, ice-cream parlours, souvenir shops, galleries. The area is Pacific temperate rainforest, receiving some of North America's highest precipitation. I can recall many times watching tourists mill about on the main street in their rainbow of plastic ponchos from the dollar store, looking forlorn and confused, perhaps finally aware that murals may not be a solid reason to anticipate a paradise vacation spot.

—Yet there is something that transpires in the grandiose vision behind covering a small nondescript town in murals. The past is illuminated, made exotic. The fact that each mural is ~~at~~ such odds with the next only assists the bold claim, as if the town were so pleased with its entire past, so willing to advertise itself, that the specific images chosen don't necessarily matter. What matters is that there is a display, that the history in images is available.

—For me, the punctum in the images is their place. There is an early incarnation of the pub I played pool at with my friends on weekends, and it is not only the pub, it is a

photograph which fits my research. I've looked over hundreds of photos from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and here is yet another. What amazes me, though, is its relationship to my own life. It is a past that I feel close to, finally. Likewise for the photographs of stevedores: the mural I walked in front of so many times as a boy, and the actual photograph it is painted from, depict proud and burly men in the foreground of a ship.



3.6 *Stevedores*, 1901. (Olsen, pp. 38-9 photo insert viii)  
3.7 Lagana, Lewis & Marciano 1982, *The Thirty-three metre collage*, painted mural.  
(Municipality of North Cowichan)

The shipyards have been there, and in use, for a hundred years before I came along and grew up in their vicinity, and then found in Australia an interest in writing historical fiction, and an interest in 19<sup>th</sup> century photographs. This image, right in front of my face all those years.

———The stevedores, however, are framed against the ship and the load of timber that explains their relevance, just as the Chinese bull gang in another mural is diminished by the lumber they haul.



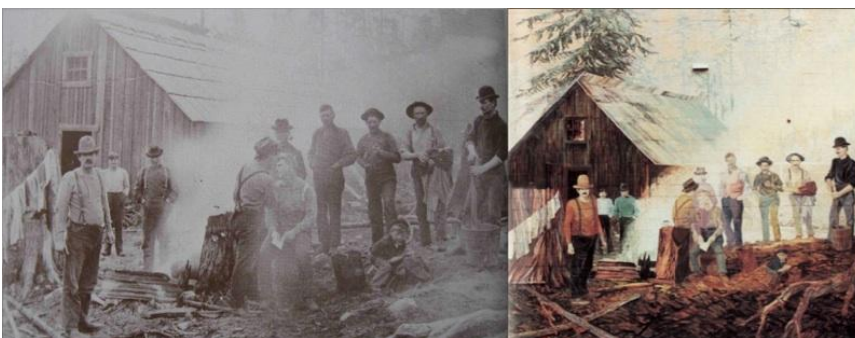


3.8 Chinese lumber bull gang, c. 1900. (Olsen 1963, pp. 38-9 photo insert ix)



3.9 Marza 1984, Chinese bull gang, painted mural. (Municipality of North Cowichan)

In the transfer from photograph to painting, the men who don't fit aesthetically can be plucked from the scene, or imaginary men can be painted in; the whole image can be reversed if it looks better. The individuals don't matter; what matters is the little story in the image. Even the loggers depicted on a Sunday in a logging camp are part of a scene; it is the quirkiness of the makeshift barbershop that justifies the focus on a day of repast from their recognizable livelihood.



- 3.10 *Logger's Sunday, bunkhouse camp, 1902.* (Olsen 1963, pp. 38-9 photo insert xi)
- 3.11 More 1983, *Camp 2 on a Sunday,* painted mural. (Municipality of North Cowichan)

These are all the men who settled and built the town and worked in it and kept it alive, yet they need to be dwarfed and propped in front of their industry, or doing something odd in order to be worth photographing.

— On the other hand, a mural is dedicated to the *signatures* of two famous rich Americans who stayed in Chemainus in 1900. The photograph the mural is copied from is of the hotel registry. Andrew Carnegie and J.D. Rockefeller were not photographed when they stayed in Chemainus, yet their portraits are painted into the mural, and the signatures of other hotel guests on the sheet are removed.

Horse Shoe Bay Hotel, A. Howe's Meat Market, and Rufus Smith's Blacksmith Shop  
(the long building). Photographed in 1892.  
(Gerry Smith photo)

HORSESHOE BAY HOTEL.			
M. HOWE, PROPRIETOR.			
RATES: \$2.00 PER DAY AND UPWARDS.			
NOTE:—The Manager will not be responsible for money or other valuables left in the Hotel, unless same has been deposited in the office for safe keeping and a receipt taken therefor.			
NAME	RESIDENCE	Room	TYPE
	Nov 10 <sup>th</sup> 1900		
J. D. Rockefeller	New York		
George Grant	Vancouver		
Andrew Carnegie	Philadelphia		
	Nov 21 <sup>st</sup> 1900		
	Nov 27 <sup>th</sup>		
	Nov 29 <sup>th</sup> 1900		
J. D. Rockefeller	New Westminster		

(Photo by Jack Howe)

Matthew Howe: Builder and proprietor of the "Horseshoe Bay Inn".  
In November 1900, two renowned American millionaires stayed at the Horseshoe Bay Inn, 11 days apart. It is not known whether J. D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie actually met in Chemainus.

3.12 Horse Shoe Bay Hotel, 1892. *Hotel registry*, c. 1900. (Olsen 1963, pp. 38-9 photo insert xxv)



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3.13 Wylie 1986, *World in Motion*, painted mural. (Municipality of North Cowichan)

For men like Carnegie and Rockefeller, simply writing their names on the hotel registry becomes sufficient enough to warrant a mural; the men themselves are so *valid* that the town will gladly boast their presence, whereas the men who hewed and transported the lumber to build the hotel need to be overshadowed by the machinery of their industry in order for their depiction to be sanctioned.

This is important. Famous men and women, important men and women, do not need to be explained the way that others do. We see their portraits, their photographs, their faces on advertisements, and we are convinced. We gladly embrace their appearance. Unknown men, labourers, the worker ants, are nothing unless we know why we're looking at them, why they are looking at the camera, why the photographer bothered.

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Barthes opens *Camera Lucida* with the discovery that he made looking at a portrait of Napoleon's brother: "I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor" (Barthes 2000, p. 3). To use this idea as a means of working my way into the 19<sup>th</sup> century photographs opens up a richness of possibility for each pair of eyes in the photographs that form my research archive: what do they see? Is this another way of conceptualizing the blind field? Many see the blank lens, the funeral black cloth over the photographer. Others see around them a host of men on the job waiting to have their picture taken, yards of machinery, rolling hills, plunging river-valleys, the inside walls of prisons (steel, rock, concrete), studios, curtains, velvet, plaster, ornate wallpaper, logs, trees. Expectant faces, boredom. The future.

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——In the pose, especially the studio with its painted backdrop, the subject is already dressed as fiction. The portrait is supposed to *summarize* him. The story behind the subject's eyes is where I want to write from, and I am coming at him already stepping outside of his moving life to sit for a fictitious semblance, an effigy.

The blind field is the off-screen, the out-of-frame. It represents (and here I risk giving too much credit to a theory) *everything* outside of the photograph's captured scene.

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3.14 *Railway snowshed construction camp*, c. 1883. (Archives of British Columbia: Canadian Pacific Railway)

In reference to this photograph of a camp along the railway construction, the blind field for me denotes the inside of the buildings: the kitchen, mess hall, bunkhouse, the snowshed in the background. What would we see inside the mess hall? The blind field is the roomful of gruff reeking men gorging themselves; it is those blurred figures down the track, perhaps watching in jealousy, or working slowly while they wait for their own group portrait. For my purposes, this photograph is perfect: here is the rough environment of labouring a construction project through wilderness, utilitarian structures inhabited by men who have carved out the mountainside for their railroad, and the debris sloping down to the left of the frame. It takes little imagination to *see* them turning from the camera and going back to work, calling out to each other and spitting in the dirt.

——The men seem comfortable in the photograph; there is almost a jocularly in some of their faces. The scene lacks the stiffness of a studio portrait and their poses appear borne of no ideal other than having to remain still for the exposure. Compared to a group portrait of surveyors for the CPR, the cooks and workers appear completely at home.



3.15 CPR geological survey party, 1871. (Archives of British Columbia: Canadian Pacific Railway)

However, the workers need to be placed on, next to, or inside the industrial applications which give them meaning. A picture of laborers without the railroad track doesn't make sense (doesn't fit the archive). It is the industrial version of the savage at home on the plain, in the desert, comfortable in the wild, outdoors, out of the civilized walls. It allows their \$1 per day and possible death while earning it to become accepted, fitting.

——This goes for the criminal or the institutionalized photographed before a drab backdrop: concrete, fencing, grime. Of course the institution or the prison is the natural setting for the photograph. However, the frame (setting) immediately allows the viewer to recognize: “I am looking at a criminal or a patient.” The backdrop reassures that the subject is safely walled in, away from the vulnerable public.

The laborers are shown as subalterns, or in some sense as savages, in their *natural* setting. Their employers, on the other hand, are photographed seated at tables, reading, in front of painted backdrops, enclosed in the trappings of their authority, and most

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importantly, not looking at the camera. They sit as if having their portraits painted, rather than photographed. The sheer number of officials, politicians, bankers who pose for the camera with averted gaze, and the number of lower classes who stare directly into the lens, further the ease of spotting distinction between classes, the intent of the photographer to represent the subject in line with the categories of archiving people.



3.16 *CPR engineers*, c. 1880s. (Archives of British Columbia: Canadian Pacific Railway)

Even when ‘on the hunt’ out in the wild world, as in the case of Captain Standish and Superintendent Hare pursuing the Kelly Gang, the publicity photograph adheres to the conventions of studio portraiture. The photograph of Captain Standish is fake: the bushes, tent, etc are props meant to display to the world his capability as an officer on the trail of the criminals. The photograph of Superintendent Hare and search party is likewise stiff, the men lined up and displaying their firearms, Hare with his boot on a stump to show his dominion over nature, and the Aboriginal black-tracker kneeling in front and pointing to what must be some clue, or a footprint of one of the Kellys, noticeable to only himself. Hare looks off into the distance, ever watchful.



3.17 *Captain Standish and dog*, c. 1880. (McMenomy 1984, p. 111)



3.18 *Superintendent Hare and search party*, c. 1880. (McMenomy 1984, p. 110)

The framing of these pictures speaks to the conceptualizing that Victorians applied to photographic seeing, and the ownership they necessarily took over the things they saw in the image, as well as the physical photographs themselves.

—Through the proliferation of cameras and of photographs, Victorians learned to see and to recognize in terms of images; as we do today, they began to speed-read the world around them, as well as the world in the photograph, and to pick up on the predictable. The camera could break down the world into easily deciphered images.

What is more, the modern camera substituted an image for the object represented, as if to say that an observer could learn more and better from the former than from the latter. That image visualized persons, places, and things inaccessible to the ordinary observer, thus expanding the observer's visual universe. At the same time, that image determined *how* one saw things, since it reproduced not only the image of some person, place, or thing, but also a way of seeing subject matter of various kinds. (Armstrong 1999, p. 77)

Through the predictability and stereotype being developed by convention, the camera came to engender trust in Victorians, so that a photograph didn't necessarily raise questions, so much as a sense of knowing. Also, through a developing convention of images, of framing, of posing, Victorians could begin to trust in what the photograph was showing them, to forecast their understanding of a visual reality. ~~In this atmosphere, a photograph wouldn't necessarily raise questions, so much as a sense of knowing.~~ After a certain level of visual bombardment, we begin to relax into a stereotype and predictability around images, making the jump to conclude what it is that we are seeing:

———'Those must be officials; look at their aloof expressions. And these must be workers, for they smile trustingly at the camera, and they stand next to a railroad.'

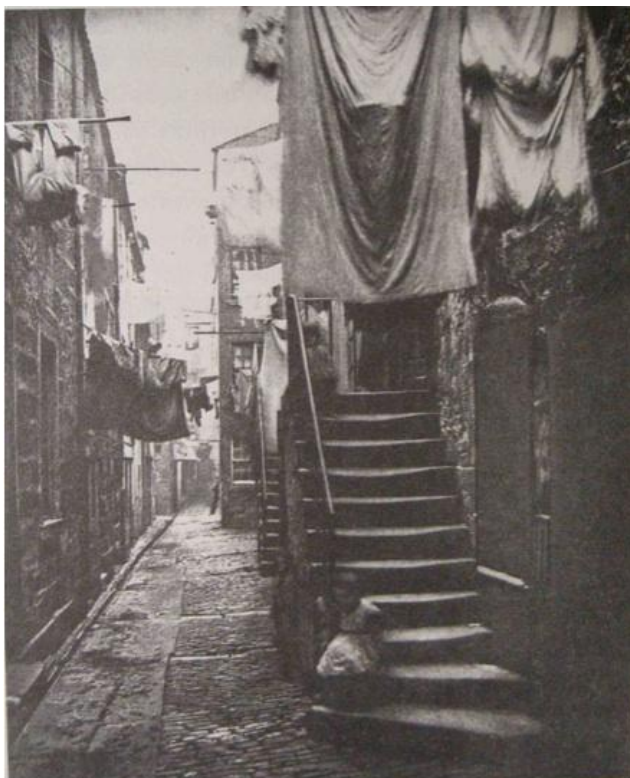
———Little could be more private or sordid than the glimpses the camera offered behind cell doors, behind padded walls. Framing portraits of criminals and the insane in the same base way that the poor were photographed allowed them to be containable inside that frame, stripping the dignity that each group may have had, and replacing it with the brackets of a category, an archive with a heading. Because for the most part they were being photographed for purposes of study or documentation, they were shown as part of a habitat, whether it be the alleyway, the industrial project, or the institution (be it prison or the asylum). This developing archive was accompanied by the overflow of images from the fringes of the empire, the indigenous and the primitive, peering back at a black lens, into the eye of a hungry Victorian world.

———The polarization of using terms such as *us and them*, *past and present*, *civilized and backwards*, was aided greatly by photographs as it applied to urban development, to industrialization's progress. Photographers were commissioned in all corners of the Empire and the Americas to chronicle the soon-to-disappear, a safari of recording in the 'untouched' exotic and remote places, but also in the decrepitude of urban areas as well.



The thirty-one photographs of old Glasgow taken by Thomas Annan between 1868 and 1874 record the first major redevelopment scheme in Great Britain and provide an exceptionally eloquent example of what was in fact a massive enterprise of converting the historic city into a visual record of the past... As first arranged in an album, Annan's images provided a record of those parts of the city that had not yet been touched by modernization...

To offer such a record, he began with a shot of a main thoroughfare that panoramic photography would have displayed for purposes of attracting tourists. From there, however, his camera veered sharply onto narrow, dark, and crooked passageways which seem to lead the eye into another city...



3.19 Annan 1868, *Close No. 193, High Street*. (Armstrong 1999, p. 92)

... Whereas panoramas displayed the new city bursting with people and things, all coursing toward some destination, this kind of photograph represented the old city centers evacuated of people and the objects on which they depended for a livelihood... the fact that he was recording a place and a whole way of life marked for obsolescence seems to endow these images with a fantastic quality... Soon after they were taken, this photographic record was apparently all that remained of the wyndes and vennels of medieval Glasgow... What Annan considered a purely documentary project joined a well-established category of writing and illustration that had already made the most abject pockets of urban decay seem fascinating to the middle-class observer... Annan's photographic record also represented human misery, filth, and disease in highly idealized

terms. However unconsciously, he exploited the difference between the vibrant fullness of the commercial city and the inert fragility of the quarters housing the poor to define the difference between past and present. (Armstrong 1999, pp. 91-4)

In the fascination of the middle-class with discreet slum glimpses, past and present reveal themselves as political through the appropriation inherent in saying, 'Here is something about to die.' As Armstrong points out, even while Annan works with one hand to catalogue everything to be demolished, to capture the slum as evidence before it is allowed to disappear, he works with the other hand to fill the archive of stereotype.

——The viewer, the owner of these images of the lower-class, has the empowerment of a covetous relationship to the subject in the photograph, knowing that he holds the effigy of one deceased, disenfranchised, disappeared, furthering the fanciful attitude towards the run-down inner city streets, and those reclusive creatures inhabiting the alleyways. There is a tempting power in being able to hold a photo of someone or something, to be able to name it after it no longer exists, and to choose to be nostalgic.

“Photographs are a way of imprisoning reality, understood as recalcitrant, inaccessible; of making it stand still... One can't possess reality, one can possess (and be possessed by) images—as, according to Proust, most ambitious of voluntary prisoners, one can't possess the present but one can possess the past.”<sup>22</sup> (Sontag 2001, p. 163)

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In the face of industrial progress, lines were being formed between the active present and the deviate or benighted past, between the positivity of urban sophistication and the increasingly negative rural archaism. For Victorians, denoting just where the lines appeared, and how to stay on the right side of them, would have become a tense practice.

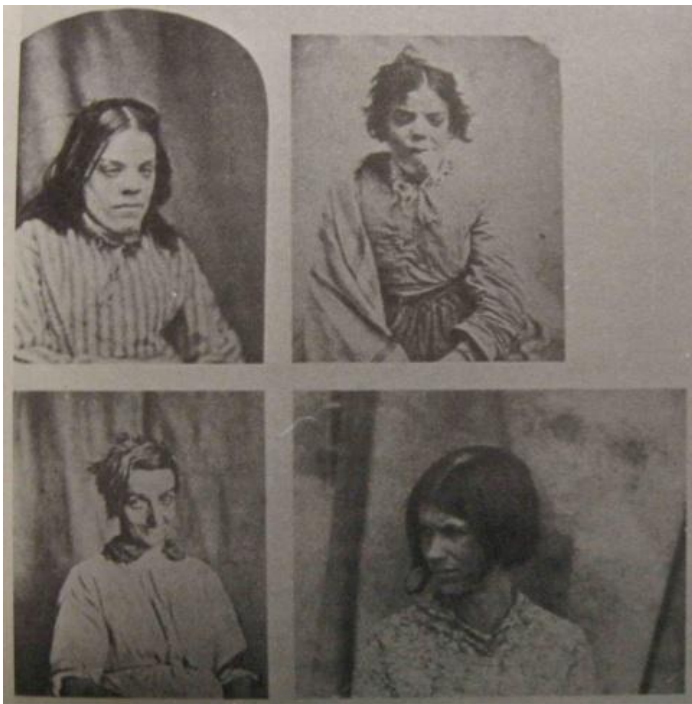
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According to Foucault, the Victorian era produced our modern institutions, namely prisons, schoolrooms, factories, nuclear families, and so forth. He also saw this era as the moment when

... Foucault identified the Victorian era as the moment that gave rise to modern institutions: prisons, sanitariums, factories, colonial bureaucracies, museums, schoolrooms, and families—all those institutions, in other words, that materialized and enforced the categorical differences organizing a complex modern culture. Foucault also identified this as the moment when normal people

~~retired from the discursive scene and~~ Western culture began its century-long preoccupation with the sexual behavior of women, children, the mentally disturbed, masturbators, homosexuals, paupers, natives, regional types, and immigrants. So extensive was the proliferation of literature on questions of deviance, and so intense the debate over its causes and consequences, that Victorian readers were virtually forced to reformulate their sense of who they were as English [Canadian and Australian English as well] men and women, from identities based on their resemblance to one another, to identities based on how they differed from deviant individuals and peripheral groups of people. (Armstrong 1999, pp. 169-70; ~~parenthesis added~~)



3.20 Diamond 1852, *Untitled*. (Armstrong 1999, p. 213)

The lower classes, the deviant, the non-white, were beginning to unwittingly threaten the middle-class Victorian, and it was up to the intelligent individual to remain in the vanguard.

“Were you someone who consumed fiction, leafed through photograph albums, and savored the accounts of local people and their customs written by the early folklorists? If not, according to the emerging classification system, then you were probably the kind of person who provided the subject matter for such leisure-time activities.”<sup>22</sup> (Armstrong 1999, p. 194)

~~Only the educated could hold a shield up to the creeping, and quickly growing, hordes of categorical degenerates.~~

——The lower classes seemed to be eating at the edges of safe Victorian life, and all manner of classifiable deviation could be seen in the slums, in the countryside, in dark skin, even in any bedroom high jinks.

Fittingly, photography offered a certain exactness lacking in the written word, in paintings and sketches. Here was a tool for *identifying*, for *categorizing* the threat. The camera became a powerful ~~instrument~~ for strengthening the classifications of ‘other,’ in the interest of self-preservation. The increasing levels of crime brought on by urban overpopulation and consequent visible levels of disparity gave rise to a need for sophistication in identifying criminals, and the camera came to fit the bill.

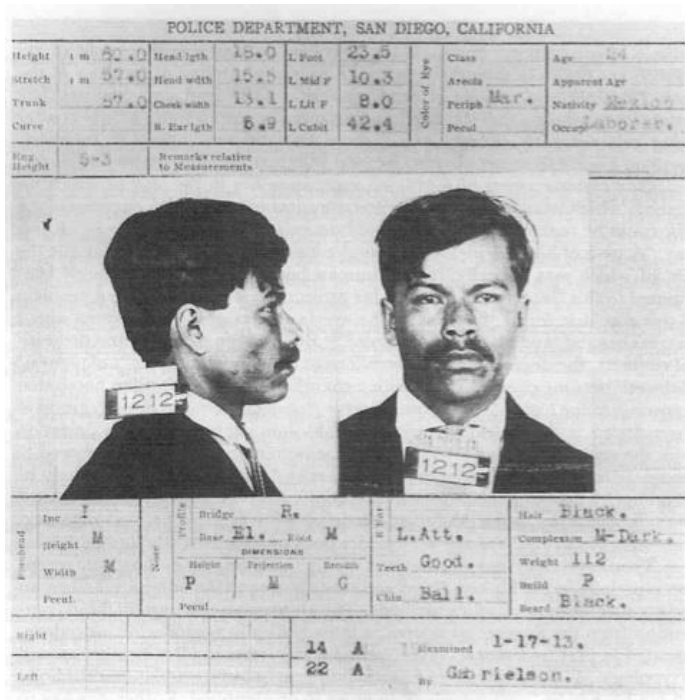
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The law-abiding body recognized its threatening other in the criminal body, recognized its own acquisitive and aggressive impulses unchecked, and sought to reassure itself in two contradictory ways. The first was the invention of an exceptional criminal who was indistinguishable from the bourgeois, save for a conspicuous lack of moral inhibition: herein lay the figure of the criminal genius. The second was the invention of a criminal who was organically distinct from the bourgeois: a *biotype*. The science of criminology emerged from this latter operation. (Sekula 1986, pp. 15-6)

Alan Sekula’s essay ‘The Body and the Archive’ (1986)<sup>22</sup> compares two ~~epistemologic~~epistemologically different approaches to the science of criminology: Alphonse Bertillon, a Paris police official, sought a system of archiving offenders in a practicable way that would allow for the individuality of each person on file to effectively identify them from the masses. Francis Galton, an English statistician and founder of eugenics, sought to de-individualize members of specific categories in order to create visual composites of their ‘type.’ One labored to find a system of bringing each man or woman out of a horde of bodies, to certify his or her singularity. The other labored to fit each man or woman into the horde somewhere, to strip identity in the name of quintessence.

——Bertillon’s system eventuated into an immense filing cabinet of identity cards, broken down categorically. Each card bore the offender’s frontal portrait, along with eleven measurements (arm span, seated height, ear length, etc.) based on a calculation “that two individuals might share the same series of eleven bodily measurements ran on the order of one in four million”<sup>23</sup> (Sekula 1986, pp. 27-8). Also, each card displayed shorthand descriptions (of Bertillon’s design) to denote facial structure, hair colour, and so forth. “Likewise, scars and other deformations of the flesh were clues,

not to any innate propensity for crime, but to the body's physical history: its trades, occupations, calamities<sup>3,22</sup> (Sekula 1986, p. 33, emphasis added).



3.21 Bertillon card, 1913. (Sekula 1986, p. 35)

In Bertillon we recognize a faith in the mathematics of identity, a refusal to assume that photographic representation would suffice for anything other than a final step in confirming the series of measurements. Francis Galton, on the other hand, approached the face's representational properties with such zeal, he invented the composite camera apparatus in order to substantiate his claims as the obverse of Bertillon's method.

“As he explained, any method that relies on particular photographs is bound to be swayed by exceptional and grotesque features more than by ordinary ones, and the portraits supposed to be typical are likely to be caricatures.”<sup>3,23</sup> (Armstrong 1999, p. 18)

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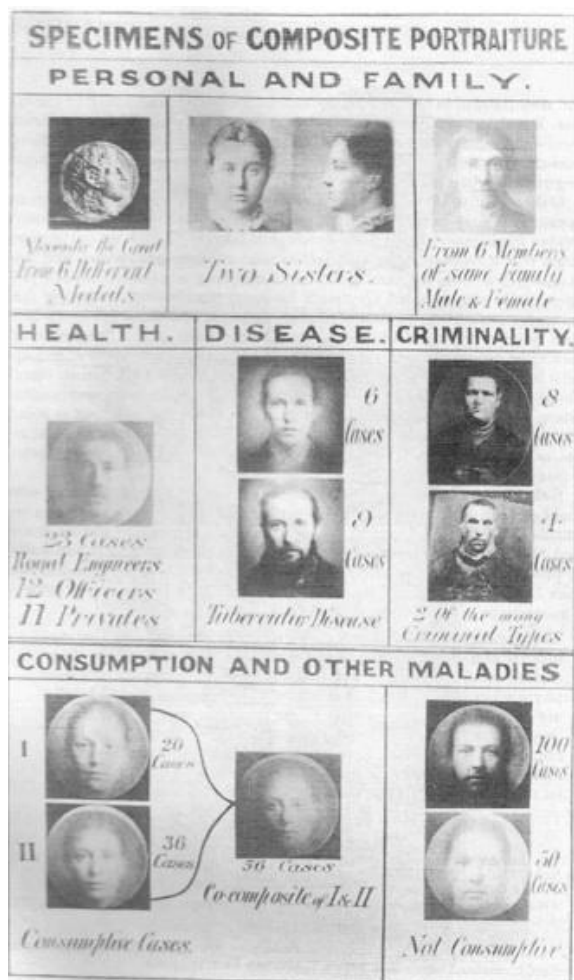
His camera exposed successive portraits onto a single plate, so that the eventual image was a blurred representation of the commonalities between the faces of several people:

“... if a composite were to be made from a dozen originals, each would receive one-twelfth of the required total exposure. Thus, individual distinctive features, features that were unshared and idiosyncratic, faded away into the night of underexposure. What remained was the blurred, nervous configuration of those

features that were held in common throughout the sample.” (Sekula 1986, p. 47)

In his claim for the validity of the images, Galton states that, “The blur of the outlines, which is never great in truly generic composites, *except in unimportant details*, measures the tendency of individuals to deviate from the central type” (cited in Sekula 1986, pp. 47-8; emphasis added).

—The problems with this system seem obvious and several; a danger certainly lies in denoting the “unimportant details,” as those details which sit outside the composite are the very things which describe individuals. The capacity for stereotyping had an elaborate tool, and a complacent spokesman, in Galton. It was in his best interest to find out that certain people looked a certain way, and anyone’s distinct features as an individual would be wiped out in the final composite image.



3.22 Galton 1883, Frontispiece from *Inquiries into Human Faculty*. (Sekula 1986, p. 45)

Galton's composite images of the ghostly denizens of consumption, of specific criminal types, were offset against a composite of Royal Engineers, both officers and privates. The composite military man was presented as the exemplary breeding stock, a cure in human form for the diseases of over-population, poverty and crime. The belief was that sloth and stupidity could potentially be bred out of the species, creating a utopian humanity.

Politically, Galton sought to construct a program of social betterment through breeding... Eugenicists justified their program in utilitarian terms: by seeking to reduce the numbers of the "unfit" they claimed to be reducing the numbers of those predestined to unhappiness. But the eugenics movement Galton founded flourished in a historical context... of declining middle-class birthrates coupled with middle-class fears of a burgeoning residuum of degenerate urban poor.

(Sekula 1986, pp. 42-4)

Ah, those degenerate urban poor again, clawing at the windows of Victorian homes! Galton's goal was to establish physical characteristics of the ideal breeder, and of the undesirable, the genetically retarded, in order to produce the necessary categories for his science. He made composite portraits of family members, ~~of tubercular cases,~~ of many criminal types, ~~sufferers of those affected by~~ consumption and other maladies, Jews, and as mentioned, the Royal Engineers, among others. Not surprisingly, he struggled to define exactly what a criminal looked like, and eventually conceded that:

“The individual faces are villainous enough, but they are villainous in different ways, and when they are combined, the individual peculiarities disappear, and the common humanity of a low type is all that is left.”<sup>22</sup> Thus Galton seems to have dissolved the boundary between the criminal and the working-class poor... Given Galton's eugenic stance, this meant that he merely included the criminal in the general pool of the “unfit.” (Sekula 1986, p. 50)

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Although Galton couldn't say what a criminal looked like, he could say that the criminal ultimately shared the commonalities of the lower class, and that was good enough.

Galton's view is disturbing, especially in its significance as precursor to Nazi Germany. Although even without the historical context of the Nazis' perversion of eugenics, Galton's ideas threaten a class of people unarmed to defend themselves from experiments of state-controlled purification. Mandatorily longer sentences for recidivist criminals in hopes of reducing the numbers of lower class progeny sounds like only the beginning of experiments which would inevitably use as fodder the lower classes, the 'unfit.'

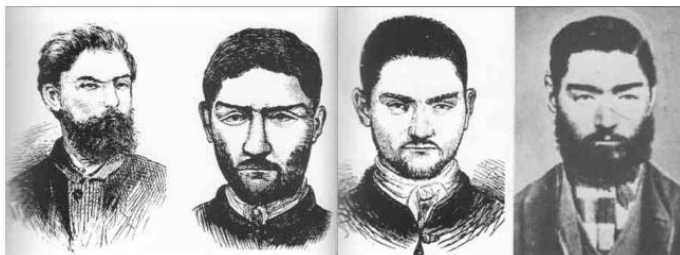
“Despite their differences, both Bertillon and Galton were caught up in the attempt to preserve the value of an older, optical model of truth in a historical context in which abstract, statistical procedures seemed to offer the high road to social truth and social control.” (Sekula 1986: 55) Bertillon and Galton had their differences, but they shared the similar belief in abstract information, in statistics as a means of *seeing* the populace. When the method of One of the abstract procedures was fingerprinting was introduced, it a method that proved cheaper and far easier than Bertillon's process, and took the identifying of recidivists out of the realm of facial recognition. “With the advent of fingerprinting, it became evident that the body did not have to be



“circumscribed” in order to be identified” (Sekula 1986, p. 34). By the late nineteenth century Bertillon’s system would begin to lose ground to fingerprinting, and Galton’s claims would suffer the emerging self-consciousness and increasing modesty of the social sciences.

However, in 1880, casting a ‘type’ of criminal facial structure was very much still in favour. In my novel, when the protagonist Joseph Richard is on his way to meet Ned Kelly, I describe the impression he has formed of what Kelly looks like, drawn from the images that Joseph has looked at:

“He’d seen Ned’s face on posters, sketches of a werewolf with eyebrows that met between small and empty eyes, and a grainy photograph showing an angry face and a strangely flat torso with a nimbus of the original hairline above the head.”



3.23 ‘Likenesses’ of Ned Kelly, c. 1880, left to right: sketch, two engravings, composite. (Jones 2008, pp. 230-1 photo insert iii)

The descriptions are of sketches and doctored photographs used by police throughout their search. However, in the more famous, and more fairly representative photos and sketches taken after his capture, Ned looks very little like the wolfish, deliberately deviate representation collaged together as police propaganda and as supposed likeness.

An integral photographer of this particular history was Melbourne-based [photographer](#) J.W. Lindt. His iconic photograph of Joe Byrne’s corpse (strung up by police for his benefit and that of another photographer, Arthur Burman) sparked for me the question of why these photos needed to be taken, and to what purpose.



3.24 Lindt 1880, *Arthur Burman photographing Joe Byrne's corpse*. (McMenomy 1984, p. 204)



3.25 Burman 1880, *Joe Byrne's corpse*. (McMenomy 1984, p. 205)



3.26 Burman 1880, *Joe Byrne's corpse*, close-up. (McMenomy 1984, p. 205)

Lindt and Burman convinced police to hang the body in front of a door so that they could photograph it, in full daylight, in public. Why not take a picture of the corpse lying down? Or at least behind closed doors? The Kelly Gang had been such a threat for so long, to the point of Ned at least being considered supernatural; perhaps it was just too soon to relinquish their capacity as bogeymen. Hence, one more last image of Byrne, standing post-mortem, as if his termination couldn't be quite real.

The seeming casualness of those gathered strikes me; who could linger and dawdle while a dead man hangs on a door in broad daylight? But in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, death was more frequently witnessed, corpses were not as hidden away before burial. Society would not be able to be so squeamish as we are today. And post-mortem photography was not rare. When American outlaw Jesse James was murdered in 1882, his corpse was strapped to a board,

... then they tilted the man until he was nearly vertical and let the camera lens accept the scene for a minute. The man's eyes were shut, the skin around them was slightly green, and the sockets themselves seemed so cavernous that photographic copies were later repainted with two blue eyes looking serenely at

some vista in the middle distance... [(the prints)] sold for two dollars apiece and were the models for the lithographed covers on a number of magazines. (Hansen 1983, pp. 220-1)



3.27 Corpse of Jesse James, 1882. (Museum Syndicate)

In *Secure the Shadow*, Jay Ruby discusses the history of corpse photography, and its public presence, particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “The ease with which nineteenth-century photographers discussed the task of photographing the dead is surely some indication of how culturally normative the practice was.” (Ruby 1995, pp. 59-60).

The book features an article by photographer Charlie E. Orr, published in the *Philadelphia Photographer* in 1877, giving practical suggestions on how a photographer might ease the burden of taking a corpse’s picture:

“... secure sufficient help to do the lifting and handling, for it is no easy manner to bend a corpse that has been dead twenty-four hours. Place the body on a lounge or sofa, have the friends dress the head and shoulders as near as in life as possible, then politely request them to leave the room to you and your aides, that you may not feel the embarrassment incumbent should they witness some little mishap liable to befall the occasion...

Place your camera in front of the body at the foot of the lounge, get your plate ready, and then comes the most important part of the operation (opening the eyes), this you can effect handily by using the handle of a teaspoon; put the upper lids down, they will stay; turn the eyeball around to its proper place, and

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*you have the face nearly as natural as life. Proper retouching will remove the blank expression and the stare of the eyes.*” (Orr, cited in Ruby 1995, p. 58)

What a relief that article would have been to read, for a less experienced photographer working in the field of portraiture, especially one with a teaspoon handy.

—As photography naturally offered another means of remembrance, and death was not so feared as it is today, photographers found work in some cases of infant mortality as well. This carte de visite demonstrates “that parents were often desperate to have one picture of their dying child. An adult hand supports the child while on the back of the image someone has written “Taken while dying”” (Ruby 1995, p. 179).



3.28 Tompkins 1874, *Florence May Laser*, albumen print, carte de visite. (Ruby 1995, p. 179)

It is hard to imagine the grief and confusion of organizing the photograph while a child's life leaves the room. Obviously photography was coming to be seen as a legitimate means of keeping memory alive, even if the subject would not have existed in any other photographs while living.

Despite this information, the spectacle of Joe Byrne strung up for photographers is still ghastly, and it raises questions. The reason for the photograph could be multiple: to turn Byrne into a statue or icon, to remove any dignity from a body finally in police hands, or perhaps it was really the case that for Lindt and Burman, it was a belated photo opportunity, and they needed some sensationalism: (Batchen 2002, p. 35).

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— The image is remarkable for several reasons. It is a picture of someone taking a picture. But who is the true subject, the deceased Joe Byrne or Lindt's photographer colleague? Also, Julian Ashton, a sketch artist working for the *Illustrated Australian News* appears at the left of the photo facing away from the ghastly scene. The previous night, Ashton “had squatted in a lock-up cell sketching Joe’s body on a wooden engraver’s block by candlelight. He called it, “The most miserable assignment I’ve ever had” (Jones 2008, pp. 342-3).

— ~~It is a picture of someone taking a picture. Who is the true subject, the deceased Joe Byrne or Lindt's photographer colleague? Also, there is the presence of Ashton the sketcher to consider.~~ He had been paid to capture the dead man’s likeness as well, in his own medium. Does he disdain the macabre activity of the photographers?

Ian Jones claims that Ashton “turns his back on the scene—with good reason” (2008, pp. 342-3), while Geoffrey Batchen mentions “the well-tailored presence of artist and illustrator Julian Ashton, leaving the scene with completed sketchbook under his arm” (2002, p. 35). I think the very nature of Ashton’s task, the length of time involved in producing a thorough sketch as opposed to a photograph, would lend a reverence and time for reflection that taking a photograph wouldn’t necessarily. Ashton’s task would have been solitary and sobering, spooky. He’d be able to smell young Byrne’s body in the close room, and he’d undoubtedly have to listen to the humdrum of police-work outside the room, or perhaps inside with him while he worked. He would feel the connection that the artist must have for his subject, in order to create a reasonable depiction with his pencils and brushes.

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— Faced with the industrial machinery of photography, Ashton the sketcher is like a man sitting in a rowboat, rocking in the wake of a steamship. Or, more fittingly, a man on horseback being drowned in the great smoke-belching rush of a locomotive. Ned Kelly, a horse lover through and through, had

“... threatened railways three times: in a casual remark at Euroa; a warning, “remember your railways” in the Cameron Letter; and in a planted rumour that he would blow up the Beechworth train “out of revenge” for locking up the sympathisers. Were there memories tangled in these threats—of Old Country stories telling how smoke from steam trains had blighted the potato crop, causing Ireland’s great famine? Memories of all the attempts to derail trains when they first appeared in the north-east? Images of the dying towns along the main coach road? (Jones 2008, p. 275)

It is not a stretch to imagine Julian Ashton, after his wretched night with Joe Byrne’s body, feeling more in touch with the defeated outlaws than with the bustling police and photographers, especially surrounded by the zeal of another photograph by Lindt, in front of the same lock-up:



3.29 Lindt 1880, *Police in front of Benalla lock-up*. (McMenomy 1984, p. 206)

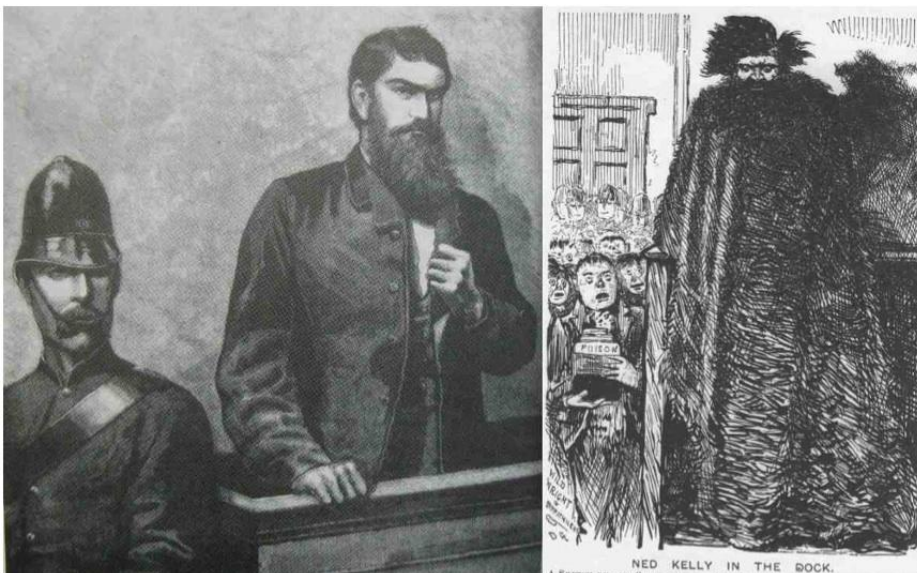
Although unpublished at the time, Lindt’s image contains many of the elements—topicality, spontaneity, narrative interest, and implied violence—that characterize the press photograph as we know it today. At the same time he has been able to embody perceptively the contemporary struggle between photography and illustration as a means of reportage, a struggle from which press photography was to emerge triumphant only at the turn of the century. (Batchen 2002, p. 35)

The role of the sketch artist would for the time being remain integral to reportage, as would Ashton’s part in the Kelly story. An interesting encounter would happen months later for Ashton, when he painted a depiction of Ned Kelly standing in the dock during his trial. Kelly noticed that Ashton was drawing him.

“Suspicious that the portrait was “for legal purposes”, Ned asked for “something to keep the cold air off”. Given a scarlet-lined, possum-skin rug, he drew it around him and raised it across one arm to screen his face from “the gentleman with the brush and pencil”” (Jones 2008, p. 361)

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The end result of Ashton’s brush and pencil work in court was a portrait communicating Kelly’s formidability, without conveying any sense of deviance or ugliness. Compare Ashton’s composition to another, taken in the same court, of the same man, by another sketch artist, and the wild parameters of what constitutes a likeness (and what artists could get away with depending on their purposes) can be clearly seen.



3.30 Ashton 1880, *Ned Kelly in the dock*, engraving from watercolour sketch. (McMenomy 1984, p. 217)  
3.31 Gaunson 1880, *Ned Kelly in the dock*, sketch. (Carrington 2003, p. 29)

It is the respectfulness of Ashton’s work that leads me to believe Jones’ claim that Ashton would make a point of turning his back on Lindt and Burman’s photographic enterprise.

Ned Kelly certainly wasn’t the only victim of contrived representation in this saga. As I mentioned previously, the Aboriginal tracker in the portrait of Superintendent Hare and his search party kneels in front, pointing to something on the ground while Hare gazes at the horizon. Gael Newton’s book *Shades of Light: Photography and Australia, 1839-1988* was produced to coincide with white Australia’s bicentenary. It contains a

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... remarkable portrait by an unknown daguerreotypist from around 1860 of an Aboriginal maid in a pale crinoline dress holding a laughing white child on her knee... the ease and intimacy of this image, one of a number featuring this Aboriginal woman found in the same family collection, suggests a different kind of relationship between the races than we might perhaps have presumed from other examples of Australia's historical and photographic record in this area. (Batchen 2002, p. 31)

The archive of Kelly-related photographs provides several examples of the white/indigenous relationship. Aboriginal police, brought in from Queensland to assist in the search, are depicted in the photos very much according to their recorded 'place' in the Kelly hunt.

“With colonial wisdom they had been allotted demeaning “official” names—H—Hero, Johnny, Jimmy, Jack, Barney and Sambo—w—which tended to give them “tracker” status rather than their proper standing as mounted police. O'Connor, however, always referred to them as “troopers.”” (Jones 2008, p. 252)

They are shown in this photo with Sub-inspector O'Connor lined up and displayed.



3.32 *Sub Inspector O'Connor and his trackers*, c. 1879, Benalla, left to right: Barney, Johnny, Jimmy, Sub-insp. O'Connor, Jack and Hero. (McMenomy 1984, p. 151)

Although this other photograph appears to present the troopers in a more relaxed and level relation to their fellow police, but they are still bookended by whites, two on each side, and O'Connor sits on a chair while the indigenous troopers sit on the fence or in the dirt.



3.33 *Queensland trackers and Victorian police*, 1879, Benalla, left to right: Const. King, Sub-insp. O'Connor, Hero, Barney, Jack, Jimmy, Johnny, Supt. Sadlier, Capt. Standish. (McMenomy 1984, p. 146)

To me, the photos bear resemblance to almost contemporary cataloguing photos of indigenous people (as reproduced in Nancy Armstrong's *Fiction in the Age of Photography*:-(1999)-).



3.34 Charnay 1863, *Macuoa, Arab Indian, and black Creole from Reunion* (left), *Group of Negresses* (right). (Armstrong 1999, p. 215)

It looks as if the troopers are being displayed as ansome sort of example of their race, as opposed to legitimate police officers specially imported interstate from Queensland for their incredible, even superhuman, tracking skills. Ned Kelly

“... knew that they alone were a match for him in his own country. At the very end he hoped to destroy them, showing near-obsession with the threat they posed. For his part [Chief Commissioner] Standish would refuse to address a police victory parade until the Aboriginal troopers had been removed.” (Jones 2008, p. 253)

For a thorough chronicle of their depressing misuse by Victorian police, see Ian Jones’ *Ned Kelly: A Short Life*.

—A comparable history to the relations between white and Aboriginal police in Australia can be seen in Charles Wilkins’ book *The Wild Ride: A History of the North West Mounted Police 1873-1904* (2010), a focus on the origins of Canada’s police system. One photograph in particular stands out for me.



3.35 *Native and non-Native scouts, with Mounties, 1890, Fort Macleod, back row, left to right: Scout Hunbury, Jerry Potts. Middle row: Insp. Cecil Denny, Staff Sgt. Chris Hilliard, Sgt. George S. Cotter. Front row: Black Eagle, Elk Facing the Wind. (Wilkins 2010, p. 103)*

The caption reads: ‘Native and non-Native scouts, with Mounties, at Fort Macleod’ (Wilkins 2010, p. 103). I would argue that although the indigenous scouts are seated on the rug, their seating arrangement has more to do with cultural tradition than hierarchy of race. The photograph carries a sense of pride and fortitude in the faces and structure

of the men. Black Eagle and Elk Facing the Wind were part of a selected number of indigenous scouts working with the North-West Mounted Police to protect tribes living on the Canadian prairies from starvation in the wake of the disappearance of migratory buffalo, from rampaging Sioux from the US, from whiskey traders. Like the photographs of Sub-inspector O'Connor and the Aboriginal troopers, these men face directly into the camera's lens. They are not officials; they are employees of a system, regardless of their dignity. Unlike the Australian Aboriginal troopers, though, Black Eagle and Elk Facing the Wind haven't been renamed for their superiors' convenience.

——— This photo is important to my research for another reason: Staff Sergeant Chris Hilliard, seated centre, is the basis of my fictionalized antagonist, ~~Sergeant~~ Hilliard. The assured pose of this young Mountie struck me when I came across the picture, and I found in him an ideal candidate for the visualizing of my lazily alert, coffee-swilling officer of the law.

*Pierre turned from the window, went to the door and held it open, as the two men tied their horses.*

——— *He nodded to them and rocked the door as they approached. One was the Indian agent who'd been there a few days before. Pierre didn't know the other.*———

*'Mr. Richard, this is Sergeant Hilliard,' said the agent.*

——— *'Sergeant of what?'*

——— *'North west mounted police,' said Hilliard. He wore his moustaches in a drooping frown and looked bored, having glanced Pierre and the house over. His head and shoulders were thrown back the same as Paul's, and he stood a few inches taller than the agent.*

——— *'Well, what the Christ do you want? Coffee?'* Pierre let go of the door and stepped down into the yard.

——— *'Coffee would bring me right back up,' said Hilliard.*

——— *Pierre walked at them so they had to step apart, and he went to the barn. He opened the creaking gate and the agent glanced at his rifle, four long paces away in the saddle holster. Pierre shouldered out with a pitchfork of hay and threw it in front of one horse, then went back in for another.*

——— *'Much obliged,' said Hilliard.*

——— *Pierre made a point of walking between the men again as he went back to the house. 'Well let me put that coffee on then,' he said...*

—...They sat in silence, Pierre and Hilliard sprawled in the kitchen as if they'd known each other long enough to grow bored with chat. The agent breathed impatiently and ran his hands over the table, spun his cup, glared out each window in turn. Hilliard looked as if he were falling asleep when he said, 'Mr. Richard, you can sympathize with our situation.'

—'Really.'

—'Your house is the only one on this side of the river for a mile in either direction. The Indian village on the other side is missing a young father and husband.'

— Pierre nodded. He shrugged again, and kept his hands on his lap. They were silent for a minute until Hilliard spoke.

—'This coffee is just coursing through me,' said Hilliard. 'Is it from the general store here in Chemainus?'

—'It's from the store in Westholme. It's closer.'

—'Could I use your privy?' He stood up.

— Pierre pointed to the barn and spun his finger.

—'Behind the barn?'

— Pierre tilted his chin. 'Watch, the seat needs repair.'

—'I'll do my business standing.' Hilliard opened the door and stepped into the yard.



3.36 North-West Mounted Police, 1890, Fort Macleod, left to right: Denny, Black Eagle, Elk Facing the Wind, Hilliard, Cotter, Hunbury. (Glenbow Archive)

Another photograph of Hilliard and the group—Potts is absent—shows them on the job. It would seem that police, trackers, scouts, straddle the divide between officialdom and employee. These images are easily readable as representing a group of men employed in *honest and respectable* work. They are valid enough to be photographed in portrait style; they still face the camera, because they are not superior officers, but they are not under scrutiny by the camera either. They are on the right side of photographic categorizing, on the right side of the law; unlike the photographs that would be produced of those in their captivity, the images are clear in their representation of upright subjects. The police have earned the right to be photographed on their merit as legitimate people, unlike the lower classes who remain photographable only as “visibly inextricable from place” (Stein 2001, p. 605). The lower classes remain lost in the wilderness of their environments, to be sought out and captured by the photographer, the social investigator.

“I went down into the under-world of London,” (Jack London) explains in the Preface (to his book *The People of the Abyss*), “with an attitude of mind which I may best liken to that of an explorer” (Stein 2001, p. 591).

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—So begins Jack London’s journey, or safari, into the darkness of urban decay in the slums of London in 1902—accompanied by 76 photographs, some clearly staged, some confusing or contradictory, some just plain bad—a “socioautobiography (or is it autosociology?)” (Stein 2001, p. 599), with a decidedly difficult-to-decipher aim. In his article, ‘London’s Londons: Photographing poverty in the people of the abyss,’ Richard L. Stein points out the safari approach of the book: “A new race has sprung up, a street people, London explains; “a new species,” he adds later, “a breed of city savages” (2001, p. 599).

—This reiterates my earlier discussion about photographic safaris to the new world, the yet-to-be tamed, and the too-old world, the dead-zone of archaic history, that which must be left behind or corrected once it has been archived. London describes Londoners as savages and beasts (Stein 2001: 591) and goes so far as to describe the “creatures of prey” (2001: 624) in purely zoological terms: “... I was afraid of their hands, their naked hands, as one may be afraid of the paws of a gorilla... The slum is their jungle, and they live and prey in the jungle” (cited in Stein 2001, p. 624).

——Again we see the detachment of privilege taking place, that relief inherent in being able to hold a book of photographs and descriptions of the lower classes, and to gratify in imagining *they* are something other than *us*. This gaze would be far more comforting than to acknowledge poverty as possibility, a consequence of misfortunes that could topple a middle-class reader into that pit of darkness between the pages. It would be much more reassuring to read that the creature staring back from a flash powder-lit park bench was somehow non-human, regressive, part of the same species as the criminal. As previously mentioned, the desire to *see* a biotypical criminal was borne of the gaze where the “law-abiding body recognized its threatening other in the criminal body... its own acquisitive and aggressive impulses unchecked” (Sekula 1986, p. 15).

——How much more appealing it would have been to Victorian readers to conceive of the subjects as unreachable, beyond our help,

... “a separate race. “A short and stunted people is created,” [London] explains, “a breed strikingly differentiated from their masters’ breed, a pavement folk, as it were, lacking stamina and strength... doomed to lingering and painful destruction,” not by inherent weakness but by the “forces of industrial society as it exists today” (Stein 2001, p. 604)

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——Only one thing to do, then, and that is to expose the creatures to the photographer’s ~~the~~ flash powder ~~both~~ as they sleep, to catalogue their numbers, to chronicle their destruction under industry’s foot. The camera technology available to London in 1902 allows for a sense of snapshot, of exposé replacing pose, a move beyond the required teamwork (or at least allowance) between subject and photographer, and into an abrupt violence. The imprisonment in the camera’s lens becomes ~~both~~ quicker, and also easier perhaps on the subject. They are not required to be dragged about or scrutinized for as long as previously, with earlier camera technology, when natural light had to provide the illumination. Also, London allows the photographs to be indistinct, allows the subjects to avert their faces from the gaze of his lens.

“Blurred, at once too bright and too dark, the photograph is curiously, perhaps deliberately, unsatisfying. What does flashpowder help us see now? It is as if both London and his subject—for this moment, at least—resist the demands of this medium, this tradition.” (Stein 2001, p. 621)

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———There is the same assault of light as in Jacob Riis's 1890 book *How the Other Half Lives*, an influence on London's *People of the Abyss*. Both books imply the poor being flushed out or exposed by the camera flash, both offer confusing, contradictory images where we struggle to make sense of dynamic, of veracity. The subjects are blinded and in some cases terrified by the flashlight "contained in cartridges fired from a revolver" (Weinstein 2002, p. 202), and Riis's team even sets a house on fire accidentally in their zeal to photograph a group of blind beggars at night. The blindness in Riis's book goes two ways. The social investigator, the author, is also blinded by his sympathy and his purposes.

The problem with sympathy, for Riis, is that it is indiscriminating. Sympathy in *How the Other Half Lives* is often the result of manipulating one's vision, as in this example where Riis remarks upon the many beggars who sell their pencils only pretending to be blind: "professional mendicancy does not hesitate to make use of the greatest of human afflictions as a pretense for enlisting the sympathy upon which it thrives". Here, the "blind" beggar sees and takes advantage of the sympathetic passerby, who mistakenly thinks he sees a blind beggar. The seer is, in effect, blinded. Riis himself confesses to having been tricked by a beggar woman who held what he thought to be a baby on her lap, only to learn that "the bundle I had been wasting my pennies upon [was] just rags and nothing more". Riis's professional identity as reformer comes up against the beggar's professional identity as mendicant. Riis's photographs are meant to help us see things "right" to give us his professional view of the tenements, but what happens when what he sees is a lie? What happens when the photograph produces more blind spots than insights? (Weinstein 2002, p. 202)

Jack London's series of photographs, and his narration of them, seems a result of so many years of this blindness, a disease of the Victorian desire to know, to categorize, to contain. In London's book, the disease has culminated in a self-conscious and impertinent narrator, matching his story to a narrative of questionable and ambiguous images. The subjects are fearful of surveillance, and London comments that a group of men waiting in front of a workhouse "have a distinct objection to being photographed... and turn their bodies directly they see the camera" (cited in Stein 2001, p. 611).

———It would seem that by the time London wrote his book, the camera's role had changed and deepened, recognized by the targets of its surveillance for what it was, recognized by authority as a tool, a system of policing through observation, and recognized by the social investigator as unreliable. In the end, perhaps the only thing



left for the camera to do is to turn its scrutinizing eye back on the classes responsible for wanting to archive, to categorize.

———London'sThe book coincided with the 1902 Coronation of Edward VII, in reality the very end of the Victorian era. London dedicates a chapter to his observations of the coronation parade, and in the middle of the night, to photographs of homeless people sleeping in the park. Again, the photographs of both scenes are unsatisfying, at odds with London's writing, which is itself unsure whether to jeer or cheer the entire spectacle. Perhaps the tone of lampoon, of self-congratulation in London's narration and his confusing photography is a fitting one to see out the end of one era and the dawn of another, a last chance at chronicling that phenomenon which made class distinctions both deeper and more clearly certifiable, the Victorian-era photograph.

———“What could be more central to the argument than this massive display of class and the exhibitionary machinery that inscribes its power? What presentation of social or cultural authority could more clearly, more visibly, identify the reality of “the abyss”?” (Stein 2001, p. 617)

London finds himself “perplexed and saddened” (cited in Stein 2001, p. 618), and admits he has never seen anything “so hopeless and so tragic” (618), yet he also finds himself at risk of being swept up in the raw emotion of the huge crowd, many of them in rags, as the juggernaut of state power rumbles past in a roar of fanfare. It is the pageant to mark the end of the Victorian era, and London is there to witness it with his own eyes, for the purposes of a book heavy with the compiled notions developed over that era, about photography as a tool of social observation. He is on a safari to chronicle the extremity of the lower classes, and at the same time experiences the overwhelming force of the extremity of the supreme upper class. There is no one closer to the top of the upper class than the man rolling past in his carriage. London stands in the crowd, surrounded by the “elaborate spectacular machinery that packages class for popular consumption” (Stein 2001, p. 618).

The fictionality of the entire experience flickers in front of his eyes, and he cannot discern anymore *how he sees* this world:

“And I check myself with a rush, striving to convince myself that it is all real and rational, and not some glimpse of fairyland. This I cannot succeed in doing, and it is better so. I much prefer to believe that all this pomp, and vanity, and show, and mumbo-jumbo foolery, has come from fairyland, than to believe it the

performance of sane and sensible people who have mastered matter, and solved the secrets of the stars.” (London cited in Stein 2001, p. 620)

Where to go from here? What became of photography as documentation of class after the Victorian era came to a close? As discussed regarding the photographic archiving of Bertillon and Galton, photographs of criminals in police custody, the early mug shots, were considered data, either as part of a list of measurements, or as one more image in a collage of representation. Police photography was concerned with recording information, not having offenders sit for portraits. However, in Peter Doyle’s book *Crooks Like Us* (2009), we are introduced to a truly unique view of the criminal mug shot, and to a remarkably sociological representation of offenders, in the form of photography taken by New South Wales police in Sydney, from roughly 1910 to 1930.



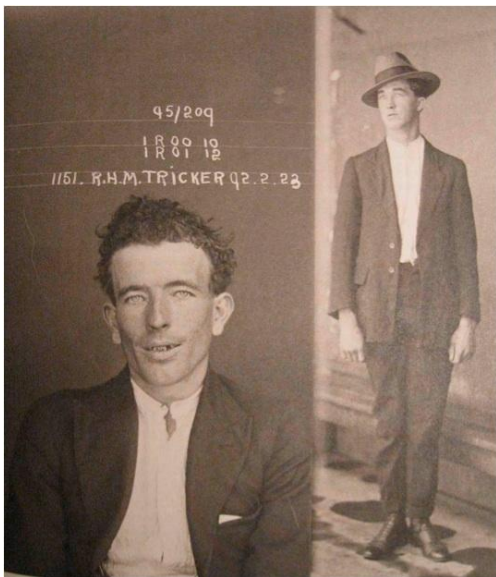
3.37 *Ada McGuinness (alias Edith Mitchell, Edith Cavanagh)*, July 26<sup>th</sup> 1929, Central Police Station, Sydney. (Doyle 2009, p. 263)

3.38 *Walter Holland*, Sept. 3<sup>rd</sup> 1921, Central Police Station, Sydney. (Doyle 2009, p. 157)

We don’t know why these particular people were chosen. A single paragraph in a police booklet from 1935 mentions the work of the “expert photographers” of the Photographic Section, who took portraits of people “when in the opinion of the arresting Officer the offender is liable to lapse into a life of vice and crime”. The gallery of “Special Photographs”, as they were called, seems to have been intended to help police distinguish the professional, in-for-the-long-haul players from the hordes of simply unlucky, momentarily foolish or temporarily erring citizens. Police were expected to be able to recognize professional criminals by sight, and various methods were used to help that recognition. Young constables, for example, would be deliberately assigned to tedious duty at the criminal courts, escorting prisoners from their cells to the courtroom and back again—which afforded them the time to get to know the crooks as individuals. These naturalistic photographs may well have served a similar purpose. (Doyle 2009, p. 17; emphasis added)



3.39 D.S. Glynn, Feb. 20<sup>th</sup> 1922, Central Police Station, Sydney. (Doyle 2009, p. 177)



3.40 Robert Henry Tricker (alias Robert Maxwell) and James Joseph Easterbrook (alias Tom Harrison), Feb. 12<sup>th</sup> 1923, Central Police Station, Sydney. (Doyle 2009, p. 229)



3.41 Charles Rennerson, Aug. 30<sup>th</sup> 1921, Central Police Station, Sydney. (Doyle 2009, p. 295)

Time and again in the photographs, there is an emanation of trust, or at least a willing compliance, in the expressions and stature of the subjects. Some appear downright jocular with the police photographer. As Doyle says, police were required to interact with offenders, to form some acquaintance on a personal level, for the sake of being able to identify them as individuals. This is a far cry from Francis Galton's blurry amalgamations of consumptive types and murderous types, from Bertillon's photographs of the many different types of ears. Of course, those systems may still have been in use into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but they had to exist alongside the work of departments like Sydney's central police station. I would argue that by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, photographic seeing had progressed away from the concerns associated with the Victorian era, and into the realm of the considerations of the social sciences. This is not to say that Victorians were incapable of capturing something in their photographs that transcended stereotyping. The beautiful cell-room portraits of young Lewis Payne are evidence of that.

Jennifer Green-Lewis cautions the overly presumptive academic to be aware that

...“what we popularly define as Victorian is frequently neither coterminous with the life of its monarch, nor even with the beginning and end of her century; it designates an aesthetic, rather than a precisely historical, concept.” (Green-Lewis 2000, p. 52)

-I am trying to be conscious of the distinction, and therefore I find the Coronation a good place (the only place, perhaps) in history to end this discussion of Victorian belief around photography, around seeing through images. Why do we feel a capacity to *know* the Victorians when we see them? Perhaps it can be as simple a reason as: because they are really us.

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The Victorians are visually real to us because they have a documentary assertiveness unavailable to persons living before the age of the camera. Further, though they may appear in their hoops, top hats, and whiskers, and as much as photography affirms the strangeness of the Other; so it emphasizes the shared ordinariness of its human subjects, in this case Victorians only by historical accident rather than evolutionary difference. (Green-Lewis 2000, p. 53)

The exotic is only exotic as long as we see it as other, and its strangeness comes from keeping it at arm's length. Victorian photographs, then, are only that because we want them to be.

“It is one of the attractions of the nineteenth century that it is fixed and over, done with, definable in terms of dates and monarch and things that happened. After all, nothing will ever happen there again, so at least, theoretically, the possibility exists of a totalizing classification.” (Green-Lewis 2000, p. 61)

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This is precisely what I need be aware of when I collect and form an archive of photographs to serve my fictional narrative. History is a world of understandings, of subjective writing and thinking, and to believe in a right or wrong approach to a certain history—or to consider myself sufficiently informed—is folly. Instead, there must be a constant dialogue with oneself, and with others, as well as with the materials I use to form a story out of what I think I'm seeing; perhaps the truth lies not so much in always deciphering history, but in always asking what I am looking at, always.

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———The glamour in Victorian portraits that we associate with that era, photos that we romanticize and become nostalgic over, ~~are~~ are taken of a very small percent of the population, and they are glimpses of frozen seconds, usually adorned in props from the photographer's studio. The photos taken outside, of groups of people, may show them dressed in their Sunday finery, and reflect almost nothing of their day-to-day lives, concerns, dispositions.

——The vast majority of people would be living in some variation of what we would consider extreme: poverty, working conditions and hours, threat of illness or displacement or loss of employment. Even the absolute most powerful men in Canada were plagued by financial destruction over the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway. George Stephen, president of the CPR, was forced to sell all of his possessions, a staggering collection of art and furniture, in order to generate desperate last minute funds.

When the treasury officers arrived... Stephen stood quietly by. They had already counted his cash and securities. Now they brought along experts who valued his growing art collection, his marble statuary, his furniture, and his famous imported piano. Then they catalogued his household linen, his china, and his silverware. Stephen carefully examined the long list of his material possessions acquired over a period of thirty-five years in Canada, and then... “without a flicker of an eyelid signed it all away” (Berton 1971, p. 352)

The men, politicians and magnates, were forced to make beggar’s trips—even the Prime Minister of Canada, Sir John A. Macdonald, went hat in hand—to Europe, some several times over, to borrow and plead for enough money to finance the CPR before it was finished, and then to get the country out of crushing debt once it was.

This is to say nothing of the men doing the actual construction, living and dying in brutal conditions. Any pomp visible in the photographs I use for research purposes, any complacency on my part regarding the subjects’ good fortune, must be tempered with the understanding that a moment in time does not portray a life, and any ease or pride on the sitters’ faces is liable to be as fabricated as the painted meadow behind them.

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Once the photographer caps his lens, he asks the man in frock coat and top hat to please remove the loaned clothing, and that man complies. Already his proud look fades. His face slackens back into the vacancy of distraction and worry, and he reaches into his pocket for the dollar he cannot afford to spend on a portrait.

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# **The Shadow of his Brother**

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*The Shadow of his Brother*

# ONE

Jeanette watched through the black upstairs window as Paul and his father Pierre yelled and gesticulated out near the rickety little barn.

She watched them cross the field in the direction of the river. Dinner cooled on the table downstairs in front of the suffering Joseph, whose hunger brought him wolflike to circle food and snarl menacingly. She watched their diminishing ghosts, Paul trying to walk next to his father and Pierre keeping distance between them, so that they didn't follow the bald dirt path, but created two wavering lines drifting away through the thick grass.

Joseph sat across from his mother at the table as flies crawled on the clothed plates. His glasses wore two versions of the smudged oil lamp and she could see her own wet eyes above them.

‘Mother, I’m dying.’

‘Just be quiet. We are waiting and that’s the end of it.’ She moved her hands on the table and turned up the lamp, turned it down when it started to smoke.

He almost sobbed, ‘My stomach is drying up.’

She looked at the door, at the clock.

Paul retched as they dragged the Indian through the bushes, while branches cracked and whooshed around them. There was a thick mire, overgrown with long grey hay and blackberry bushes, washed clean each spring when the river flooded with snowmelt from the mountains. The spring melt brought the river enormous and crushing, spreading itself over the banks and into the bushes, across deertrails and low fields until it became something other than river, a brown sheet crossed with wire and post fences and sprouting trees with watery reflections. Until then, the claybanked stagnant pool would hold the bear and the Indian beneath its surface, buried in rocks. By the time it flooded, the river would scoop from here a jumbled snag of bones and pulpy skin.

Father and son were silent save cussing, until Paul realized that Pierre was going to put the bear in the swamp as well.

‘Wait, no. The meat. And the pelt.’ He was white-faced to the point of luminosity with illness but the waste still struck him.

‘Oh, you just shut your mouth,’ Pierre spat, ‘you just be careful with me right now.’

Paul reached for his father’s arm and Pierre jerked away, looking almost out of control for the first time in the twenty years that Paul had been familiar with his rough face. The white of Pierre’s eyes rolled and his teeth showed; he looked at that moment, in the glowing twilight, like a horse startled by a snake underfoot.

In the near-darkness they stood facing each other. The air whined with mosquitoes and stunk of metallic blood. Then Pierre slapped him so hard that Paul’s leg bent under him and he sat down on the cold pebbles of the riverbed.

‘You help me drag this thing,’ Pierre jabbed his finger into the nery hollow of his son’s collarbone.

Paul touched the wet fur and recoiled again. He almost whimpered, sitting beside the black lump with the river cackling incessantly. His eyes dropped, closed, he breathed deeply through his nose and lifted his head, opened his eyes and looked at his father as he rose to his feet and stood in front of him again. ‘Fine,’ he said, ‘let’s get this over with.’

Pierre stood and watched his son. He almost tried to touch him, to negate what he had done by striking, because he felt the thin amount of air change between them, as if the particles had become infused with something.

Those moments of life-change Pierre could remember, and he gave them a hefty weight in the course he had taken. As a child on the wharf in Halifax, he realized his first glimpse of a turning away from the life of a textile clerk already laid out, the company ladder-climb already perhaps mapped out in his father’s mind, for him. The soft gentle hand of his father as he clutched it, the nails careful and the inner palm as smooth as the lining in a woman’s purse. He looked up at the soft tender neck-folds, like dough shaped from the most carefully sifted and selected white flour, a moist and perfect dough for soft bread.

And in front of his eyes passed the gnarled stained hand of someone, a hand destroyed with work and bearing indecipherable ink tattoos on the back of it, and the fingers. And this hand swung so close to his little face that it seemed to him later in life a curtain, drawing time closed on that promised planned textile life and spreading time open on the muscled work life of short sleep in confined ship space and the reeking body-closeness of exhausted men. He couldn’t remember the face of that whaler, but he could recall suddenly and painfully the need to drop his hand from that tender warm fold of his father’s, and the desire to never put his hand there again.



As a young man, when Pierre used to stand on deck and watch the long darkness of rain moving upon the whale-ship, and the barometer would rise, he knew each time that his life had somehow shrunk, become compressed in meaning beneath the will of whatever God loomed above the strength of the ocean and the earth. Each storm, each blood-spouting whale etched a mark on him, a thickening of the skin or a wrinkle, an unexplained scar. Each sent him further away from frivolity, further into debt. Now he watched Paul absorb the blow of his first exchange with this creditor, and it stung his heart.

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An Indian agent came to the cabin on a bay mare. Pierre leaned against the wall outside talking to him as Jeanette stood at the window pretending to peel the same potatoes over and again. The sons were at the fringe of the property splitting wood.

When the man put his foot in the stirrup, he said to Pierre with tension showing in his neck, 'The tribe is convinced there was foul play. Jack wouldn't just leave his children. Someone did this. There is a guilty party.'

'And I hope you find them.'

'Them, is it,' he asked, turning the horse. 'Did you know Jack's a half-breed?'

Pierre looked past him at a lone arbutus tree and cleared his throat. He wanted to shrug but was now afraid of how casual he was trying to appear.

'His father is in Victoria. He's a factor in the Hudson Bay Company.' He watched Pierre, who watched the arbutus, cleared his throat again, and nodded.

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Joseph was pulling a tree out of the thin bushtangle, holding a thick branch in each hand as though guiding a docile bull. Paul corded wood between two pines and turned to watch Pierre coming toward them through the grass. Paul wiped his face, pale and drawn tight, and stood with a piece of cedar in his hand.

Pierre looked at the cords and at the mess of branches and woodchips. He scratched the back of his neck. 'Don't want cedar.'

'It fell in the storm. I didn't cut it down.'

‘Just stack it in front. Burn through it before winter.’ He picked up a piece and threw it underhand toward Joseph, who looked around at the noise as he struggled to haul the tree clear of the underbrush.

‘How does he do it?’ Pierre asked, gazing in thin unfocus at the huge working back.

‘It’s amazing. I couldn’t even budge that thing. I tried. When he started dragging it, I told him to stop because I couldn’t believe it, and I wanted to see for myself. I thought maybe the tree was lighter than it looked.’ He shook his head and shrugged at Pierre.

They made, for the first time in days, eye contact and then Pierre looked away across the dry field, still with that vaporous blankness in his eyes. Paul ached inside and blinked sleepless and depleted, and wanted nothing more than Pierre’s guidance, but the father was unwilling to crawl into the hole that his son had fallen into. They watched Joseph heave and heave on the flailing branches as the tree came crashing foot by foot unnaturally into the open like a beast that has caught the whiff of the slaughterhouse, and fights until the last moment. The back of his shirt was soaked through but he grinned wildly over his shoulder at them. ‘It’s huge,’ he yelled.

That night, Joseph lay in front of the stove with a book almost touching his face. He was sour with wood and sweat. Jeanette knitted and Pierre read at the table, waiting to hear the creak of the little barn door.

Through the warped windowglass, the black shape of Paul leading his horse crossed the moonlit pale wood of the barn and the barn door swung open, sang out to him. Pierre closed his book and rose from the table, batwinged by his shadow on the wall. She watched him cross to the door and pass outside.

The lantern in the barn wobbled to life as Paul lit it. The Clydesdale, woken by the activity, stood sentinel and motionless in his stall. Paul took the brush off its nail and started currying the mare in the warm light. Pierre came through the creaking door and stood watching in realization that the days of seeing his son behave normally were gone. Paul’s movements were stiff; his arm moved tight against the horse’s bulging stomach, as if jerked along by a novice puppeteer, and his head turned jumping on his wooden neck when he looked her over. The mare sniffed uncomfortably.

‘Look, now,’ said Pierre, not so much as a means of starting a lecture, but more to stop the jerking movements.

Paul stopped, and then slowly went along with the brush while glancing at his father behind him.

‘The goddamned Indian agent was here today. That Jack is a goddamned half-breed.’ He took up the shovel and threw it spinning against the wall, where it banged the wood. ‘His father happens to work for the HBC, and you better hope he’s got a white family down in Victoria to keep him busy. Better pray he don’t care about his half-caste son.’

Paul went into the shadow and came back with the shovel, and leaned it against the wall. Pierre picked it up again and threw it like a harpoon. Paul watched his heavy, dull arm drop and stood with the brush in his hand, looking at the floor of the barn.

‘Aren’t you going to fetch it?’ Pierre knocked the brush to the ground, and Paul flinched away. He watched the mashed hands swaying in and out of the lamplight with their hieroglyphs like a bluish stain.

Pierre rubbed his face and sighed, looked at the nervous horses.

‘Not going to hit you,’ he said as he went himself and stooped to pick up the brush. ‘Wasn’t going to hit you.’

And so began the twisting acted scenario agreed upon between father and son, one to begin expounding the virtues of gold, of travel for the sake of gold mining and panning in cave and riverbottom, the other to begin for the first time seriously listening to the foaming mouth and nodding, as if opened suddenly to the possibility of loving gold, of loving the search for it. And Joseph sat, listening with his bulging eyes on each face in turn, young and absorbent in the slanted autumn light of the kitchen, or the lantern gloom of evening as mosquitoes whined into their ears. And Jeanette sat, knowing a façade when she saw one and silently pained at being held aloft, shut from her own son’s secret mind and her own husband’s at the same time. They passed their evenings in this way until father began to turn the lecture toward notices in the *Colonist* that strikes and claims were erupting in Australia, that gold was being discovered there again. And Paul began to appear interested in travelling to such an exotic colony.

‘Imagine, kangaroos. Right there in front of you.’ He would nod and look out the window, picturing the strange beasts grazing under a hot sun, where the cows stood morose and chewing eternally with their hooves in shit.

Joseph nodded with him, his slack mouth a vision of stupidity, as he peered through the thick lenses, and through the besmoked glass, at the impossible vision.

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Paul rode into town and met his friend Tom Argyll for dinner at the Chemainus hotel. Rain was a world of its own sitting on the town and smothering it, so the streets were dense with mud and it reflected the gaslights in wild patterns. Smoke hung between the buildings, pushed down by the rain.

The rail in front of the hotel had an overhanging shingle roof, so water dripped on the horses and they crowded each other sideways. Paul slid off and settled into the mud, and forced each boot back up out of it. He untied the horse closest to the steps and brought his mare among the wet rumps. The untied horse drifted off to explore the rainy night.

Paul went up the steps and kicked his boots clean against the wall of the pub, and then entered the glowing room, shaking himself. Argyll waved from a centre table. His crushed nose watered constantly and he suffered from hay fever; he left his handkerchief on the table everywhere that he sat down.

‘Mutton and potatoes,’ he said as Paul lowered himself, and Paul nodded.

‘Two,’ he raised his hand to the publican.

‘Since when am I a barmaid,’ the man replied without looking at them.

Paul went to the bar and ordered dinner, asked for two beers, and brought them back to the table.

‘So you’re aware that an Indian went missing?’ Tom Argyll moved his hands around on the table, and spun his glass slowly. ‘Well, I have it that he’s really a half-breed from Victoria.’

‘Yes, yes, I know,’ said Paul.

‘Well, it’s not news anymore, of course. Just interesting.’ He tapped the glass a few times and bubbles came up through the yellow. He wiped his nose. The stairs led up to a dark set of rooms, and the rain clicked against the small windows on one side of the building.

‘Look at this,’ Paul said, unfolding the newspaper and sliding it across the table. ‘Melbourne, Australia. Now that would be something. Get out of this damned rain,’ waving his hand to include the room.

Tom ran a finger over the print. ‘You’re not thinking of *going* down there? Come on.’

‘Sure, sure. Why not?’

And Tom sulked, sudden and almost violent.

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‘Your brother and your father are up to something,’ Jeanette said, hoping in some sense that Joseph, who was lying on his bearskin with a book occasionally touching his nose, hadn’t heard.

He looked around, startled by the voice, and now awake. He put the book down and rolled hugely to stand up. When he stretched, his hands were flat on the ceiling.

‘What?’ Joseph couldn’t remember what she’d just said, and he stumbled towards the smell of baking.

‘Don’t you dare touch anything.’

He stared at the loaves of bread that fogged the windowglass above the counter.

‘Okay, I’m awake. What did you say just then?’

‘Nothing, nothing.’ She went to the door and pulled it open, and the dog tried to come in. ‘For God’s sake, there are enough beggars around here,’ she said.

‘Mother, what did you say about Paul?’ Joseph remembered that it was school tomorrow, and he felt that bored depression of all Sundays.

She looked at him. ‘Your brother and your father are hiding something.’ Then she looked around and touched one of the loaves. ‘I don’t know what, but I’m worried about Paul.’

‘I’ll follow him around.’

‘As inconspicuous as you are.’ Jeanette picked up his book from the table where he’d dropped it. She read the cover, looked the book over like rotten fruit, and let it fall back to the table.

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Paul left the house that night, and Joseph waited for a few minutes before following him. He rose from his bearskin in front of the cold stove, and watched from the window as Paul’s black shape shrunk across the field, toward the river trail. Joseph laced his boots in silence and slid out the door. But he was always slower than he thought he was, and his older brother moved with the speed of purpose into the night-world.

Joseph crossed the glowing moon yard. The wall of trees on the other side of the field was black, and the outhouse stood like a vortex behind the barn. The workhorse thudded inside the stall, following Joseph’s scent.

‘Damn my eyes,’ he said. The slope down to the field seemed to change when he moved his head, and the dark shapes around him grew and shrunk in his glasses. Joseph trotted down the slope and into the dry field. The hay shushed and whispered as he hurried toward the black trees.

He wandered in the blind darkness, blinking at the scant grey path that led to the river. It vanished if he looked directly at the ground, and appeared ghostly if he looked into the trees. He was not scared of what lay in the woods, but he was scared of his blindness, of the weakness that sensual failure cost him.

Joseph was sweating and stumbling, and he had almost turned back three times when he saw something. A tiny orange flair, a mist of warm light far ahead caused him to fail the path and bend his leg into a soft moss between two stumps.

‘Câlice de tabarnac,’ he whispered as he searched out the cleared dirt of the path again with his hand.

He carried on towards the glow, but mindful of the path, swinging his head slowly to pick up the grey trail, swinging his bull neck out like a beast. After a long while he could make out certifiable trees, black verticals lit by the now certain fire. And trees on the far side of it, painted orange and grey. He heard the river garbling along now in a steady hiss. Something was popping, blacking the air above the fire.

He stepped as careful as he could, swaying in the dark and seeking out the lighter earth of the path, and wondering what the Christ his brother could be doing, if it was indeed Paul out there in the fireglow. Joseph again fell from the path, and rolled down into a muddy clay imbedded with rocks and woven roots. The river chilled his foot and he scrabbled up out of the water, angry now and wanting to punish someone, whoever it was lighting a fire in the middle of night and taking folks out of bed to investigate stupidly. He wiped his pants and shirtfront, clawed some mud from his arms, and crawled up the roots to the path. The fire was gone; he was in complete darkness. Even the path was gone.

He swung his head around and around, and there was a sliver of orange. He pulled off his heavy glasses, smeared with clay, and tried to clean them on his shirt. Now he could see the fire and the path, and he marched toward the glow, a filthy creature, enormous as any beast in those woods.

The fire ate away at the night so that the small orange scene grew into focus as he came closer. A black mass lumped in the flames and one man alone walking around it, bending here and there to poke with a stick so that sparks leapt. The fire was between the river and a small swamp, in the rocky dirt woven with tree roots. The man threw a

bundle of branches, and the crackling was enormous against the dark sky. Joseph crouched with knees groaning behind salal bushes. Every time he tried cleaning his glasses they came up worse, so that he couldn't make out the face of the man; he knew it was Paul by movement alone, the head thrown back with stiff purpose and vanity, and arms jabbing out with the stick, fending and fencing. Paul lifted a can of kerosene and doused the fire, and a ball of flame belched up into the night.

'What are you doing, brother?' Joseph whispered to himself. 'What are you burning?'

Paul stood blackened by ash, and the lump in the fire sizzled with the stink of fat and meat. Joseph's cavernous stomach yearned for it.

He told himself, finally, that whatever his brother was doing could be explained. This was no nightmare; he was awake and Paul was being silly and deceitful, and that was all. He clutched his aching knees and stood up, and crashed through the bushes to close the distance to the fire.

When he emerged into the fireglow, covered in filth, knocking branches aside and calling out to Paul, his brother was reeling, the whites of his eyes and his bared teeth shining in the light, and he swung the stick at Joseph's head. The stick whipped across his face and he fell back with his arms up, howling.

Paul beat him and yelled nonsense, both of them terrorized by each other.

'It's me,' Joseph wailed, 'it's me Joseph.'

The stick slowed, and then stopped, and then came down again hard on top of his head.

'What in the hell are you doing out here?' Paul said.

'What are *you* doing out here?'

Paul stood over him, sootblack and staring, then reached for his brother's hand to help the giant to his feet.

'Mother-' Joseph touched his head and swore, and wiped blood on his pants. 'Mother said you were up to something. I didn't want to follow you, I'd rather be asleep for God's sake.'

'She what?'

'Oh God, my glasses,' and Joseph dropped to his knees and began sweeping the earth and rocks with his huge hands. 'Don't move, don't move.'

Paul watched him, and saw his glasses on the ground reflecting orange.

'Please help me find them.'

‘Stop crying.’ Paul raised the stick again, for a second, and then lowered it.  
‘Stop crying, I can see them.’

‘Where?’

‘Here, settle down.’

Joseph clawed the glasses from Paul’s hands and held them to his face in the orange light, inspecting them blindly before putting them on.

Paul put his hand on Joseph’s shoulder. ‘Let’s go home, come on.’

‘You really scared me,’ Joseph said.

He wiped his face, and smiled at Paul as he stood up.

‘You really scared *me*.’ Paul looked into the crackling mess, the black reek of hair. His mouth was twitching and he shook in the firelight.

‘What are you doing?’ Joseph asked. ‘What in God’s name are you burning?’

He stood over Paul and came back to his senses, and his head throbbed. The fire was blazing away beside them. Joseph asked again, and folded his arms.

Accustomed to spreading his shoulders and thrusting his head back at all times, Paul fronted the world with his chin; he looked down his face at most people so as to already approach them with disdain, to involve himself only through defiance with those around him.

Joseph, alternately, bent down from the shoulders to try to become less visible and therefore less called upon, challenged. Since adolescence he hunched and cowed. Even with their stances, the two brothers were unequal; the younger still loomed above Paul’s sneered face. Usually, Joseph straightened his back only when he lay down at night, and his spine cracked whenever he actually stretched himself to full height.

With his arms crossed, Joseph filled his lungs and stood tall, with his back snapping along to the fire. He towered over Paul and decided not to give in until his brother explained himself. Paul faced him, eyes wide and shifting in the erratic light.

‘It’s a bear,’ he said. ‘It was rotting here for weeks and burning it is the only way to get rid of it.’ He jabbed the stick at the ground. ‘Can’t dig a damned hole with all these rocks.’

He looked up at Joseph with his head twisted, and dragged the stick.

‘Why would you do it at night,’ Joseph said, ‘it doesn’t make sense. What’s really going on?’

‘I should knock you senseless for even questioning me.’

Joseph’s shoulders lowered and he looked at the burning mess.



‘Alright, look,’ Paul threw his stick on the fire, and then took up the can and sloshed kerosene, forcing them back from the heat. ‘You promise me for Christ’s sake, you don’t say anything to Mother.’

Joseph watched his orange face, the shadows on it, his black eye sockets.

‘I shot it,’ Paul said.

‘Yes, and?’ He wanted this explained away. He only wanted his brother to tell him the truth and trust him. But he knew Paul was secretive and sideways in most of his dealings.

Paul sighed and rubbed at his sooty face, bringing up clean lines of skin. Joseph smiled at him and patted the bloody mess of his own hair.

‘It’s a God damned sow. There’s a cub inside her,’ Paul said, then threw his arms in the air and looked around, at the trees and darkness above them. His head and hands jerked visibly as he turned back to Joseph.

‘I felt bad. What do you want?’ He paused and then suddenly shrieked, ‘Stop staring at me!’

Joseph flinched. ‘You shot a pregnant sow.’

‘Yes, a black bear sow, Joseph.’

Joseph smiled again and dropped his arms to his sides. ‘Well, that isn’t so horrible.’

He reached to put his hand on Paul’s shoulder and Paul stepped back. He turned toward the depths of forest beyond the firelight, with his eyes vacant and his shaking hands.

‘But why burn it? At night?’ Joseph said.

‘Hell, I don’t know. Who knows what Indians think of something like that? They might put a curse on me or want my scalp or some God damned thing.’

‘What does this have to do with Indians?’

Paul swung to face him, and then said, ‘It’s Indian land, all along the river.’

The fire had been shrinking and it was much darker. Joseph looked out to the invisible night.

‘Paul, could you help me home?’ he asked.

‘Let me fix this up.’ Paul upended the canister, shaking it, and they stood back from another fireball and the irritating heat. He threw a last armful of branches on.

Joseph said, ‘This may help,’ and grabbed the butt end of a white driftwood log. Paul went to lift the other end, and Joseph told him not to bother. He dragged it across the fire as Paul watched.

They stood looking into the black mess and the flames, and trees moved above them in the night, and the river jiggled rocks against one another.

Paul spat on the fire. 'Let's go.'

They moved into the forest, following the worn path home, with Paul guiding.

'Watch, here's a rock,' Paul would say, or take his brother's arm when the trail branched.

Joseph followed him, knowing he would have to lie to his mother, knowing she would not believe him. He knew if he told her Paul has accidentally shot a pregnant bear, and burned it in the night to destroy it, he would still be lying. He watched Paul's body moving through the woods ahead of him and wanted more than anything to know what he had done, wanted to help him. He followed Paul into the black night.

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Two men on horses rode straight into the yard and dismounted in front of the barn. Pierre leaned on the kitchen table with his sleeves up, and watched through the dusty window. The yard was white and the sun baked the barn's roof. The dog yapped once from the bearskin in front of the woodstove. Jeanette was at her sister-in-law's visiting and baking. Pierre turned from the window, went to the door and held it open, as the two men tied their horses.

He nodded to them and rocked the door as they approached. One was the Indian agent who'd been there a few days before. Pierre didn't know the other.

'Mr. Richard, this is Sergeant Hilliard,' said the agent.

'Sergeant of what?'

'North west mounted police,' said Hilliard. He wore his moustaches in a drooping frown and looked bored, having glanced Pierre and the house over. His head and shoulders were thrown back the same as Paul's, and he stood a few inches taller than the agent.

'Well, what the Christ do you want? Coffee?' Pierre let go of the door and stepped down into the yard.

'Coffee would bring me right back up,' said Hilliard.

Pierre walked at them so they had to step apart, and he went to the barn. He opened the creaking gate and the agent glanced at his rifle, four long paces away in the saddle holster. Pierre shouldered out with a pitchfork of hay and threw it in front of one horse, then went back in for another.

‘Much obliged,’ said Hilliard.

Pierre made a point of walking between the men again as he went back to the house. ‘Well let me put that coffee on then,’ he said.

The thin cows were down across the field, in the shade of the treeline. The workhorse was gone from the stable as was Paul’s mare. The men sat in the kitchen, looking around as leather and wood creaked with every small motion. Pierre rubbed his face and put his hands on the table. Between the three of them, the air was acrid. They each rummaged in their own thoughts until the agent cleared his throat and opened a notebook.

The agent said, ‘Why don’t you tell Sgt. Hilliard what you told me?’

Pierre flopped his hands and shrugged. His fingers shook slightly, and the men were already looking at them on account of the tattoos.

‘You did a lot more talking than I did, if I remember,’ he replied.

‘Well, what did I say?’

Pierre looked at the agent’s worn face, and then at Hilliard’s eyes, which smiled more than his mouth did.

‘Jack, the half-breed who I don’t even know, is missing. His father is in the Hudson’s Bay Company and lives in Victoria, where I haven’t been in a year.’ He clapped his hands and dropped them in his lap, wagged his head at the two men, and looked out the window.

‘Oh, and the tribe is convinced there’s foul play,’ he added.

‘Well at least you remember-’

‘Oh, and you liked my house.’

The agent glanced over at Hilliard, then at Pierre. ‘I don’t recall saying that.’

‘You sure?’

‘Yes, I’m sure. I was saying: at least you remember exactly why we’re interested in finding the guilty party.’ The agent paused. ‘Or parties, as you mentioned there might be.’

Pierre shook his head, ‘I mentioned no such thing.’ He looked down at the table and then up at the men. ‘Or I didn’t mean anything if I did.’

They sat in silence, Pierre and Hilliard sprawled in the kitchen as if they’d known each other long enough to grow bored with chat. The agent breathed impatiently and ran his hands over the table, spun his cup, glared out each window in turn. Hilliard looked as if he were falling asleep when he said, ‘Mr. Richard, you can sympathize with our situation.’

‘Really.’

‘Your house is the only one on this side of the river for a mile in either direction. The Indian village on the other side is missing a young father and husband.’

Pierre nodded. He shrugged again, and kept his hands on his lap. They were silent for a minute until Hilliard spoke.

‘This coffee is just coursing through me,’ said Hilliard. ‘Is it from the general store here in Chemainus?’

‘It’s from the store in Westholme. It’s closer.’

‘Could I use your privy?’ He stood up.

Pierre pointed to the barn and spun his finger.

‘Behind the barn?’

Pierre tilted his chin. ‘Watch, the seat needs repair.’

‘I’ll do my business standing.’ Hilliard opened the door and stepped into the yard.

The agent scoffed at Pierre after a while, and said, ‘Right, you make your purchases at the Westholme store, which is through the Indian village.’ Then he added, ‘Where you don’t know Jack’s family.’

Pierre gave him a blank look, slowbreathing and featureless. Hilliard crossed the white yard, coughed and spat in the dirt, then came in and resumed his seat. The agent turned to tell him something, undoubtedly his revelation, and Hilliard raised his hand.

Hilliard closed his eyes and then opened them. He said, ‘Could I stress you for another cup, please?’

Pierre stood up, jerking his chair back from the table so that it dragged on the floor. The dog looked up from Joseph’s bearskin.

Hilliard turned his head to the agent. They sat looking at each other while Pierre fetched the pot and came back to the table, as a fly moved in patterns overhead.

‘Mr. Richard, where are your sons?’ asked the agent. ‘Working?’

Pierre muttered in French, and said, ‘Yes, my sons are working. They’re around somewhere.’

‘I was hoping to speak to them, as I missed them last time I was here.’

‘You come in the middle of the day looking for two working boys.’

‘I could come back this evening.’

Pierre held the coffeepot with two hands as he poured. His stomach moaned.

‘I don’t much care what you do. As last time, I can’t tell you anything, and I’m sure my sons couldn’t tell you much more than that. Paul doesn’t always come home for supper.’

‘Does he eat at the hotel?’ asked Hilliard.

‘I’m tired. How long do you plan on staying here?’ Pierre clanged the coffeepot onto the stove and leaned on the back of his chair, over the seated men.

Hilliard sipped, put down his cup and said, ‘This coffee is just a wonder. I’m feeling fit to ride all the way to Victoria tonight.’

The agent looked at him, then up at Pierre. ‘I have a God damned responsibility to these people.’

‘Indians,’ said Pierre. He winked at Hilliard.

‘Yes, Indians,’ said the agent. ‘And half-breeds. And the sergeant here has a duty to the safety of the province.’

‘Maintiens le droit,’ said Hilliard, raising his hand. They sat for a while, sipping. Hilliard looked around the kitchen once more, finished the coffee, and stretched. ‘Mr. Richard, thank you for your time.’

Pierre nodded, grabbed the empty cup and took the agent’s cup as well.

‘I wasn’t finished,’ said the agent, as Pierre splashed his coffee out the door.

The coffee pooled a shape in the dirt, and motes swirled on top as it spread out and sank, till the ground showed dark where it had been. Pierre held the door open, watching the men until they stood from the table, replaced their hats and passed outside. With his boot, Hilliard scuffed the wet dirt where the coffee had landed.

He clicked his tongue and said, ‘I just might spend a few coins and grab a bag of that coffee in Westholme.’

Pierre walked them to their horses, and shook hands silently. The agent barely touched Pierre’s fingers before swinging up into the saddle. Hilliard gripped Pierre’s hand with a strength that matched the older man’s, and looked at him with boredom in his half-closed eyes. His moustache hung below his jaw until he smiled. ‘A real pleasure, Mr. Richard,’ he said, rolling and drawing out the French pronunciation.

‘Sergeant Hilliard,’ Pierre nodded, then looked up at the Indian agent and showed his teeth. ‘I’m sure you’ll be back next week.’

‘I’m sure I’ll talk to your sons.’ The agent jerked the reins and his horse rocked forward. He looked down towards the field as he rode out of the yard. Hilliard tipped his hat and followed.

‘Enjoy your evening,’ he called over his shoulder.

Pierre watched them ride away, with his hair moving in the hot breeze, shadowing his face.

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Joseph waited in the yard, moving his head around in the morning sun, throwing white light against the wall of the barn with his eyeglasses. His thoughts were elaborate, yet he was so often seen as a dullard for his childlike trust, his belief in good.

Inside the house, Paul sat on the bench under the window, with his shirt open and sweat on his white chest. He stared at the floor and his breath sounded asthmatic. Jeannette walked into the kitchen from the bedroom she shared with Pierre, looked over at her son, and spoke.

‘What?’ he asked, blinking and looking around.

‘Are you alright,’ she repeated.

Paul smiled and began buttoning his shirt. He looked directly at her for the first time in days. His bed had been empty two nights in a row, and he refused to join them for meals. However, he was now home, and offering to run errands for Pierre in town.

‘Paul—’ Jeannette walked over and sat on the bench next to him. ‘Joseph told me what happened.’

‘Ah, yes,’ he said. He startled her by laughing. ‘He told me that you sent him as a spy.’

They smiled at each other, and Paul put his hand on her shoulder.

His moustaches hid his mouth, and his eyes were bruised with sleeplessness and something dim. She searched for her child in his face and couldn’t see him, and this scared her, as though she sat with a stranger and could not speak candidly or intimately.

‘Mother, I feel much better. Please don’t worry about me. It was a horrible mistake, that bear.’

She tried to say something and he squeezed her arm, too hard, then stood up to button his sleeves.

‘Anything else from town?’ he asked. ‘Fencing staples. Joseph wants a book. You need anything?’

She looked up at him with turmoil in her eyes. ‘Take your brother with you.’

‘Do you need any thing mother,’ he sounded out each syllable as if teaching a slow child. He started to apologize and then stopped, with his mouth slack.

Jeannette watched his strange face for a moment and then turned away.

‘Stop your constant fretting,’ he said.

‘You can talk to us.’

‘Oh, I know that,’ he crossed to the door and began pulling his boots on, trying to ignore her sorrow in the room.

He laughed and said, ‘I’d say I’ll even be home for supper tonight.’

He banged the door behind him and almost ran to his mare.

‘Liar, you damned liar,’ she said. She looked around, suddenly embarrassed, as if expecting someone to be standing in the empty house and watching her.

\*\*\*

Paul and Joseph rode into Chemainus, Paul on his mare and Joseph plodding on the Clydesdale. Paul rode ahead because his younger brother dwarfed him, and he was furious that he should appear small, or that his beautiful mount was like a child’s pony next to the draft horse.

Joseph watched Paul’s wooden back, the sunbleached top of his derby. The road was empty and the fir trees shot above them. Just outside of town they passed the stable with its new sign, Williams’ Livery & Feed Stables. Men stood in the shade and watched them pass. Paul stared ahead and Joseph waved.

‘Get some shoes for that thing, Joseph. Come on in,’ Williams called to them.

‘Thank you, not today,’ Joseph said.

‘What’s your son’s name?’ one of the men yelled, and the others laughed.

‘Come get your horse shod and the boy can have a taffy.’

Joseph waved again and rode behind Paul, looking at his stiff neck and imagining the anger on his face.

The livery yard hosted bare-knuckle fights and faro. A navy sailor from Victoria had been shot through the mouth a few months back. He’d accused a local man, an employee at the stable, of cheating at cards and was ambushed on his way back to the shipyard. He survived but lost nine teeth, and the shooter vanished. The gossip was that Williams was missing a horse and the shooter had ridden it to Victoria and boarded a ship for Mexico.

‘Can’t go around accusing locals of cheating,’ people said.

In town the brothers rode to the general store and hitched up. Paul ordered fencing staples at the counter and Joseph lumbered through the low aisles, trying not to knock anything over.

‘Do you have any new books?’ he asked the clerk at the counter. The clerk squinted at Joseph with his top teeth showing rat-like and grey, then looked over at the wooden rack.

‘Just yellow-backs. One on Jesse James.’ The clerk turned away and shook staples into a bag for Paul. Joseph picked up books, glancing at the images of cowboys shooting from the saddle, or Indians ransacking caravans. The cover of one showed a woman being terrified by a bandit, with her bodice loose. Joseph picked it up and stood with his back to the counter, looking at the painted cover. He put it back and found a farmers’ almanac, and read his horoscope.

The door opened; an Indian came in and took off his hat, pushed the door closed. He looked at the Richards brothers in silence. He was Joseph’s age, and they had seen each other at the river over the years.

‘Good morning,’ Joseph said, reaching to shake hands. ‘Sorry, can’t recall your name.’

The man’s wife stood in the shade outside the store, looking in at Joseph and Paul through the wavy glass. She carried a baby in a woven papoose on her back, and a small child stood next to her. When Joseph turned to face them, the child yelled and ran into the sunlight.

The Indian pushed past him and walked along the aisles. Paul was leaning on the counter, as was the clerk, watching.

‘Hey,’ Paul said. ‘He’s talking to you.’

Joseph put up his hand to calm him down. Paul’s face was wet, and he swallowed twice, staring hard at the man.

‘Paul, it’s not a problem.’

‘Don’t want any hassles in the store anyhow,’ the clerk said.

The Indian picked up a bag of flour and put it on the counter, gave the clerk some coins and put his hat back on. He took the flour and went out onto the steps. His wife looked around, saw the bag of flour, and began talking and gesturing at the store. He shook his head while she talked, and pulled her down the steps into the daylight. The child ran to them.

Joseph, Paul and the clerk watched the family drift up the street.

‘Will this be all today?’ the clerk said.

Paul took his knife and cut a plug of tobacco, and cleared his throat. ‘You want that book?’

‘No, no. Thank you,’ Joseph said.



They were half out the door when the clerk said, ‘You hear about that half-caste missing?’

Paul stopped. Joseph walked into him and recoiled. Paul shoved his brother aside and re-entered the store.

‘Yes, we’ve heard about it. Everyone’s heard about it.’ He stared at the clerk, his eyes seething in the dry room. Joseph stood in the doorway, watching them. Paul’s shirt was soaked in a dark bird across his back, and his neck was rigid.

‘I hadn’t heard about it,’ Joseph said.

The clerk ran his hands over the counter, looked down and shrugged. He breathed in and shrugged again.

‘Seems he’s gone missing from Westholme area. You boys live out that way, I recall. He’s from that Indian village by the river. Turns out his father is in the government down in Victoria.’

‘Hudson’s Bay Company,’ said Paul.

‘Ah, right. Right. Anyways, there is going to be a reward and all kinds of good things happening around here over it.’

He looked up at Paul, who stood in the middle of the store with his eyes dark like a ghou, and Joseph behind him, half inside and enormous.

‘You haven’t heard?’ the clerk asked Joseph. ‘Your family doesn’t tell you much, I suppose. They’d all know about it.’

‘We don’t know a thing about it, no more than you and your gossip,’ said Paul, ‘and all the other tongues in Chemainus.’

‘Why doesn’t anyone tell me anything,’ said Joseph to the room, looking with his warped glasses at Paul’s back.

The clerk shrugged, and Paul said, ‘You stop that God damned shrugging.’

‘I beg your pardon?’

The clerk closed the till and started walking around the counter towards Paul. Joseph stepped into the store, and closed the door behind him. The clerk stopped at the edge of the counter. Paul hadn’t taken his eyes off him, but lowered his shoulders as if to charge. The clerk pounded his fist on the counter.

‘You Richards get the hell out of my store,’ he yelled. ‘Tell your father I’ll want a word next time I see him.’

Paul pushed Joseph, who opened the door and stepped down into the daylight. Paul came behind him, then turned in the doorway and pointed at the clerk.

‘There’s nothing to say to my father. You know you’re a gossip, that’s all this is about.’

‘You’re a French animal, like your father. That’s all this is about,’ the clerk yelled.

Paul ran into the store and leapt on the counter. He kicked at the clerk, who shied away with his arms over his face. Joseph was suddenly there, hugging Paul’s body around the waist and the legs. He carried his brother out the door and let go of him, and Paul staggered.

‘What in the hell are you doing?’ Joseph roared. He looked around and there were people watching them.

‘That is the second time you talk to me like that,’ Paul hissed at him, putting his hat on. ‘Don’t try for a third.’

He untied his horse and climbed on, throwing the bag of staples on the ground.

‘You take those home, God damned loudmouth,’ Paul said, ‘and I’d tell you not to say anything, but what’s the point in that.’

Joseph grabbed the halter to stop him, saying, ‘What are you talking about?’

Paul kicked at his hand and jerked the reins, and kicked the horse so that it reared and turned away from the giant standing bewildered. He was watched from windows and storefronts, benches and wooden chairs.

Always a spectacle, thought Joseph. Always some anomaly in this town.

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Pierre measured gold dust into a canvas pouch in his bedroom. He took one small nugget and dropped it unceremoniously into the pouch. His fingers shook with the detail of the work, black fingers in the candlelight, and he looked at them and wondered what he had done wrong to lead one son astray into the heavy darkness, and the other freakish and simpering, neglecting the gift of colossus form.

He swore a little in French until he felt better, tied up the pouch and put it on the bureau. The air in the room was sour and dead. He looked in the mirror at his shadowbruised face and straightened his back. He hadn’t wanted to be a farmer, and his sextant was the only possession he treasured. He didn’t want the boys to be farmers, but when he tried to think of what they should do, he only grew weary. He knew that Paul would have to leave home uneducated, betrothed to no one, penniless. At least he had selfishness as a companion and guide. Joseph lacked that incredibly. He was a mortise,

a body awaiting a spark. Pierre was not interested in accommodating it. Outside the night whistled and chirruped for untold miles, insectcloud and dry.

Joseph loomed over the table in the kitchen with a book between his paws, and read with his mouth open until he noticed his father. Pierre stood framed by the bedroom doorway, leaning forward as if arrested in motion, his heavy forearms in the lamplight, and his face dark with thought. He started as if awoken, then crossed to the table and reached out his hand, hesitated with a grimace before patting his son's back. Jeannette sat in a chair under the window knitting.

'Where is Paul,' Pierre asked casually.

Jeannette looked at him and then back at her swirling fingers, counting in low breaths.

'I would guess he's at the pub,' Joseph said, cleared his throat and repeated, 'guess he's at the pub.'

Pierre took a cup, poured from the water jug and leaned against the counter. He walked over to Jeannette, carefully touched her hair, closed his eyes. She moved her head so that his hand rubbed her neck for a moment before he took it away.

'I'm going to bed,' he said. He kissed his wife's hair and then went to the kitchen and put the cup on the counter.

'Bonne nuit, papa,' said Joseph.

Pierre put his hand in the middle of Joseph's back, as if to shove him, and then turned and went to his bedroom.

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'Here, take this, damn you,' Pierre said when he forced the little sack of gold into Paul's hand.

He shook a bit, as he thought this was the total extent he was willing to go to help his son, and he wanted the finality of the offering to be all there was; he wished the small amount of gold could in some way solve everything, and so he shook when he pressed it into Paul's surprised hand, and wanted to turn his back to avoid having to discuss it.

Paul looked at his hand, knowing what his father had put there. He recognized the pouch, and even knew the dry wooden smell of it, from sight. He'd gone through his father's boxes so many times over the years and knew the feel and smell of each scrap

of paper, the gold scales and logbooks, knotted pouches of dust and nuggets and the weight of each coin.

‘What is this for?’ he asked, though he knew exactly why Pierre had given him the gold.

‘It’s time you leave, you know that.’

They stood in the barn again, beneath that halo of orange light from the kerosene lantern. Their face shadows fell long against their clothes, and Pierre turned to pat the horse.

‘You actually think I should just board a ship for Australia.’ Paul said to the side of his father’s head.

‘What in the hell did you expect when you set out to—’ Pierre said.

‘I set out to do nothing!’

‘Either way, it’s done, and you’re done if you stay here.’

‘I’m sure you’ll tell Mother and Joseph a likely story in my stead.’

‘You’ll tell them,’ Pierre said, and looked at Paul, and poked his chest with a finger. ‘You will tell them where you’re going.’

‘It’s your idea,’ Paul said with his throat tightening.

‘I’ve had about enough of this, and of you.’ And Pierre ran a hand down his face, turned to leave the barn.

Paul sobbed quick and violent before he could stop himself. Pierre put his hand on a stall door and lowered his head, and though it brought his eyes to blur, he kept going, and pushed the barn door open, and walked out into the yard.

Jeannette was at the window with Joseph crouched beside her. When they saw Pierre, they both moved, and Joseph walked quickly away from the window. Pierre looked at his wife’s silhouette in the yellow room, and he could not climb the two steps to the door. He went down into the field under a white moonlight, and he walked in the field, running his hands over the warm hay.

‘What happened?’ asked Joseph. ‘Mother, what is happening?’

‘Just be quiet,’ she said in the hushed miserable warmth of the house.

Paul ground his teeth and tears ran over his face, and then stopped. He breathed in locomotive force out his nostrils and threw open the wicket on his mare’s stall. He dragged the horse out as he hadn’t untacked her yet, and took her into the yard. Jeannette stood at the window still.

‘What in God’s name are you staring at?’ Paul shrieked at the window. He mounted the mare, spinning her out of the yard and into the blue night.

He rode straight for the stables where illegal whisky could be bought at all hours, and got among the men there to watch a game of faro in the familiar smell of horseshit and leather.

‘Which one of you bastards called out to me the other day?’ he asked.

No one could quite remember who it had been, as Paul’s eyes smoldered and he drank through his teeth like he was fuelling an engine of intense pressure. His straight back was damp with sweat and he clapped his boots on the wooden plank floor as he strode the lamplit deck behind the stables and stood over the men there.

‘No? I didn’t think anyone would remember much, with me standing right here, anyhow,’ he said.

‘Come on now, Paul, have a drink and relax,’ said Williams. ‘Daniele, get him a little something.’

He turned back to Paul. ‘That brother of yours, he is one noticeable fellow,’ he said, and a few of the men guffawed.

Hooves approached out of the night, and the men sat or stood quietly until the rider hailed, and then they relaxed back to what they’d been doing. Paul’s friend Tom Argyll stabled his horse and strode in, calling good evening to the men there.

He clapped Paul on the back, took out his handkerchief and dug at his nose, tucked it into his pocket and called for a drink for himself and his friend. Paul stood with Tom’s hand on his neck, and seethed at the men sitting around the faro table.

‘What is it, Richard?’ asked his friend, ‘Still here? I thought you’d be gone for Australia.’ He laughed, and shook Paul.

Paul turned to him and said, ‘You don’t know what the hell you’re talking about.’

‘Oh pardon me, pardon me,’ Tom said. ‘I was at supper with the Collins family and I’ve had a dose of wine, plus a few nips in the smoking room with Mr. Collins, so I might feel a bit loose right now.’

He frowned at Paul’s outrageous anger, and squinted. Then he laughed and shook Paul again.

‘Would you hurry up with those drinks, Daniele,’ Tom said. He let go of Paul’s neck and crossed the black fence of shadows to the gaming table.

Daniele, urchin daughter of Williams, put a glass in Paul's hand and Paul gasped the whisky down his throat, and shoved the glass at her. He wiped his face, hawked, and spat into the dark weeds outside the stable.

'Paul here is off to Australia,' Tom announced, gesturing with both arms like a buckled ringleader at Paul, and raising his glass. 'May the waves carry him daintily and set him on golden beaches.'

'Here, here,' the men muttered or yelled, though half of them didn't acknowledge the announcement.

Paul shook his head. 'It's not true,' he said to no one, already nervous again and feeling the sweat come out under his arms and on his back. 'Not going anywhere,' he said.

Williams studied him with jeweller's interest. He started to say something, then held off. He watched Paul glance around with his teeth showing, and shrug his wet shirt off his skin. The men spat into the darkness and watched the card game.

Paul took his empty glass to Tom. 'Have this filled, would you,' he asked, looking out at the night.

'Sure, sure,' said Tom, and laughed. He took his glass and Paul's and went to the makeshift counter at which little Daniele stood, elfin and irritant.

'How's school, then?' asked Tom.

Daniele whipped her rag at an empty glass and darted to catch it as it rolled toward the counter's edge. She spat on the floor and sneered up at Tom.

'Whores all, nunnery lectern. Can't teach me a damned thing I won't learn here.'

'Sad youth, do not begrudge the nuns their attempt to straighten you.' Tom rapped the glasses on the counter and pointed at them, and he lit his pipe with a candle. The crushed nose on his face was a confusion in the candlelight.

Daniele poured the glasses full and flicked her eyes at Williams' back before pouring herself a glass and downing it with a series of wincing and shudders.

Tom shrugged when Daniele held out her hand for payment. He turned and marched to Paul and put his arm over his shoulder again. Paul took the glass and raised it in salute to the night.

'What is going on, Richard?' Tom Argyll asked.

Paul shook his head and said, 'I'll talk to you about it later on.' He sniffed at the brutal whisky and closed his eyes before downing it.

When Williams put out the lanterns and told everyone to leave, Paul and Tom staggered against the posts of the stables until they found their horses, and leaned in the saddles as they rode chilled by a midnight breeze.

The black trees shushed above them. They rode to Tom's little shack near the sawmill, as Paul refused to go home and face his father, his mother with her pleading silences. The horses turned at the fork by rote. Paul muttered and Argyll listened, frowning in the dark and shaking his head a bit.

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On the morning of his last day, Paul sat on his narrow bed holding the crucifix he'd been given on his first communion. He ran his thumbs over the smooth wood of the cross and the silver Christ. He put the crucifix in his pack, and then dug it out and put it back on the little table by his bed. He turned it with his finger, picked it up and put it in his pack again. Paul stuffed a shirt and the precious canvas sack of gold dust in the pack and fastened it. He looked out the window at the field and the wall of evergreens.

His mother was in the kitchen making breakfast and wrapping the cakes she'd baked for his trip. Her face, when he'd gone to the kitchen, was swollen with red anguish and she couldn't look at him.

Paul cleared his throat and looked at his bed, at the little table with two woven pieces of driftwood on it, and he turned again to the window and said, 'Imagine, kangaroos,' as his mouth trembled.

He opened the pack and shoved his hand in, took the crucifix that he'd held as a child, and put it on the table, then slammed it down once. Paul closed the pack and stood up.

Joseph and Pierre came in from feeding the animals, and sat with Paul at the table as Jeannette put plates in front of them.

Joseph smiled at his brother, and said, 'You will write, of course.'

Paul shrugged.

'Of course he will,' said Pierre, shaking Joseph by the shoulder and looking at his wife.

'It's only that I'm very curious about it; I know you don't like to write much,' Joseph said. 'And I may even come there myself if you find it a nice place.'

'You don't know anything about it,' Paul said to his plate. 'Just yesterday you thought Australia was a country.'

Joseph glanced around with hurt in his smile and nodded.

‘Well, there’s breakfast,’ Jeannette said. ‘Come on, eat up.’

Joseph came out the door waving something.

‘Paul, Paul, you left your crucifix.’ He held it in his enormous hands, smiling at Paul with the offering.

Paul lowered his head. He said, ‘Joseph-’ and looked away.

He took the crucifix with his family around him, and turned to the horse to put it in the pack.

‘Well, good luck to you, son,’ Pierre said, shaking his hand.

The sky was the colour of stone and drizzle caused the horse to move its ears. Moss bloomed along the sides of the house and on the barn’s roof. Bald eagles hung against the sky or sat in trees over the river, spotting the bodies of fish moving in the shallows.

The Richard family watched the eagles loop high above the river. None spoke, silent and wrapped in thought. Rain tapped around them and a raven called his mimicry in the woods.

At the wharf in Chemainus, Paul stood with Tom Argyll. The stevedores finished loading the steam ship, bound for Victoria, fifty miles south at the tip of Vancouver Island. The steamer sat huge across the dock, wafting a silent black flood into the sky.

‘What’s the mine called?’ asked Tom.

Paul unfolded the newspaper he was holding and found the circled notice.

‘Magdala. Somewhere near Melbourne, apparently.’

They looked at the paper, not reading.

‘How long is the trip to Australia?’ Tom asked.

‘I have no idea.’

‘Lord, better hope there’s some God damned entertainment.’ Tom rubbed his nose, spat on the wooden boards. The ocean rolled like a lead blanket under the murky sky, and gulls swirled around them.

‘Hey,’ he added, ‘speaking of entertainment. You recall those fresh hangings down in Deadwood. Well, the Spearfish Vigilance Committee rides again. Someone robbed a stagecoach and murdered the driver.’

Paul shook his head. ‘Deadwood.’

‘You should just head south if you want action so badly,’ said Tom.



They were looking south, at black islands and grey water. At clouds spread far across, absorbing the shades and mixing them.

‘I’m going to Australia. That’s the fact.’ Paul nodded at the steamship, ‘The first leg of my journey, right there.’

They watched stevedores walk back and forth, calling out to each other.

‘Bon voyage then,’ Tom said, ‘You’ll be spending all your time vomiting off the side anyway.’

Paul showed his teeth and spat off the wharf. ‘My father wasn’t seasick. I’m sure it runs in the family.’

‘Oh, I’m sure too,’ laughed Argyll, with his nose whistling. He stopped suddenly and looked sideways at Paul. ‘Runs in the family like violence.’

Paul chewed something and picked his lip. He looked up at Tom, turned to front him, and closed the distance between them with his shoulders back.

Tom’s face jerked into a rubber smile.

‘That’s right,’ Paul said, ‘runs in the family like violence.’

The ship’s whistle blew and the passengers on the dock turned to line up in the drizzle, with a grey world around them dripping.

Tom raised his hand. ‘This is it,’ he said. ‘Good luck; write when you’ve got some women waiting for me.’

Paul shook his hand and gripped his shoulder. ‘Women? They’d know I’m lying the minute I try and say anything good about you.’

‘Tell them about my eyes,’ said Tom, then laughed. ‘Even better; tell them about your brother’s eyes.’ Tom widened his eyes and put his hands up like a pair of binoculars.

Paul smirked and looked around them at the wharves. *Good riddance*, he thought, knowing already that he didn’t mean it.

Tom embraced him, and Paul stood with his arms at his sides. He raised one hand and patted Tom’s back and then stepped away. They shook hands again with Paul averting his gaze.

He turned away from Tom with a nod, and found the end of the passenger line-up. He could see his mare on the steamer, stabled against the starboard cabin with a collection of horses and mules, pigs and cows.

Tom waved once and walked off down the dock, which smelled of brine and sunbleached wood in the grey air. He passed a man holding the reins of a black mare.

They nodded, and the man touched his hat. He blinked slowly as he watched Tom stroll away, then the man led his horse toward the steamer.

The captain waved to him. ‘Sergeant Hilliard.’

‘Morning,’ Hilliard said. ‘She’ll be rough in this weather.’

The captain licked his teeth and looked across the bay at Thetis Island and Kuper Island.

‘Choppy, bit of a blow maybe.’ He shrugged and then shook his head. ‘Won’t be any rough.’

‘Hell, what do I know.’

They watched the passengers file along the gangplank.

‘Bound for Victoria, are you?’ Hilliard asked as he studied the back of Paul’s head in the line-up, the stiff and wide shoulders and the neck-hair shorn high, almost at the base of his skull.

‘Yes sir. Be there shortly after lunch.’

‘Well, you better sell me a ticket then,’ Hilliard said.

## TWO

1879.

Joseph Richard's thick glasses hurt his face, and his eyes were blank planets whirling a confined orbit. He was not dressed for the occasion. His sleeves were rolled at his elbows, being too short and too tight to wear buttoned to the wrist.

When a rock hit him squarely in the back of the head, he'd been expecting it. He sighed and turned his magnified eyes on the boys in shortpants, and swatted at them, hoping not to hit anyone.

'Giant.'

'Demon.'

They laughed and ran from him. Joseph stood at the back of the small crowd, full of people he knew well enough. Some turned to look at him, as if the children were his fault. His mother watched from the picnic tables and wondered her secret thoughts.

It was a grand event. Askew was opening his new sawmill on Horse Shoe Bay in Chemainus, and all the settlers in the area came with family if they had any. If they were alone they came with a bottle of screech in their jackets.

The wiry Askew stood at the podium on the fresh wooden deck, built with 2x6 fir lumber from his mill, and yellow smelling. He waved his arms as he spoke to cheers from those gathered, proud of their little growing community and hopeful for its future on the rocky and wild coast of Vancouver's Island.

'Chemainus has her sawmill, and Canada will have her railway!' he said. The crowd clapped and yelled.

Askew's young wife wore a new cuirasse bodice. With the seven children around her, she was an envy for the lonely and half-drunk men. The mill sprawled like a rough tenant claiming his seat by the fire.

A sailor from the Royal Navy, in midnight blue with glaring buttons, made a speech and some of the girls in attendance flushed when his smooth face turned toward them. When he said, 'This mill is the pulsing heartbeat of a little town, with many opportunities for young families to grow,' none of those young ladies dared look up into his golden smile.

There were Chinese lanterns and refreshments and a few danced and most drank gin punch.

Pierre Richard, leonine and French, elbowed his way to the podium on the fresh wooden deck. He had the iron build of a stevedore, and he lumbered when he walked, a museum of injuries. His beard spread across his breast, and he wore shirtsleeves. He was holding a book. The scheduled speeches were over and not many wanted to hear more. A young man in the crowd, dressed for the occasion in bowler, frock coat and waistcoat, excused himself from his friends because he wanted to preserve the perfect day; he gently touched Pierre's elbow. Pierre jerked away and placed his hands on the podium. They were bruised with tattoos done so poorly that it was nearly impossible to decipher them; it looked as if he'd been beaten all over the backs of his hands and forearms.

Joseph stood like an ogre at the back of the sweating crowd and squinted at his father on the podium, as Pierre moved his arms in a gesture of encircling the strong mill. The people watched him in the green light.

When the fact that Pierre was up there slithered its way through the crowd, a few of the mill workers elbowed each other and some mothers coaxed their children away to the swaying lanterns and gay tables of the picnic lawn. The navy fellows turned to regard Joseph's enormous shadow behind them. Children had been watching Joseph since he first came along to the grand opening, waiting for a chance to throw rocks or pull his clothes. He had come on foot behind mother and father who babbled in French and the dust led them right through the little burgeoning town to the mill.

'This is a wonderful day for speech and for our young nation to embrace her destiny,' Pierre began in his heavy Quebecois accent, 'and let us all rejoice as Canadien who make an attempt to settle here and produce a livelihood from the earth as she provide it for us.'

'Speak English,' called a young man with a beautiful moustache, waxed in solid curls. His companions tittered as sweat dampened their collars and whisky steamed out of their skin.

'... and your mother-dear, that plump England, she don't even blink when you pull her skirt and ask for guidance. She just tell you get back out there and keep playing in the dirt and don't let America take your toys.'

'Hear hear.'

'Get off the stage, or go back to Quebec.'

At this, Joseph took a step forward towards the podium. Then he stepped back and cleared his throat, rubbed his nose, and turned to glare at the sneaking children. They darted away.

Pierre thumbed through the book he'd been holding all day, Grant's *Ocean to Ocean*.

'If any of you could read you'd know this one—' he began. '*... where there is one settlement there ought to be twenty, if the island is to raise its own grain and hay, and to cease sending out of the country all its wealth. There is little or no immigration to Vancouver's Island, and but little has been done to induce it, or to smooth the way for those who arrive. When an immigrant reach the country, he find it difficult to obtain information as to where there is good land to take up; and how is it possible for him to go out among a sea of mountain to search for a farm?*'

'He could move in with you, Pierre.' Men laughed and waved for Pierre to finish up.

'Forget immigrants, try controlling your *sons*,' said a goat-faced senior, looking around with secret meanings in his nod.

Pierre stared at him.

By now the mothers had herded their little children over to the fluttering picnic, and those girls in the group with any manners had followed. The settlement of Chemainus was struggling against a coastal wilderness, and a day of celebration was rare; an opportunity to lace up and step out in Lyons silk ordered from the capital, Victoria, was not to be wasted on 'politics.' Let the men be entertained by squabbles. Sweetmeats and punch and Chinese savouries and gossip were calling.

Pierre continued, '*... If this state of thing continue, even though the mining population of Vancouver's Island increase ten fold in as many year, most of the wealth will be sent out of the country, as was the gold of Cariboo, and the country in the end be as poor as ever.*'

'Make your point!' said the young man with the moustache as his sweetheart drifted towards the food and laughter. The shrinking crowd at the podium waited. Joseph stood alone behind them, and the women looked at him isolated in the sea air, and listened to his father's droning voice, and felt irritated.

Here Pierre grasped at the scrap of paper marking his page, as it whisked into the air and sailed away. 'This, then, and you can go back to your party,' as he found his page and crushed the book in his mottled hands, '*It is not enough for us to allow Chinamen to come to our shore merely that, while living, they may do our rough work cheaply, repelled the while from us by systematic injustice and insult, and that when dead a Company may clear money by carrying their bodies back to their own land.*'

A few glanced at the Chinese cook who moved back and forth at the tables, out of earshot.

‘Go back to *your* own land, Mr. Richard; this is *British* Columbia,’ said one of the group, glancing back at Joseph.

‘*By the possession...*’ and here Pierre widened his eyes at the bored audience, ‘... *of British Columbia and Vancouver’s Island we look across into the very eye of four hundred million of heathen, a people eager to learn, acute to investigate, and whom the struggle for existence in thronged centres has made tolerant, patient, and hardy. Can we do nothing but trade with them?*’

As soon as this sentence was out, most of the men tramped up the boardwalk to the mill where the saw, edger and planer were being demonstrated and received with applause in the cool green-smelling shade.

The man with the exquisite moustache smirked at Pierre. ‘*What is your point?*’

‘That this railway is an open invitation to the thousands and millions of Celestials who will come and do the work that we’re too proud to do for wages we wouldn’t give to an Indian.’

Joseph walked to the edge of the stage as the small group of men guffawed, sweating and hungry but none wanting to wander solitarily to the food-tables where there were too many women, or to the sawmill where there were no women.

‘Will any of you go to work for the railway when it calls for men?’ Pierre kicked at Joseph’s beckoning hand.

‘Sure, and for Chinamen’s wages!’

‘I’ll go; it’s either that or clear stumps for the rest of my life.’

‘My girl would abandon me.’

They passed the bottle of whisky around and Joseph felt suddenly impotent and wordless. He wanted to say clever things and be respected in this little circle. He could see his mother standing with the women at the picnic but looking toward their spectacle as if she were just as alone. He offered a narrow laugh and the glazed eyes of the few drifted up, landing here and there on his frame like insects.

‘Funny,’ the moustache glistened, ‘certainly funny. Oh I’m sorry, were you...’ he pointed his finger at himself, at those around him, toward the ocean, back at himself. ‘Me? You’re looking at me. Sorry, hard to tell with those glasses.’

Joseph’s massive eyes stayed on the man’s face. ‘I’m looking at you,’ he muttered.

The man turned his back on Joseph. 'Well, Mr. Richard, we're hungry so you can continue your speech to your son here. I'm sure he's never heard it.'

They turned as one and headed for the picnic tables, leaving Pierre on the stage and Joseph standing on the deck two feet below, and yet the eyes of father and son were almost at the same level.

'Father, let's go eat something. Or go home.' He hung his head.

'I want to look at this mill.' With that, Pierre clomped across the deck, leaving Joseph a statue in the mud.

At the picnic table, conversation shrivelled. He picked at the hot greasy dim sum and made an effort not to eat too many.

Mother took his arm and led him to the beach where the black rocks and shells rattled in the frigid water.

'Son, your father is going to ask you to leave home soon.' She looked across the water to the indistinguishable islands. 'Probably after the harvest.'

Joseph bit into a dumpling, and sucked in air while his mouth burnt.

'Spit it out, for Christ's sake.'

He shook his head and wolfed the culprit down, then looked at her sloping face. Her eyes fixed on nothing and she wore the look of a person hearing a mildly surprising story.

'Where am I going?'

'Gold. Maybe the railway. The coal mine in Nanaimo.'

'You're serious.'

She nodded and her eyes glazed farther and her neck relaxed so her head leaned back.

'Mother.'

She came back to life and the gulls screamed.

'I want to go off and work.' He began stuffing the pastries into his greasy mouth. 'It's fine.'

The saw roared through the orange wood and the men clapped and swigged and shook Askew's hand.

Joseph worked the event and the sawmill over in his mind, and his thoughts were thus: The men felt themselves standing on the threshold of a great future of lumber, a limitless sea of dense green heaving up behind them, moaning giants who

carpeted the silent forest in brown needles and handed over their lives for the building of safety and home so that men could retreat from that cavernous wild into a softly glowing and oil lamp stenching sanctuary, a structure to protect their bodies and civilize their minds in the knowing that they alone had created a history where there was none; where another man may have tread at some point, whether he be Indian or surveyor or trapper, but never a man before who had everlastingly changed that section of earth into a recorded visible history.

That was what the sawmill could sell: dominance over a parcel of that foreboding and eternal coast, reaching out of the mottled ocean in a rumble of black shale and stretching out hands of roots into a lush moss and wildflower earth, climbing in a steaming squadron of pine, cedar and fir up the face and chest of mountains which roared and vomited freezing white water in chaotic and living violence, back down to the black oceans that lapped at the shale beaches and belched forth seaweed and rotten bleached logs.

A sawmill stretched across the face of the brutal coast like a badge on a man unremarkable, unacknowledged and ordinary, side-standing on a listless front porch or just out of the sun's white heat. A badge that would suddenly transform this man into a physical tool of the governance which we either acquiesce to and fear or gnash our teeth at and fear, a badge that carries its meaning across any breast which wears it and renders that man a beacon. So this sawmill was a badge upon that beach explaining an irreversible justice and divine policing henceforth to be respected. The people gathered there were active members of a new and growing society, unmovable and unflappable in resolve to succeed in taking that place underwing and protecting it from itself forevermore.

This resolve stood out on the proud faces of honest men who worked themselves sick in their struggle for ownership and marriage to that beautiful land; they loved the young Dominion and knew that they would toil from this day on raising life out of the black soil year after year and tending it so that it may give life to their children and their children and their children, wearing themselves away in a fameless lifelong war against an invisible enemy named Failure, until they would one day find themselves underneath the same black soil and no longer holding the reins of guidance. They knew that this land would be fair to them and provide in a way the old world was no longer capable of, with an innocent heart that Mother no longer could pretend to feel beating in her breast. In Joseph's mind, this is what the log said to them as it was halved by the blade.



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Smoke met the drizzling grey air and a murk sat against the cedar roof shingles.

Joseph looked out the window. Not much was visible save the wet black trees and the cattle that stood morose on the little slope leading to a pasture and deep irrigation ditch. Daylight was fading but the sun's direction was impossible to mark. Rather, the air darkened and the outlines of the cattle blurred.

Pierre tapped out these syllables on the tablecloth with a thick finger, 'Eat your God-damned steak.'

They scraped their forks in the wavering glow and Joseph wouldn't look up.

'I believe they would call this veal,' mother said as she watched the shadow animals in the yard.

'Oh stop,' Pierre held his silver like weapons, 'I will not throw away meat just to suit your squeamish nature,' he pointed the fork at his son, 'or yours.'

To breed the cows, Pierre had to pay for the loan of a bull, and Lewis had brought him down the road and demanded his two dollars before he'd let the beast through the gate into the pasture. The bull was small and nervous, circling the older cow and half-wild heifer. The terrified heifer wouldn't let the bull anywhere near her, as much as Pierre chased the animals and tried to corner them together.

The bull was attacked over and over again for most of the day by the instinctual cow. The bull eventually gave in to his duties, and earned Lewis his day's work.

While birthing, their cow had slipped down the bank and the calf was driven into the mud beneath her immovable body. Pierre yelled and struck the cow as she tried to help him rescue the calf. He dragged the rubbery animal out of the black mud, and Joseph and mother could see from the doorway that it was dead. Pierre carried it to the tin basin by the woodpile. When the cow began to eat the afterbirth, Pierre ran across the sucking ground and kicked the cow's face.

Now they tried not to remember exactly what they were eating, except for Pierre, who didn't care.

'This *steak* cost me two dollars, so you'd best enjoy it.'

\*\*\*

Joseph watched his parents with eyes that bulged behind his glasses, eyes that held a man squirming and feeling as though he were trying to lie, even in the most mundane

conversation. Joseph had no concept of this effect, and was mystified by his isolation in a town of lifelong strangers.

He stood up from the table to let the scratching dog out of the house, and the lamp threw his shadow against half the wall. He towered and was heavily muscled in such a manner that seemed unnatural. He worked very hard for father but this could not account for his physique, as father worked alongside him, and nearly everyone who didn't live in the city began and ended the day in darkness as well. The working day was more conducive to the wasting away of the body than to the building of muscle, yet he seemed to grow thicker and taller each year, and at twenty years old he cast huge shadows around the oil lamp- and dough-smelling house.

There was no explanation for his build and it drew constant attention in town and country, even amongst the people he'd known since childhood. To see his massive back and legs, and then to have him turn and lay his enormous eyes on you was an experience that none except his parents felt comfortable with. Mother, of course, was as immune as mothers are.

Joseph sat back down and the table groaned under his elbows.

'Going to hunt tomorrow, you and uncle?' he asked, scratching his shoulder.

'Yes, along the trapline.'

'His or yours?'

Their traplines were three kilometres apart, and as Pierre's was closer, hunting along his brother's traps would mean he wouldn't be home until evening.

'His.'

When Joseph and mother exchanged a quick smile, Pierre pointed his short finger at her.

'Jeanette, you get this boy up in the morning and put him to work.'

Joseph laid a hand on his father's shoulder and shook him gently and got up to let the dog in.

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It didn't look like morning but it was. Pierre was already gone, and it wouldn't be full daylight for another hour yet. In the pluming air of his breath he was shrouded. The little barn's roof dripped on what was left of the snow. The dog dug at some stale hay for shelter and winter birds went silent as thrown rocks.

The cow came up with an impatient moan, leading the heifer. Grabbing up a rusty knife from the nail in the doorframe, he attacked the twine and spread a bale of hay for the huffing beasts. The cow slashed her head at the heifer, who was well out of her reach, and ate without taking her eye off the enemy. After a minute of peace, supposedly threatened, she lunged and the heifer went in a tangle out of the barn.

‘You greedy bitch,’ Joseph yelled as he kicked the hay out from under her mouth. The heifer came back in as if she didn’t remember the cow or that she’d even been in the barn yet, and she moved to the pile of hay in front of her with black empty eyes, and started pushing and chewing with her head rising and falling, rising and falling as if she was nodding in agreement to whatever was being said in the barn, but not really listening.

‘Who were you yelling at?’

He coughed. ‘The cow.’

Jeanette brought the fry pan and laid it on a folded cloth in the middle of the thick table and finished the presentation of breakfast upon his plate. She sat down and looked at him as he drank white coffee.

‘Yes, mother?’

‘You alright, son?’ She touched his hair. ‘It’s difficult isn’t it?’

He began the long journey of filling his stomach, and said, ‘Why don’t you ever eat breakfast? It’s not healthy.’

‘There is a whole planet out there for you.’ She turned to the window as if the planet would be there.

He stuffed bacon into his mouth.

‘Your father tries.’

‘Midas? He sent my one friend to Australia.’

‘Your brother went – gold appeals to many people.’ She waved at the fogged window and put her hand over her mouth as she lied to her son. ‘Your brother wanted an adventure.’

‘My father wanted a scout.’ Yet Joseph knew also that there were secrets among his family.

She got up and brought the coffeepot and looked over his shoulder at the progress. ‘More bread?’

‘Yes, please.’

‘Son, you will meet a lot of people and have friends.’ She stood with her hand on the wooden chair and watched him organize cushions and blankets on the bearskin in front of the fireplace.

‘Where, here in town? They hide from me.’

‘When the railway—’

‘What, a bunch of Chinese friends?’ He moved his hand around on the floor until he touched the book. He removed his heavy glasses and laid them next to his head and brought the open book so close to his face that he could have been a man at the park sleeping.

‘There will be thousands of men here soon,’ she said and her voice was quiet as if she were only now hearing the fact in that sentence that had become old and repetitive already, a sentence that Joseph was sure had been passed from mouth to ear across stately rooms and log cabins and campfires and newspaper and taverns and open freezing air, spoken in reverence and pride and disdain and despair and greed and coercion, in all manners of English and French and Chinese and Salish and Gaelic.

‘The skin is a mirror,’ mother said to the opaque window, as her breath fogged and cleared, fogged and cleared on the glass. The dog limped like a crippled vulture across the muddy thawing yard.

‘What does that mean?’ he muffled behind the book.

‘They look at you and see themselves. They can relate to each other, but faced with you they become drained and they lash out.’ She rubbed a trail in the dusty windowsill with a finger. ‘Your body is their judgement. Time to stop hiding behind your father and me.’

‘I told you I’m ready to leave.’

‘You did. It’s an easy thing to say.’

‘Who are *they*, mother?’

‘The world, I suppose. England. The sun never sets on the empire, does it?’

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‘Ah now, what’s this?’ Pierre shook the newspaper and squinted at the large type in the middle of the page.

**Railway grading underway! Men needed urgently.**

**Good wages. Apply at Yale Office of the Canadian Pacific Railway Co.**

Joseph turned the eyes on him and Pierre looked across the dim kitchen and shook the paper again.

‘Here, read it.’

‘Yale. How far is that, father?’

‘Oh, it’s not bad. Maybe a couple days. You go to Victoria, and catch a steamer across to the mainland and then up the Fraser River. You don’t remember the mighty Fraser.’

‘All I know is the island,’ Joseph took the paper. ‘Ten dollars a week. Is that good pay?’

‘It’ll feed you.’ Pierre pushed at his knuckles with a finger. ‘The ship stops at New Westminster once it gets to the mainland. Mail, passengers. Then it’s straight up the Fraser to Yale. That’s the start of the Cariboo Road to Barkerville and the goldfields.’

‘I was just wondering why you’re so interested in it,’ Joseph muttered as he swept the paper away and stood up from the table. ‘I’d better go feed your cows.’

He went out in the dripping air and walked to the barn.

\*\*\*

They’d settled in Chemainus because Pierre’s brother lived there with his family, and when Pierre gave up on the Cariboo he’d come to visit.

‘Chemainus needs farmers and labour,’ Jean-Michel had said that day as young Joseph grabbed at mouthfuls of dirt in the dooryard of the clean little house.

Pierre, already weathered and disenchanted, perhaps saw an appeal in a life settled to one property and one honest and long-yielding employment. He could work as little or as much as he wanted, and for himself, with no overseer or captain and without the immediacy of a starving family if no yellow flakes or dust showed in his sluice-box or if no whales had travelled that far north yet.

That warm valley with its little bay, sparkled by the soft waters of Georgia Strait, must have held him that day; he decided to seek out a lot for purchase, rather than return to Victoria in hopes of signing on with another whaler.

Jean-Michel’s grubby children were too young to interest Paul and too weak for Joseph’s play. They held to their mother and their aunt in the pine-smelling kitchen as

the women looked through the latest dresses and fashions coming out of the capital city. As Jeanette thought they were still heading to Victoria, she was taking her sister-in-law's order and circling a corset and a hat with a pencil. The bread baked and the eggs boiled.

Later that night, the men made their announcement just after Jean-Michel said grace.

'It will be good to have family around,' everyone agreed, 'that's the way to feel at home here.' They all missed Québec with her three hundred years of white history and deep winters of skating on the St. Lawrence River and the sugar maples.

The brothers found a lot with a good log cabin already built. The owner had been murdered on his gold claim up north in the Cariboo, leaving his family to sell the lot and move to Victoria so that his wife could try to remarry.

'That's the way things happen,' giggled the land agent. Pierre rubbed his black knuckles and signed the papers in the land office. He and Jean-Michel got drunk that night and wrestled in the dark yard while snot ran down the children's weeping lamplit faces.

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Joseph stood at the bright door and watched birds flit. They landed on the same few branches and posts all over the yard, returning in a cyclic pattern over and again, calling out if one broke rank.

Father came out to the barn. He'd been threatened in town the day he showed Joseph the advertisement in the newspaper. Two men who worked at the mill stopped Pierre outside the general store and asked if anyone had taken care of his boy yet, and then quickly excused themselves, saying they'd confused him with someone else. And then they watched him as he made his way along the road.

Pierre said to Joseph, 'Son, you are old enough to find something else. That's all.'

He reached for the chewing cow and she banged into the wall, swinging her head and rolling her wild eyes. He could not face his son as he spoke lies.

Looking away, scratching his beard, he said, 'We love you and we don't want you to waste your life. It's nothing more than that.'

Joseph nodded and tried to think of one reason to want to leave. The years disappeared behind him and he was suddenly afraid that he didn't even know his

parents, let alone his brother Paul, who was somewhere in Australia repenting some unknown act.

How many windows on the house? What was the last thing his mother had said to him? If he left, he may not return for years like Paul, or perhaps never return again. His father would never return home to Québec and his decrepit relatives, so what would make him different?

‘But I’ll miss you and mother,’ he said to the white sky. He meant he would miss their lives, absent from their slow aging and the holidays that meant everything to him.

‘You’re not disappearing, you’re simply getting a job.’

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‘I have to get to Victoria to catch the steamer. How do I do that?’ he sighed.

Pierre looked up at his face and then out the window toward the small barn. ‘We’ve discussed it and you can have the Clydesdale. They’ll let you take a horse on the ship.’ Lifting his arms grandly, ‘He’s yours, son.’

He rubbed his black hands and squinted out at the light. Joseph felt as though his parents had discussed his whole future out of his presence. How long ago had they orchestrated his leaving? Perhaps they had foreseen his struggles, even an inevitable downfall. And if so, were they letting him proceed with their plan regardless?

He felt a damp injured weight, watching his father eat lunch leaned over the table. ‘How am I supposed to make a hundred miles on a goddamn crippled draft horse?’

‘*Câlîce de tabarnac,*’ Pierre struck with an open palm at his face and knocked the heavy glasses to the floor.

Joseph ran his hand along the dusty floorboards until he found the glasses, pounded the door open, and left the house. There was a fir log lying in the mud, sawn into rounds for firewood, waiting for the axe. He hugged one of the rounds and lifted it above his head although it weighed as much as he did, and hurled it over the fence into the paddock where that same enormous horse eyed him blackly in the cool air. It took a few tidy steps away from the round and stopped.

Crows lifted from each dried-out fence post and switched places with each other.

Pierre stood on the porch looking at his son's feet buried widely in the mud, and wondered how his family had become so betrayed by dishonesty. Whether he could have stopped it.

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Mother wept and held him around the waist.

'Don't do anything stupid,' she said. 'Write us as soon as you can.'

She met the wounded look that was now days old. 'We'll miss you very much, but you won't even have time to think of that, trust me.'

He looked at the house and the green damp under the boards. Pierre took his hand and maybe this once looked steadily into his watering eyes. One huge prematurely scarred and calloused paw enclosing a gnarled thick iron hand covered in markings.

'Father,' Joseph sighed.

'Joseph,' father said, benevolent in relief that his son was leaving.

They gave him what money they could spare as he'd never had employment under anyone except Pierre.

'Son, this country is crying out for an identity. The railway *will* be built. You can make a future for yourself. Listen,' he took him by the arm with his empty hand, 'you are the strongest man you will ever meet.'

Joseph looked blank but his chest pounded. Pierre took the arm in both his hands and shook it. 'Strength,' he hissed, 'and intolerance for lies. Don't let anyone get above you. Do not turn your back from a fight, you listen to me. Never run from a challenge.'

Mother shook her head, saying nothing.

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'Sir, sir, hello there, sir, you up there,' a short man in high heeled boots with a waistcoat buttoned to his throat was trotting after the confused Joseph as he clomped Douglas Street, the main street in Victoria.

Simpson had come out of the newspaper office for his afternoon rounds. He insisted on talking to people in the street, asking about their professions or children, and their reasons for being in the capital city. His editor rarely published these 'opinions' but some did link to real news stories, and more than a few of Simpson's interviews had produced clues to crimes committed or planned. Those who knew him avoided him;



most slanting afternoons found him driftwooding in and out of shops, winking and flipping his hands to people who were expert at pretending they hadn't noticed. His hands were so pink they looked sore.

He was going to the hotel for a late lunch when a giant facsimile of a man on a horse appeared at the end of the street. Simpson flinched and brought both hands to his mouth, but the image stayed and moved along in the same listless way that men do after riding long through terrain or weather, uninvolved and singleminded for relief from the moving saddle. It looked like any rider, only outsized and almost ridiculous.

The little city was spreading constantly and clapboard giving way to brick. Sweet-smelling pine constructions were torn apart and replaced with concrete and plaster. Pillars at the bank, sloping roofs over the sidewalk, glass in every window. Horses could no longer be tied to just any railing; these have just been painted and that one is reserved.

'What a magnificent animal,' Simpson said, and grabbed at the stirrup to stop their travel. 'I'm from the *British Colonist*, sure you're familiar with our publication. Unless you read the *Standard*, which would be a mistake.'

Joseph managed to get the beast out of the slowmoving traffic and into the cold dusty shade of a hotel. The bridge of his nose throbbed.

'My,' the reporter moaned as he met Joseph's eyes, 'what a spectacle you make.'

The old horse like a statue, head down and exhausted and the nervous giant astride, unsure of what to say and annoyed by the dust on his glasses.

'A quick question, sah,' as Simpson produced a notepad. 'What brings you to our capital?'

Joseph's stomach sparked with pain as he looked at the hotel menu. He'd eaten everything his mother had packed for him as soon as he was on board the steamer, and that was hours ago. He felt that empty pain that hung off the inside of the ribcage. People were staring at him, saddled on a draft horse and towering over the street.

'I suppose a meal brings me,' he said.

In the hotel restaurant Joseph ordered a steak and almost didn't order a beer out of shyness. As the reporter chatted one-sidedly at some men seated next, Joseph was very proud of himself and already writing his first letter to mother in his head.

Lunched with a newspaper man, spoke of this and that. He got me all caught up with the latest gossip down here.  
Don't forget to feed old Bess first, so that she'll leave the heifer alone.

Everything was new to him. He'd been in hotels and restaurants, even in Victoria, but now he was on his own. He was what they call a free man! He breathed loudly through his mouth and his eyes were invisible behind the glass from any angle other than straight on. His pant cuffs were above the top of his boots, making him seem even more outgrown in the smoky dining room.

He was overjoyed with the pure movement of a man in the world, really with the opportunity to look for work anywhere in the city or at the port, or any of the farms.

Joseph was not stupid but he sometimes looked it, if he did not constantly keep in motion of some kind. People would walk into a room and see him slack at a table waiting for his meal and beer, and assume he was part of some circus through town or someone's neglected simpleton giant child, for in his stillness he was a curio waiting inspection. How could a body dedicate all of its functions to growing that large and not neglect the brain! Yet he would eventually sigh and turn his gaze upon a newcomer to the room. This delay could be due to the lack of peripheral vision, or to his immersive brooding. And yet, staring, one would sum him up as a dullard and a freak and be done with it in that regard.

'Did you know,' as Simpson creaked back around, 'that the *Standard* claims a greater readership than the *Colonist*?' He laughed and glanced once at Joseph's face. 'We've put up one hundred dollars to the Irish Fund to settle the little dispute.'

He looked around and straightened his vest. 'Horrible what's happened in Afghanistan. Those Afghans slaughtered Cavagnari, so of course we had to march on Kabul.' He shook his head and hands at Joseph. 'What were they thinking? A bunch of goat herders going up against Britain's finest? Led by Roberts, nonetheless.'

Joseph nodded slowly and hummed.

'Now, what...?' Simpson moved his pink hands on the table and watched them. 'Oh, you're in town to find work, I suppose? On the docks?' He flicked his eyes up a few times and looped them around Joseph's frame. 'You'd have no problem finding work.'

'My father suggested I go to Yale. He'd like me to work on the railroad.' Joseph stretched and smiled. 'He thinks I'm the strongest man I've ever met!'

'Well, I daresay he's right.' Simpson looked around at the few diners and drinkers, who were each in sidelong ways staring at Joseph.

'Do you want to work on the railroad? Does your father tell you what to do?' He leaned in. 'What I mean is, sometimes we want to rebel! Father this, father that, oh just

give me some room!’ And he prattled his fingers on the table and smiled with his mouth open.

They sat for a while with the newspaperman providing a history of gossip in Victoria, who was coming from England and who had left for England in frustration, who had a mistress and who was a cuckold, and Joseph relished the juicy fat on his steak which his mother always made him give to the dog.

They left the hotel into a reddening sky and Simpson said, ‘I’ll show you to a decent boarding house and I must reiterate that you sail on the *Western Slope*. Reasonable fare and the captain will let you bring that crazy horse.’

‘Thank you,’ Joseph said as he missed the step. The mud had hardened a bit as the traffic lessened in the evening. He untethered the horse and they walked into the glow of the town.

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‘That there is my bed and these are my fucking possessions. I don’t care how large you are.’ The filthy coalminer clawed the length of his beard and pebbles tapped onto the floorboards.

Joseph nodded and took off his overcoat. There was a wooden trunk under each of the beds in the boarding room and he put all his clothes into his as he stripped to his underwear.

‘What, you want to fight me?’ the miner said to his massive back.

‘No,’ Joseph whined and he stuffed the leather wallet with all his cash into the trunk, with his back still to the man.

A scrawny youth with a long beard watched everything, coiled on his bed with his boots on. ‘You should,’ he yelled. ‘Shut him up for Christ’s sake.’

‘You,’ roared the miner, clutching his fists above his head. His eyes were running two clean lines down his blackened cheeks and he wavered in the middle of the little lamp-lit room.

Joseph sat on his bed in an oversized mockery of the youth’s position.

‘What’s your name?’ asked the boy.

‘Joseph Richard.’ They nodded at each other.

‘George Vittens.’

They turned back to the older man. George said, ‘My father, Bill Vittens.’

Bill gazed out at them.

‘Now shut up and go to sleep,’ George howled at his father, who was staying upright by miracle.

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The steamer docked at New Westminster, a trading post town near the river’s mouth, before continuing up the Fraser toward Yale. The town sat low in a blanket of woodsmoke with mountains rising up behind it. The *Western Slope* pulled away from the dock, and Joseph watched from the stern as buildings dissolved back into the trees, and then the whole settlement disappeared around a bend in the river. He spent a grey afternoon watching mountains slide past their upturned and undulant reflections. He thought, In this country, men are alone. Canada dwarfs her humans. Hundreds of years of bearded whites and thousands of years of beautiful Indians, and each may find himself suddenly caught alone in her great reaches and sobbing confusedly out of nothing but emptiness. The country is simply too huge and this pulls away and pulls away at any sense of ownership, possession, right, those doctrines that allow men to feel they belong, and women to feel they can bring something into that world. A whole town can spring up in weeks and burn down overnight, and the men will sizzle and pop or be left soot-faced and staring at her for reason. She does not care. He knows that it can be taken away from him and for no other reason than that he thinks the slack reins in his hand are attached to something he can control. He is blind, listening for running water or a wind to push branches apart and guide him to a vision.

This emptiness is stronger than anything we can throw at it. The wet mountains, the pines reaching straight at the hidden sun, the hypnotising miles and miles of yellow prairie or frozen tundra belong to nothing and to nothing comes man’s attempt.

He will watch his friends turn sour and return to the township. He will ask his wife’s eyes why they are clouding when he touches her. She will offer no answer other than a smile of pity even as she recoils from his fingers.

He loves her but he has nothing and this can sweep over him and flood his eyes. It happens to all.

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Yale, 1879

The steamer ground up at the shore, as planks hurled from her deck in a bridge and men rushed down, almost falling off either side into the biting water; some walked on up the slope to town while others screamed for luggage. The stevedores, robotic and thick, marched in file with ridiculous loads on their backs.

Young George Vittens took his syrupy father by the arm and led him through the mud away from the hurtling luggage. Joseph waited for his small trunk, smiling at the air and making jerky moves to get out of the way. The Clydesdale came down the ramp shaking its head as if disappointed to have survived the trip, guided by two men. Joseph lifted his hand and went toward them.

‘Thank you,’ he said as they gawked into his face.

The mountains ran black and dripping up into the wool cloudsky. Joseph led the Clydesdale up the gravel to Front Street, a stretching ramble of saloons and brothels facing the river and the mountain in cacophony and muck. He realized that here was gathering a secret army of Chinese workers for the railway. They had been hinted at in the newspapers and promised against in parliament and here they were, Joseph thought, shuffling along the rickety street in powdery sleeves, with shining braided tails down their small backs.

A group of Scandinavian giants appeared from the gloom of the Bent Mast and scattered the Chinese and Indians across the wooden boardwalk. Joseph smiled an open-mouthed nervousness upon the scene and had no idea where to go. So he stood on the shore-side of the open street and tried to spot the son and father in his small range of clarity.

The horse, unimpressed, hung his enormous head and watched the mud between his hooves.

A waving arm appeared across the road and he knicked at the horse and they started across. The blonde giant Scandinavians stopped and watched his approach.

‘What in God’s name are you supposed to be?’ one asked as Joseph realized a crowd awaited him. They stood in the dried-out shade of the boarded façades, a dusty collection of men with blank eyes, some spur jangling and a few in a slow chewing rhythm of tobacco, an unconscious constant that goes unnoticed like the pulse in a lover’s neck.

Joseph cast his eyes down. ‘Oh, I came to work on the railway,’ he muttered at the ground as his face warmed around the ears.

His glasses picked up a sliver of sunlight and cast it on the ground next to his headshadow. He swallowed and his bowels shifted, still unaccustomed to the break in

his farmhouse eating routine. He had felt clammy and frail during the trip up the Fraser River; his arms trembled faintly.

And when he finally looked up he saw written on their faces an open awe. The Chinese had drifted off and he stood in the giants' circle, a child king. They were gripping his triceps and running rough hands over his thin coat back. It was a cattle auction appreciation, stopping short of looking down his trousers or opening his mouth to inspect the gums. In silence they moved about him, an occasional black stream of juice shooting from a hairy mouth into the mud, but otherwise a reverent maypole dance.

One of the men, skin almost translucent in the winter light, with white hair and a sharp beaked face, took Joseph by the forearm.

'See that man?' he asked in heavy German accent, pointing to a bearded orc in the doorway of a filthy one-room pub. 'He said he wants you out of his town.'

'I don't know him,' Joseph said to the ground, to the mud. His glasses began sliding down his nose.

'But he said he wants to fight you,' and the men shrugged as if this were the law made and delivered.

Joseph thought of his father's directions, and he tried at the same time to remember, from books he'd read, repartees against fighting. He could only recall his father's words. He raised his head to keep his glasses from falling off. He glanced at the white-skinned German, and tried to see the man in the doorway. He was blurry, but he had a round stomach and a brown towel over his shoulder.

'Then I'll fight,' Joseph said.

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By that night he was stripped to the waist in lamplit sawdust with a screaming boundary of rank men urging him to kill the fat bartender facing him, a black mat of moist hair from throat to belt. Joseph was striving not to weep or vomit as a man on stilts clomped past, shaking a handful of paper money at the crowd and bellowing his predictions for the fight of the century. Joseph had given his eyeglasses to George Vittens to hold. Now, he could make out no details, and stood raising and lowering his fists awkwardly in a world of blurred howling maws.

Joseph wailed as a fist froze his face and sent a sour numbness into his mouth. His teeth felt like smashed fingers. He threw his arms up and took a blow to the relaxed

stomach, then dropped and retched into the sawdust as the damp beast shook his arms at the audience and circled back toward him. Joseph clawed at the rough pantleg as it swung, and pulled the other man to the ground. Instantly he was on his side clutching his face as a knee pistoned into his forehead and against the backs of his soaked hands. A whistle blew somewhere and he was lifted to his feet. He sobbed and shook the arms off him, retreating back and back until he was guided to a wood box to sit. The man on stilts patted the booing crowd on their heads and apologized that Joseph had just come from the wild and would need to train in the pugilist's method, as he was familiar with eating raw deer and catching Indian children in the night, but not the sporting world of men.

George Vittens handed him his glasses but he could not put them on his numb face, so he held them between his legs as he moaned. The boy and his father led Joseph away from the hot circle and into the clinking darkness of tethered horses. They threw his coat over his steaming shoulders. The moon made a blue world and horse teeth shone.

In their small room papered with old news, they sat on the beds and watched his hands like bloated salmon in a pink riverpool, drifting in the white basin. He sucked through his pouched mouth and blood dripped onto the floor. Bill sat on his bunk and moaned with Joseph.

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He looked more ogre than ever when he approached the ramshackle hiring office of the railroad. The mountains were gone behind murk, and water dripped from everything. It was cold and two men puffed steam in the white air outside the door. The men, with moustaches like soot over their lips, stared at him and one spat tobacco juice in the mud and touched his hat brim.

‘Office is open. You lookin for work? You speak English?’

‘Yes, I’m Canadian. I – ah – don’t have any experience with the railroad work but...’

‘Shoot, don’t tell me. Go on in and talk to one a them.’ He spat again in a black jet and shook his head at Joseph’s warped face.

Joseph took the stairs in one step and pulled the hat off his swollen forehead before knocking.

‘Yes,’ someone said.

He pushed the door and the spring hinge whined his presence. The office was dark with a strange map on the wall. It said British Columbia. He recognised immediately Vancouver's Island on the coast. He followed the black line of river with his eyes to a number of spots marked with coloured pins. There was a knife half-buried in Yale.

'What in God's name are you supposed to be?' asked the block of man behind a wide desk. He was grimacing at Joseph's face and neck, a winter storm of yellow, purple, grey, with magnified bloodshot eyes behind his glasses.

'I'm looking for some work. On the railway.' He bent his fingers around the hat. 'My parents have a cattle farm so I'm familiar with long work days. Sir.'

'Why the hell is your face so...?' He thrust his hands in the room and shook his head. 'You come in here looking like that?'

They watched each other in the sifting shadow as the two men outside coughed together.

'Explain yourself, please!'

Joseph with a pained smile, 'I got in a fight my first night here.'

'When was that?'

'Last night.'

The man had been slowly shaking his head. 'I don't know. Jesus. What's wrong with you?'

He stood quietly because this was where his father's plan ended. He had to get a job or he didn't know what to do.

'Fine, we'll start you clearing the roadbed. We're not blasting yet.' He looked over the enormous body. 'No point starting today, and apparently Sunday is too goddamned sacred around here for anyone to work. Monday, six o'clock. Check in with Macdonald.'

He got up and tapped Yale on the map, then tapped a spot just north on the west bank of the river.

Joseph gave his hat a few squeezes and jerked toward the door, then back, then turned his torso toward the door, then stood again in front of the desk and extended his hand still fresh with gore across the knuckles.

The man simply looked at the hand and shook his head as it had been more or less shaking since Joseph entered.

Joseph left the office and winced at the men outside as he fit his hat back on. The springs whined and the door closed with a singular empty clap for his performance.



He walked toward the cloud of rock dust north of town to have a look. The pines were covered with it, a tunnel of colourless trees guiding him toward his new job.

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‘Well, now, if this isn’t the place to find work.’

He emerged an eclipse over George and Bill Vittens, three glasses of beer in his smashed hands. He was very pleased with himself. He’d composed another letter home in his head as he quickstepped down Front Street to the hotel they had installed themselves at.

Mother, Father

This is a town of opportunity. My second day and I have already been hired on with a road-laying crew. There are many Celestials here, so you know now that the rumours in the paper are true.

Bill was rocking quietly and watching the action in the saloon. He would focus on a table of men and nod slowly to what he perceived them to be saying, and his eyes would widen and widen as his owl head turned. He’d begin to melt toward the scene as Joseph and George chatted away beside him. His glazed eyes unblinking in their hypnosis would pull him until his mouth opened and he would list threateningly over the grimy floor. Eventually, after enough men walked in front of him to interrupt the focus he would recede like a snail sensing a finger, his eyes clearing and his facial muscles drawing together.

The Scandinavians, a dark wall pushing the room in as they entered. In full-length pelt coats with beaver hats they consumed the lamplight and forced a shadow to spread. There was a dense wet smell. Four abreast they crossed to the bar like a log boom and brought silence with them.

‘Oh, of all the drinking holes on this street,’ said George as he bared his brown teeth.

Joseph with that open-mouthed smile looked up to see why it had become quiet. The Scandinavians were looming at the bar and eyeing his destroyed face, a foul blue in the dim light. His glasses shone orange. Flanked at the little corner table by George whose booted toes just managed to touch the floor, and Bill, again being pulled with slack mouth toward the low conversation at another table, Joseph leaned on his forearms and the table cracked.

‘What the fuck are you looking at?’ George asked the men as the sour smell of wet furs clogged the room.

‘Yosef,’ one of them nodded and the other three leaned away from the rickety pitch-sticky bar and came black and long across the room. The one who spoke his name stayed at the bar. The odour of their coats was stronger in the close air.

‘The face of a champion,’ and they laughed. Joseph smiled but his cheeks hurt and he looked down at the table.

George’s gaze flicked in rapid pulse and his head jerked around behind them. He took in Joseph and the giants and struggled to find something vicious to say, to voice his lashing offence at the abuse of his friend.

‘You are healing well,’ one said and put his hand thickly on Joseph’s shoulder. ‘Nothing is broken?’

Joseph shook his head. This man had a crooked nose that swelled flatly between his eyes and seemed to push them apart. His lips didn’t quite cover his teeth, and because he was conscious of this, he often forced them closed. He looked mopey or dour as a result. When he forgot to push his lips closed, his teeth sat against the air in the way of a mule straining under a load.

To his right, a behemoth with a beard that poured out of him like a storm cloud and eyes set so far back under a muscled brow, that it was impossible to determine in the dim saloon whether they were open or closed, or even what they looked like. He didn’t remove his wool cap but his hair coiled out from under it.

To the mule-tooth’s left was the Germanic raptor with irises almost white. His thin hair was oiled straight back and his jaw moved horselike around a mouthful of tobacco.

‘You have found a job?’ he asked Joseph, looking at the Vittens family.

Joseph raised his glass. ‘That’s what we’re celebrating.’

They laughed and Bill Vittens’ eyes became clear and he looked at them in wonder before sliding back into his meditation.

‘Who hired you?’

‘The railway. The office there, fat sort of fellow. I’m clearing rock for the graders.’

The black beard moved and thick Germanic or horrible English came out of his mouth quietly, and then he sipped his whiskey.

‘You don’t want to work for the railway. Not directly,’ the falcon said. His white eyes scorched Joseph’s throbbing face. ‘They don’t pay their men. They’re already broke. Also, you’ll be surrounded by Chinese and drunks.’

‘Oh well, they gave me a job.’ He touched his glasses and relieved the pressure on his nose. ‘I may as well see for myself.’

The three shook their heads and the mule shrugged.

‘Here’s to your job, then.’

George snorted and spat on the floor, but a thin line hung from his mouth and he had to wipe it into his beard.

‘Here’s to your boxing matches!’ and he upended his beer.

They smiled down at him.

The falcon looked again at Joseph’s bulbous and shadowed face, and said, ‘Sorry. This place has not much by way of entertainment.’

They turned away, dragging the wet fur stench with them and went back to lean against the bar. The men there shuffled away to make room. The three shrugged at their leader in explanation. Juice launched into the cuspidor, producing distinct notes.

Outside, there were three quick pistol shots. And then one more into the silence. For a moment, all were still inside the little ramshackle saloon as if posing for a photographer. The picture might be titled ‘Men at Leisure’ or ‘Popular Pastimes in Yale’ and sell for five cents. Then with a cough and a few heads turning, they resumed their lives.

Joseph felt as though he’d dealt well with the threat. These overbearing men wouldn’t get the upper hand. His father had cautioned about letting others bear down on him. They’d talked him into the fight and he could have been maimed or killed and no one to stop it or exact vengeance. As it was, his face was a horrifying and tender mess.

‘Do you think you can get me a job?’ George asked as they studied the damp white fingers he spread out on the table.

Joseph looked at his thin shoulders and wispy beard.

‘I don’t know. I suppose if Chinamen can do it.’

George shook his father and asked him to pay up if he wanted another beer.

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George ended up getting himself work. He approached the hotel owner one frantic morning in the restaurant and offered his services in the kitchen.

On a Monday they woke in the black reek of their room to Bill, in a rare moment of sobriety, clomping around with unlaced boots and splashing coffee on their blankets. The lamp slowly poured the room into yellow life, and his shadow flowed up behind him to stain the ceiling, and then lurched away and slunk along the walls.

‘Drink up. Come on, get out of bed. You worthless children.’

Joseph’s nose was blocked with dry blood from breathing dust and he’d soaked his pillow in drool.

Bill put a boot against the frame and rattled the poor bed. ‘You need to get to the kitchen. Let’s go.’

George moaned and twisted down into his blankets. Bill balanced the tin mug on the side of his son’s head.

‘Get it off me,’ he howled without moving.

Bill sat down on his bed laughing as George struggled to grab the hot cup and put himself out of danger.

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Joseph’s hands quickly became destroyed by crushing and rolling rocks, as he manoeuvred his fingers underneath the small boulders to lift them onto carts. There were other white and Indian workers near him in size, who hadn’t been snatched away yet by the Scandinavians, but his strength was so out of proportion he often had a slow-working audience around.

There was some talk of a competition being held on a Sunday perhaps, to test his power against a select few others in hurling or wrestling matches. The talk made him nervous; the bruises on his face were down to yellow blotches but the terror was fresh. He wanted nothing to do with competition.

Joseph sat on his bunk stuffing his small pile of money into a leather purse. George watched him, propped in white morning light reflected off the old resilient snow on the windowsill. George smoked a cigarillo, wearing the boots he’d bought after his first pay, and tapped his finger on the thin crust of ice until it broke and he sunk his finger into the snow, touching the wet wood of the sill.

‘You better buy some boots or something useful,’ he spat out the dirty window.

‘No, no, I’ll just keep saving away.’

‘For what?’

‘Well, I’ve never earned my own money before, so I just like having some.’

‘Hmmp. Money’s no good if you don’t spend it fresh. Goes bad,’ and he swiped all the snow from the ledge. ‘What about women?’ He looked at Joseph. ‘Mmmhmm. Yes, sir. That’s what you and I will spend some money on tonight.’

Joseph laughed and moved his glasses around. ‘No, I couldn’t.’

George shook his ratty head and pondered the street below. There seemed to be mud on everything and freezing rain filled the air so there was no discerning where the sky began. It looked as if there had never been anything other than rain, other than grey above the earth, other than wet filth splashed and spattered. Men moved silent and redundant in sameness, back and forth in the muddy open, and beneath the chill darkness of the shopfront awnings. He watched the woman standing at the open black doorway of a brothel, her young tired face and muscular shoulders pink with cold. She stared at the mud in the middle of the street as thin wheels and hooves moulded it back and forth, in constant change like the work of a fickle potter. George looked back into the room. His thin beard was almost white in the soft direct light and the veins crawled on the back of his hand as he carved the hissing ashes off the cigar onto the wet sill.

There was a bump against the wall in the hallway and the door swung open.

Bill’s blank stare sailed the room and he shuffled carefully in, holding the doorknob as his body cantilevered. He turned in jerking focus and pushed the door closed. Then his head ratcheted upright and he looked for his bed.

They watched him burrow into the thin sheet and wool blanket, clothed and scraping along, and then George sighed and came away from the window. He grabbed Bill’s filthy boots and began shaking his feet back and forth until they came off and a rank sourness drifted in the room.

Bill, like a mole, kept pawing into the bed and pulling at his blankets to bury himself. George dropped the boots onto the dull floor and looked at Joseph.

‘And what is your father like?’ George asked, as his bottom lip jumped sporadically.

Joseph smiled and huffed through his nose. He thought of the tortured hands, his father’s whaling stories: the rope singing through his palms, spraying blood onto the rowers seated in front of him. His scarred palms thick and unnatural, like handfuls of fleshy dough in the kitchen daylight, as he would let the child Joseph run his fingers across their deadness. The backs of his hands, bruised and strange with indiscernible tattoos, the knuckles pulped and spread in floating chips, the hands a source of pride for he who would offer them as negotiation in shops, farm auctions. ‘You see these?’ he

would say, in front of one man or ten. ‘Do you think I’m here to simper with you over a few dollars? My offer is final.’

His thick black hair always greasy, the animal smell on Joseph’s hands for hours after climbing down from his father’s shoulders. His wide moustache, thrust at either horizon and his face almost never smooth-shaven, even on Sundays. He shaved as though it were a waste of time, even if he would do nothing afterward but sit at the table for hours with a book.

Yet his eyes were soft, and he looked at Jeanette as if dreaming. He would listen to her hum and sing under her breath, songs from old Québec, and he’d tap his fingers on the table.

‘My father,’ said Joseph, ‘suffers from gold fever. He used to be much worse. All he talked about was gold, and he convinced my brother to go to Australia.’

‘What’s in Australia?’

‘Gold, apparently.’

‘Jesus,’ and George rubbed his eyes, ‘why sail all the way there just for gold? Wouldn’t it be gone by the time you get there?’

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Up on the distant mountainside, a blast on the ledge above them threw slabs of rock and cannonball stones. The cacophony of black airborne shapes flew out above the men and went spraying down the cliff to the riverbed below, a simultaneous battery onslaught on the trees and water.

The men were covered in a rattling mist of dust, wiping their eyes and scratching rocks from their hair and ears. They bent and resumed shovelling and scraping the roadbed, clearing also now the fresh debris from the blast. Joseph grabbed hold of a jagged rock and began lifting it.

When a yelling came down the line toward him, louder and more insistent than the regular working disorder, he wiped his glasses on his shirt and looked around. A group of Chinese were bunched at the edge of the cliff, gesticulating and frantic.

The foreman Macdonald shook his arms overhead and hollered at their representative, who had lately been learning and teaching a hybrid working language, so that the two races could exist and work in some kind of unison.

‘Fong! Workee, workee!’ Macdonald screamed, rubbing his fingers together in the other’s face to indicate money. Fong crossed his arms and closed his face to the foreman, stoned and impervious and mute.

Joseph watched with his glasses sliding down his nose as the Chinese men with deliberate eventuality lay their tools on the ground and walked back from the cliff-edge to sit cross-legged or squat on the ground or one of the boulders on the roadbed.

Macdonald dragged a boy to his feet, hollering redly into his face, and Fong slapped the foreman’s hands away and pushed him back.

The men were now all sitting except Joseph and a few scraggly whites, and two Scandinavian behemoths who hadn’t gone to work for the independent contractors.

The foreman spat in the dirt and climbed on his horse, then rode south toward town. The men sat, some motionless and staring at their hands and feet, some debating in near-pantomime. Fong stood sentinel and glared. He marched over to two young men who were slowly collecting rocks and slapped their hands empty.

Joseph walked closer, enormous in the dusty silent air, surrounded by seated men who made him truly monolithic. He shrugged at one of the Scandinavians standing at the lip.

The man said, ‘He fell. He’s dead,’ and did an arc with his arm out over the ledge. Joseph stooped and put down his shovel, trudged across the loose rocks.

His legs and groin throbbed as he stood at the edge and looked down. There was a Chinese worker wedged deep between two rocks on the riverbed, straight down the sheer black cliff. The rocks were wet around his crooked body. He was face down, but his arms were straight up behind him, as if he’d been trying to pick up speed on his dive.

Macdonald returned with an Indian. The Indian wore his glossy hair in two plaits on his chest and carried a deerhide pack. He nodded when the foreman spoke and waved his arm to the edge of the cliff. He dropped a long coil of rope to the ground, and began inspecting a harness with a leather strap seat and tackle that looked like a trap for rodents. He took up one end of the rope and scuffed in his moccasins over to the jagged and bulbous rocks along the inside of the roadbed, where he tied the rope around a boulder. He worked slow and absent, and ignored Macdonald’s impotent and furious staring, weaving amongst the slippered dusty bleeding feet of the Chinese.

The Indian beckoned to Joseph and two other large men, and shook the rope and grinned. ‘You pull me up fast.’

Macdonald kicked a rock.

‘Will you hurry up for Christ’s sake,’ he screamed.

The Indian turned slowly and looked at him, and smiled. He held his hand out.

Macdonald said, ‘I already paid you.’

‘Oh, that’s right.’ He shrugged and went back to the elaborate harness inspection.

‘Ten fucking dollars,’ Macdonald roared, and walked away with his fists shaking at his sides.

‘What’s your name?’ asked Joseph.

‘Joe.’

‘Ha, mine too.’

The Indian looked at him, at his warped eyes. He gave the straps a few tugs.

‘Joe is my white name,’ he said, with the ‘white’ a smiling grimace.

When Joe finally lowered himself over the edge, they were starving and bored but hadn’t been told to stop for lunch. Joseph Richard would not be able to eat, and his hands were damp as he reeled his thoughts away from the fallen man. The crump of constant eruptions above and around them had stopped. All the dust blew down the valley so they could see the sun, and the black cliff face across the river.

All the whites stood close to the edge, trying to nudge forward and look over, and falling back with that sick throb every time. Joe had gone over, and his rope was a stiff wire; they had put a folded burlap sack at the lip so the friction of rock wouldn’t damage the rope. After a few minutes they heard laughter, and it sounded close but they couldn’t see over.

Fong held his workers at bay with a glare, and if one stood up to do anything like work he would rush over and scream, and shake his arms. A couple of the Chinese had edged down to a vantage point upriver, where they could see the Indian. They announced to the others. Macdonald paced and inspected tools for dents, counted the men.

At the cliff’s edge, guarding the rope, Joseph and the other giants stood like three creaking and dusty gatekeepers bloodied by the rock war, looking over the valley of black jagged stone and trees arrowing at the orange sky. Crows, tiny black drifts against the afternoon, barking out and sailing away up the valley.

‘Why haven’t you gone to Ebenhoch?’ one asked the air.

‘Ah, I worked for him before. They think they know everything.’



Joseph crossed his arms and listened, trying to stand between them and beat his terror of the edge. Through his glasses, it was a good few paces; if he lifted his head and looked out from under the lenses, it was much closer. Small gusts of wind brought a silent whimper to his lips.

The first one spat and nodded. 'They work too hard; they're ridiculous. I came here to make enough. Not to destroy myself.'

'I didn't want to actually learn anything,' the other said, and they laughed. He turned to Joseph. 'Why are you here?'

'Here? Yale?'

'With Macdonald.'

'I just – I went to the office. They sent me here.' Joseph nodded and spat, hoping it went somewhere in front of him.

The first one looked down and rubbed his leg against the other. 'You should try working for Ebenhoch. He came to the bar for you, remember?'

'He's the crew boss of those... are they German?'

'German, Danish, Finnish, this one and that one.'

Joseph said, 'Well, he got me into that stupid fight.'

The men shrugged and looked out over the wet valley. There were surveyors on the other side, working through the bush. Downstream on the riverbank, closer to Yale, stockpiles of railway ties and rails were being laid out. Smoke rose in crooked lines from town.

Macdonald appeared behind them.

'Hold my fucking legs,' he shouted and Joseph leapt, almost squealed.

'I'm going to see what that son of a bitch is doing, so you fools grab my legs.' He took a few keys, and a tobacco pouch and pipe out of his pockets, and then dropped to his knees and crawled to the rough edge, holding the rope with one hand.

Joseph stood back and Macdonald turned on him from the ground, a demonic lizard. 'You grab a leg, you enormous whore, or I will personally see you shot and face down in the thoroughfare tonight,' he screeched.

They held his legs and he inched over the edge until his face filled with blood. Indian Joe was sprawled on a ledge ten feet below, a mouth in the cliff face. He had tied a few dynamite sticks to the free end of the rope and was lowering the bundle between his spread legs, rapidly hand over hand down into the air. A fuse was hissing orange, a long whip of a tail that touched the rocks as it spun slowly.

The bundle danced eventually onto the riverbed, shaking its way closer to the crushed diver as Joe jiggled the rope from his perch.

Macdonald began screaming and the startled men clamped down on his writhing legs. He swore the eternal burning of the Indian, an afterlife of incest and sodomy. The Indian howled up at him and then bent to his careful jiggling.

The dynamite settled into the fabric of the man's shirt, touching his wet black hair and coming to rest against his neck. The rope had some slack in it and sat atop the dynamite, as the fuse crept sizzling over the sticky rock.

Indian Joe leaned back and mimed up at Macdonald to cover his eyes. There was a belching roar and the rope leapt straight up the cliff face. Rocks thudded like charging animals through the bush across the river and the Chinese worker erupted in a red and grey mist. The blast echoed up and opened above them, a crash against the sky, and the riverbed was invisible with dust.

The surveyors in the bush hollered and shook their tiny fists. Indian Joe gave the rope a few tugs as if he didn't know Macdonald leered above him.

'Pull me back,' Macdonald said, and they dragged him away from the edge. They looked at him, and Joseph asked if the Indian was okay.

'Oh, don't worry about that motherless whoremonger,' Macdonald spat. He marched toward Fong.

The two men shrugged at each other and began pulling the rope, and Joseph grabbed on behind them. When Indian Joe's hands came into view one of the men knelt to catch him under the shoulders. They hauled him away from the edge and he carefully dusted himself, straightened his hair. The loose end of the rope came up, burned black and spackled with gore.

Mandarin rang out in clean thin syllables from the vantage point, and like a linked machine brought to life, every Chinaman rose, dusted his pants and fetched up his tools. The ding and scuff rang out multitudinous as a hundred men set to make up their day's labour.

'Well, that's just a sight,' said one of the Europeans. He picked in his beard and spat.

White dust rose up around them and they separated back to work as Macdonald forced his way through the tide of men to come and yell at them for loitering.

The dust pushed off the crumbled ledge and drifted out over the echoing rivervalley. In the giants' wake, the foreman leaned out to try and pick the spot where

the corpse had disintegrated. The river was a snake. Where the body had been, only a crater, a wallow among the black rocks.

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In the pub that night, politics rose. Out of the snarl of stiff clothing around the pub door, the men in fur coats came wolf-like, already saying his name in their throaty timbre, looking for him.

And the pale one, the falcon with white eyes: ‘You’re healed. Ready to work with us, eh?’

Joseph had been rising and falling his hand at the passing barkeep, shouldered and elbowed back by the men leaning over the oak, and wearing the grin that denied him service even while he tried for it. He smelled their deep rank musk perhaps before hearing them, and turned.

‘Oh, I *am* working – for the railway...’ and he put up his flayed hands for inspection.

‘Our friends,’ began the falcon.

He gripped the neck of the man immediately in front of Joseph at the bar. His sleeve was damp as it came past, and he bent the man down and away, pushing his neck to waist level, then knee, and stepping over him to the bar.

‘Our friends worked with you today. They say you’re unhappy.’

Joseph had his arms up in front of him, like a bear boxed by hounds.

‘I’m not unhappy,’ he wheezed, ‘and they pay me on time!’

He felt the man on the ground clawing past his legs in the close heat, and Joseph struck out with his knee. Once, and then again, hitting the man’s back and hip as he crawled. The falcon put on a surprised face, then laughed and took Joseph’s arm, and pulled him to the bar.

‘This man is thirsty! Serve him! You bastard!’

Joseph pounded the bar, ‘Serve me, you bastard!’ and he laughed with the men in fur coats around him.

George Vittens watched from the corner, as his father moped and rolled a cigarette next to him.

‘Sit on the other bench,’ George said, ignored.

The tables were covered daily with the dust that seeped into town from the blasted cliffs. George had been rubbing away at their table since Joseph went to stand

feebly at the crowded bar. They knew he was the only one of the three who could get close enough for a drink. George looked at the table and nodded. He smiled and tried to see his friend.

Joseph stood at the bar and laughed, nervous and confused by this ready violence in him.

The lamp light, candlelight, the yellow dull warmth of the crowded drinking hole with a rickety skeleton of hasty lumber. Men hunched and sighed, exploded in laughter, in targeted violence.

Night after night the fluctuating population seemed on the verge of burning Yale to the ground through some accident.

The pale one looked up at him with a void smile on his face.

‘Could make some money fighting.’

Joseph began demurring and the man put his hand out to silence him. Joseph wiped at his greasy forehead and pretended the man wasn’t looking at him with his pale face turned up.

The falcon extended his hand. ‘Dennis Ebenhoch.’

Joseph shook it and muttered, ‘Joseph Richards.’

‘If you won’t come and work for us, at least let me help you with some money.’

He took Joseph’s elbow and his hand was cold like a vise.

‘We can find you a fight, perhaps. One you’re sure to win. What do you think of that?’

‘I don’t want to fight.’

‘We all want to fight. Look around you. Hatred.’

Joseph tried to pull his arm away gently but Ebenhoch held it firm, and Joseph stood still.

‘Imagine all men fearing you.’

He let go of the elbow and looked up at Joseph with a trouper’s fear, clutching the throat of his own heavy overcoat. Then he laughed and raised a finger at the barkeep, pointing at their row of empty glasses.

Joseph smiled and looked around, at least a head taller than everyone in the tavern. Perhaps he imagined their fear.

He was almost at the hotel. The afternoon dust threatened the sun. Ebenhoch rode through the crowded street toward him on a blockfaced mule.

‘We’ve got that fight for you.’ He sat his animal and looked down with his dead gaze.

Joseph flipped his hands like suffocated trout and sighed up at him.

Ebenhoch put his hands on the pommel.

‘Look, it’s a sure bet. You can collect your winnings the second it’s over.’

Joseph looked down the street as men drifted around the mule, well back from its kicking radius.

‘How do I know it’s a sure win?’

The pale man glanced over each shoulder and leaned down with a great creaking of leather.

‘We always know the winner.’

‘Then why did I fight before?’ Joseph whined.

‘Ah, well that time we didn’t know. But we almost always know,’ and he laughed with nothing in it.

Out of politeness Joseph didn’t turn away.

Ebenhoch spread his hands. ‘Give me some credit. I thought you could fight. You look like a monster.’

At this Joseph twitched and blinked. He looked at the ground and backed away, shaking his head.

Ebenhoch walked the mule forward.

‘Hey,’ he said with a certain caution, and Joseph stopped.

‘Twenty dollars,’ said the man, nodding. ‘One fight. You win.’

Joseph had dry blood on his hands and the shoulder of his woollen shirt had torn, snagged on some rock. The day’s work, begun and ended in near darkness, had earned him a dollar and a half. He searched Ebenhoch’s face in the darkening blue of the street.

Ebenhoch looked back at him with eyes devoid. Joseph was not used to his gaze being directly met, and he saw that this must be truth-telling, this blatant stare.

Another night, Joseph went to the decrepit stable behind the hotel to check on the decay of his horse. A dark shape came at him from just outside the clear ambit of his vision, and he stepped against the wall. He turned and lashed out with a kick, and the man who’d sprung at him stood off smiling.

‘Good, good,’ said Ebenhoch as he rounded the corner and took his white hands out of his coat. ‘You’re quite fast.’

He shrugged at the other man and turned back to Joseph.

Joseph squinted at them with his heart beating, proud of himself and bewildered.

‘You can make your twenty dollars this Saturday,’ said Ebenhoch, ‘if you want it. I’m off to spend about that.’

The two men walked along the side of the stable back toward the street. The white face turned back. Joseph thought he could see satisfaction written there, as he was caught watching after them.

‘Seek us out when you want a man’s wage. We’ll pay double what your company pays.’

He said *company* like the name of an enemy. He laughed and disappeared with his companion among the roving shapes in the wan street torchlight.

Joseph went to the scene of his previous beating and there again was a roaring crowd casting the yellow smell of grain alcohol through the darkness and the bloom of fires.

George and Bill Vittens shadowed him like sentient totems. He found the Scandinavians easily enough, bunched and moving across the open centre of a makeshift ring. They turned as one and Ebenhoch came to greet him. He put an arm up around Joseph’s shoulder and led him into the glowing midpoint. With the fur-clad men stood a stringy pugilist in undershirt and trousers. He had a moustache waxed to points opposite and he sniffed and rubbed his nose, sneering up at Joseph.

‘Your opponent,’ said one of them.

Joseph cast around at their faces, then back down at the boxer. He looked up at them again. He could pick this man up overhead by the look of him.

‘MacMillan here is a bareknuckle champ across the border.’

The bleating audience held no favourite and Joseph glanced at their gaping mouths. The Vittens duo began pulling his coat sleeves and he took his hat off.

Ebenhoch wrote bets into columns in a little leatherbound book, his white fingers spidering along as he nodded or winked at shouting men and placed their bets.

‘Get your God damned bets in,’ shouted the gangly ringmaster atop his stilts, lifting and replacing in hydraulic jerks a stovepipe hat as he circumnavigated the shifting ring.

George Vittens folded Joseph’s coat under his arm and spat meaningfully in the hay and sawdust at their feet, pursing his lips at his perceived rivals. His father wandered off into the shadowed crowd.

Joseph was led by the mulefaced Scandinavian to an upended crate. He sat down. Men screeched at the back of his head.

‘Shirt off?’ asked the mule.

Joseph looked up in terror, shaking his head and pushing his glasses as far up his face as possible, pressing the frame into the meat of his nose until it hurt.

‘I’ll keep it on,’ he rasped.

‘Don’t let him grab it,’ the mule said, miming dirty tricks of shirt-pulling one after another.

The men cleared the ring and then there were only two seated and gazing at each other, and the ringmaster looming above them. One fighter enormous and one electric in rigidity.

‘David and Goliath!’ bellowed the man on stilts, plucking in and out of the mud and hay that stuck to his poles. ‘Will the giant of the Philistines wrack our hero’s limbs, or shall David cast a stone through the forehead of his tormentor?’

‘Bets!’ yelled the Scandinavians at all corners of the crowd.

The stilt man wheeled past and said, ‘Look fierce, man,’ to Joseph. ‘Bring in some gold.’

Joseph straightened his back and sat looking across at his opponent. He gagged and felt bile hot against his tongue.

Crowds of men still approached out of the gloom, thickening the wall of bodies that pressed the one-rope ring into odd parallelograms not found on any page.

They shuffled and pushed each other, striking out in the blackness between their coats. Drizzle washed out of the dead sky and hissed against the torches and in the firepits, and lamps hung above their faces.

The ringmaster moved to the centre of the ring, and became immobile save his eyes.

‘Bets off!’ he shrieked. ‘Ladies,’ and here he was swamped in laughter, ‘and gentlemen. Tonight’s bout observes Queensbury rules.’

‘Where are the gloves?’ yelled some caring spectator.

The ringmaster wafted a hand as if dispelling an odour.

‘Three minute rounds, as many as necessary. If the pugilists are in agreement, then I turn your focus to them. I bid ye goodnight.’

He crossed with an odd grace out of the ring and into the darkness beyond their orb. Voices rose in conversation and a few cheers, and men jostled closer to the ring, to witness the age-old struggle of the everyman against his oversized oppressor.

MacMillan sprang bodily from his crate and was midway across the distance before Joseph noticed the charge. He rolled sideways off his seat and scrabbled at the hay and dirt as he stood up. MacMillan turned from the pushing crowd behind Joseph's corner and rushed at him again. Joseph caught him in the chest with a forearm and sent him whirling head down onto the ground, hard enough that he instantly wanted to help the man up. He struggled to remain standing back, his guts worming, and to watch MacMillan get to his feet with his legs bending under him. Joseph threw a punch in the air and forced his mouth into a snarl.

MacMillan lurched forward and stung Joseph by punching him in the neck, catching his ear and making the side of his head burn. The crowd cheered, beginning to settle in to watch the fight.

Rage crashed up through Joseph. He put up a hand to block his opponent's view and swung his torso in a haymaker. He hit MacMillan so hard that the smaller man staggered through the single rope and the first layer of spectators, and came hurtling back into the ring with his skin red mottled and his nose sideways against his face. Blood washed its heat across Joseph as he caught the man under the chin and sent him shuddering into the sawdust.

The crowd started roaring at the scene illuminated in the centre, at Joseph standing with his fists still up as if to defend from the bloody and small MacMillan crawling at the muddy hay and gasping. He dropped his hands and watched his opponent bleeding freely from the face, his legs slowing and stopping. There was nothing more to do. Joseph was sick and he wanted to wring his hands, to apologize. Silence and muttering around Joseph as he tried to leave the ring. The Vittens family lifted his overclothes for him and he shrugged into the coat. Ebenhoch stepped over the rope and took him by the arm to lead him away. Joseph looked back to see MacMillan being dragged to his feet by some corner man, a towel over his face.

Someone tried to strike Joseph and he lashed his arm out, and yelled. Men stood back as he was led through the reeking crowd and he dared anyone else to try and hit him.

They walked directly to the Silver Pick and Joseph leaned against the bar with men around him, congratulating him for what felt like a victory born of nothing but their sheer difference in size. He shook and was exhausted, and he felt sorry, and drank the glass of whisky or whatever it was put in front of him in a gulp. He slammed the glass on the bar and snapped his fingers at the bartender.



Ebenhoch approached his shoulder and pressed cash money into his palm, muttering, 'Here's your percentage. Put it away.'

Joseph stuffed it into his trouser pocket and looked up. The glass was still empty, and he yelled at the bartender, 'Come on man.'

He looked around for the Vittens father and son, who weren't there. He saw in the glances of men a hesitance, and he stood gazing absently down at their faces.

A white morning with cold hands, oversensitive to the bite of stones and the iron handles. A body feels strength drain out of it when it has used up its nourishment. The day sits ahead, and the hands shake. A man grows to hate the deficiency of flour and soda. He loathes salted pigs.

Joseph coughed the dust and stretched his back, sparkling with aches. The clank and scrape of a hundred working bodies in the dust, and the shifting of loose rock sent up a constant din.

Against the empty sky were two riders, one pale and the other black save the skin circling his eyes. They sat their mounts and watched the progress of the clearing and grading crew. A turkey vulture whorled somewhere out above the river, inhaling the vapour of a carcass invisible among the rocks or thin bushes.

Joseph watched the riders, thinking. He looked at the men all around struggling against the earth. The unblasted cliff face just north of the site lay buckled and exposed, and he could see the work there: weeks of shifting by hand thousands of tonnes of ugly and jagged stone and shale. Graders scraped along with a low fog of dust hiding their footwork.

The twenty dollars promised him had been finally thirty-five, and he had rubbed it between his battered fingers in covetous perversion late at night.

He saw the riders facing him. He raised his hand and waved, and began to walk through the horde of dusty labouring men around him as the riders walked their mounts forward across that distance.

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'You fucking quit?' asked the plump man at the desk. He scratched *Joseph Richard* from his ledger. 'Too many goddamn celestials for your liking?'

'Celestials,' Joseph said.

'Chinese!'

‘Yes, I know. I’m going to work for Ebenhoch. The Scandinavians...’

‘Can’t handle watching a waist-high do your job twice as fast? Is that it?’ He scratched and dipped his pen and blacked out where the name had been. Then he took another, smaller book and began writing Joseph’s name on a half-filled page.

‘What’s that?’ asked Joseph.

‘What?’

‘My name? In that book?’ He put his hands in his trouser pockets and took them out, and rubbed his nose.

‘This is called a blacklist,’ the secretary looked past Joseph at the clouded window. ‘It keeps people like you from re-applying for jobs that are no longer available.’

Joseph brought his huge fist down on the desk and yelled, ‘Bastard!’

The secretary leaned back and dropped his pen. His eyes were round and bright, and he pulled a drawer open. The hinges on the office door sang out, and light came up on the grey walls and shelves.

‘Okay?’ someone said behind Joseph.

The secretary pulled a revolver from the drawer and began with shaking fingers to dig around for bullets and push them into the chambers.

Joseph convulsed, trying to hold his bladder. The man behind him cleared his throat and spat outside.

The revolver made satisfying noises as the round chamber slunk back in.

‘Who’s a bastard?’ asked the secretary, panting, whispering. ‘Who’s a bastard?’

Joseph watched the revolver. It was greasy and it shivered. He couldn’t get his jaw open, so he slowly turned and pushed through the two men at the door, they trying for a grapple and unable to hold him as he stepped down off the three steps into the mud.

‘Go to Macdonald and tell *him* you’re a fucking blacklister,’ the secretary wailed inside the office.

Joseph moved on his watery legs and sobbed in a dry way, his mouth open finally, letting in the constant dust.

It was cold and the wind came up the entire length of the valley, long miles of splashing plump water and black pole pines, spears into the clean sky. Somewhere down in that wind was the ocean, and the Strait of Georgia. And Vancouver’s Island. His parents might be sitting at the table in the cow acoustic morning.

He continued along the road, took his glasses off and wiped his eyes, and with some weary resolve he sniffed and spat in the dust.

Joseph opened the door to their shared room, into the white morning dust, and his glasses reflected the windows in luminous double orbs.

George grated his face against the stained pillow and turned a chameleon eye on the sound, murmuring.

‘What,’ asked Joseph.

‘Why ain’t you at work?’

In his bed, Bill Vittens emitted a hissing like steampressure as if sighing at the idea of work. Digested beef stink filled the small warm room.

Joseph said, ‘Oh, I’m going to try my hand at something else.’

‘You are...’ George said.

‘Yes.’

Bill rolled in his sheets and barked a snore.

George said, ‘In a town full of half-pay Chinese you’re turning down work.’

Joseph looked at the cocooned Vittens family, in their beds at ten in the morning, and he thought about work. He thought about his father on the island, probably outside in the drizzle with an armload of grey fir.

‘I’m going to work for the Scandinavians,’ he said.

George’s other eye came out. He looked at Joseph’s streaked face and white eyes.

‘Did you get fired?’

‘No, I quit. Perhaps you and Bill could have my position.’ He felt raw and his voice was shaking.

George turned back into the pillow, and a muffled something came from there.

‘What?’ Joseph said, and there was silence after it.

He turned and left the room, banging too loudly the thin door, and went down the hollow stairs to the front desk.

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Men squelched and clanged along the street, spitting blackly against wooden steps and the boots of others. Joseph moved eyefollowed down the middle of Front Street, dusty and indignant. He thrust his huge chin at two hawkers who spread to allow his passage,

and he brought his fists up. Shacks with false fronts advertised a long wall of women and booze and gambling, closed this time of day and dead in vacancy. Half the town slept until afternoon and half the town worked. At the boat-launch, a sternwheeler was being unloaded and there moved giants among the stevedores. Joseph stood at the top of the wide ramp that led from Front Street down to the shore. One of the giants turned and Joseph recognized his toothy mule face.

The man hailed him and stood back to let a cart past, then made his way up the ramp. He reached to shake hands.

‘You’ve come to work with us?’ He smiled with his lips over his teeth and his hand felt as though it were fleshed in rough bark.

‘Yes, I’ve quit the grading crew. Joseph Richard, officially,’ as they shook.

‘Acke Munter, at your service.’ He studied Joseph quickly. ‘You don’t like grading?’

Joseph moved his glasses. ‘I don’t know.’

‘Well, we do some grading as well, but mostly other things...’ he rolled his hand in translation, ‘alongside? You would say?’

‘Yes, sure,’ Joseph smiled.

Munter nodded at him, and moved his lips, as if checking that his teeth were covered. He looked at the ground, turned to look upriver, and then waved toward the steamer. They walked down to the dock.

The men were unloading eight-foot railway ties from bundles, shouldering one each down the short gangplank to carts pulled by mule teams.

‘These are going upriver, unloaded and stacked along the right of way. We do all aspects of this railway.’

Munter led him to the lead cart and Joseph nodded at the other two men he recognized, from this group that had been a constant since his first day in Yale. Ebenhoch the falcon sat at the reins above them, with his pointed riding boots on the dashboard. The one with his face hidden behind a black wall of beard approached with a rail tie on his shoulder. He shrugged the tie, stained and reeking of creosote, onto the cart and looked at Joseph; he said something alien, turned back to the steamer.

They had a few smaller men with them, each still tall, though not monstrous. They worked silent and fast, avoiding each other and thudding in steady beat the ties against the growing stack, as the carts’ axles groaned.

A reeking stack was completed with a last tie and the men lashed it down with rope, heaving on the rope and throwing half-hitches blindly. The falcon took up the reins.

He turned to Joseph and said, 'Come on then, and see where these end up.'

Joseph glanced at Munter, who nodded. 'Yes, go on. You work for all of us.'

He climbed up onto the hard seat and the metal springs wailed; there was a crack from somewhere in the body of the cart. They shrugged at one another and Joseph scraped the mud off his boots against the dashboard.

He put out his hand. 'Hello, Ebenhoch.'

Ebenhoch gripped Joseph's hand and let go. His eyes were the same as the heavy sky, and his hair and skin as well, so that he seemed almost ethereal.

Young Joseph looked down on the men around the cart, and smiled slowly in the cold midday air. He was among strong men his own size, who seemed to control the stevedores and navvies who swirled around them, quickly as they had been as Joseph approached, to load the carts, or swirling slowly, bringing them cups of beer in taverns or running errands across town or up into the blasting cliffs to retrieve payment off a powdermonkey for some debt owed. Yet always a churn of smaller men while these giants stood solid, like piles driven down below the water's constant surface, holding up the structure of the pier, and disappearing invisible into the earth itself below the waters of shore.

These men were solid in that way, Joseph thought: a pile which supports a pier is not visible in its entirety, yet the pile is buried deep through water and through gravel and clay. Let other men be boats, tied with old rope and confounded knots.

Ebenhoch snapped his reins and knicked at the mules, grinding the cart forward behind the rocking backs of the team. They went up the ramp onto Front Street and Joseph leaned out to spit in front of the same hawkers he'd raised his fists to. They passed creaking under the window of the hotel room he shared with the Vittens family and he wished for a thin face between the curtains. He watched behind them until he wouldn't be able to see it either way and then turned forward.

'So, Joseph, you're ready for some real work?'

'Oh yes, sir,' he said, 'that's what I came to Yale chasing.'

'You didn't come chasing fights.'

Joseph looked across at him. He thanked him for the money, for the bonus fifteen dollars.

Ebenhoch asked, 'You work hard?' looking at the thick leg next to his on the bench. 'You a farm boy?'

'We've a small farm on Vancouver Island. My father was a whaler.' He said this as if to explain why the farm was small.

'A whaler? Yes, I was one as well. But I like this. I like the land. The ocean annoys me. Mountains are not so bad. They don't shake you when you're trying to sleep,' and he laughed but his eyes were not warm.

They rode uphill, upriver, towards the blasting and the eternal clouds of rockdust, and the wet black cliffs and spearing trees. Day after day, dynamite and glycerine destroyed the rock faces, and men moved the rock, and set more dynamite, and the rock exploded throughout the canyon above the muscular Fraser River. Dust coated the trees and the town but the rain was frequent, and it cleaned everything overnight so that in the morning the men could cover the trees and the town again with dust. There were now hundreds of men camped in and around Yale, perhaps thousands. No one knew how many there were. And every few days more came swaggering off the steamer.

The cart splashed through puddles and bumped over rocks hidden in the mud. They came abreast of another team going the opposite direction with an empty cart.

'This is our employer,' said Ebenhoch. 'You say hello to him.'

The man driving the cart was shorter than the other Scandinavians, yet he was so solidly massed on the bench that he looked too substantial to be made up of one human, one skeleton. He wore a wool cap instead of a derby or slouch hat. His moustaches came straight out to the sides, and were twisted tightly in a black line across his face. He looked directly at Joseph so that Joseph's eyes became itchy and started to water.

'Mr. Borg, this is our friend I was telling you about,' said Ebenhoch as they stopped beside his empty cart, black with creosote and grease. 'The fighter.'

Joseph shook his head with an embarrassed and weak smile, reached to shake Borg's hand. 'Joseph Richard,' he said as Borg took the hand in his, applied a ghastly pressure, and let go, and placed his hand back loosely on his own leg with the reins again draped across his palm.

*He broke my finger*, thought Joseph, as he fought the urge to cry out. His face was cold and he had to move his shoulders around to avoid fainting. He breathed deeply through his mouth, then he smiled at Borg.

'Go up to eleven,' Borg said, looking past him. 'This was the last load for ten.'

Then he looked again directly into Joseph's damaged eyes. 'Pleased to have you aboard, son.'

Borg didn't shake the reins, but the muleteam began again pulling the cart, and it creaked away back to town.

Ebenhoch laughed as they rolled along the muddy road. He laughed loud and hilariously in the exploding air, wiggling his hand.

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A group of Chinese was marching to the railway office to demand their wages. Joseph walked among them, his head and shoulders floating blackly above their faces. He was on his nervous way to collect money owed to Ebenhoch.

Men stood spitting on the boardwalk, watching the Chinese workers pass on Front Street, with Joseph above them.

Someone yelled, 'Ban coolie labour,' from inside the nearest tavern.

A stick was hurled and it caught Joseph in the face, knocking his glasses off into the mud. He picked them up and replaced them, smeared brown world coming into focus. He stood with a warm red line running down his jaw and neck, as the Chinese men around him watched.

The man next to Joseph handed him the stick. He was like a statue placed irresponsibly in the middle of the street with the sun waving down on him. An actor who'd forgotten his lines, he looked back into the expectant faces. And he thought of the children of Chemainus, with their rocks.

He tried to smile and felt the flies lift off the blood on his face.

'Who the fuck threw that?' roared someone from the crowd.

Joseph, unsure and shaky, climbed the muddy steps to the boardwalk in front of the tavern, and stood in the shade among the whites there.

'Who threw this?' he said, and a small fellow with rivet eyes scoffed. Joseph caught him by the collar and a handful of neckmeat, and shook him a few times, staring into his face. He let go of the man, who backed away cussing quietly and rubbing his neck.

Joseph threw the stick clattering into the tavern and turned to leave.

'Hey,' someone yelled from inside, and wooden footfalls came louder as the yellor rushed. Joseph swung his arm to protect his glasses, and caught the running man across the nose. The man's face fell inward wetly and he slid to the boardwalk.

Joseph trotted down the stairs, expecting a bottle or a rock across the back of his head in the silence. He stepped into the muddy street with his shoulders hunched high in anticipation, and walked on, a bundle of ill nerves. No harm befell him. He walked, he looked back, thinking: *I do not want this role. But it finds me.*

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Light emerged white over the howling valley, and it had no warmth. Joseph was on his way to the docks to meet the steamer. He wore a good wool work coat and wool hat. His boots were new, made especially for him by the cobbler, who had clambered like a gnome around his tiny shop, revelling at the size of his customer. Clothed and shod, Joseph was now saving his money for a new pair of eyeglasses. A group of Chinese workers filed past him on their way up to the cliffs. They were dusty and their clothes looked poor for the heavy weather. They stared at Joseph as they passed. He was so large in his black clothing that he could go nowhere unnoticed; he loomed even among the giants from northern Europe.

Because of his thick lenses and his size, he was easily recognized and well known on the river, and he had a few organized fights that brought men from all the stations along the Fraser. Indians, Chinese, whites, the blacks who worked with draft horses, all knew the giant with his magnified eyes. Joseph had learned to counter-fight: defensive and decisive with his strikes, by the sheer panic of not wanting his glasses broken; he doled a parsimonious rage on any man who tried to attack his face.

His last fight had been an even match. The ringmaster was almost silent, sober in his role. The sound of bone being struck, of flesh clapping and even their exerted grunts could be heard deep in the crowd, and men watched with reverence as Joseph and his opponent battered each others' faces and ribs in the palpitation of torchlight. Joseph fought with his head back, waving it away from the rapid fists, and he landed counterpunches with a deft timing, sending his enemy back against the rope and the cheap blows from the crowd.

Joseph still squirmed with the feel of striking another man, but he convinced himself of a necessity in it, in the money shoved into his bruised hand. Money has a heavy argument, and a moral rigidity does not clothe or shelter one.

In the fourteenth round, with both men gasping and loathe to move their burning shoulders, Joseph cast out with an accuracy that surprised all, especially him. He



punched his opponent just above the ear and the man dropped to his knees sighing with his eyes hollow and almost asleep.

Joseph raised his mashed fists and was surrounded by roaring and cheers of an ancient appreciation. He looked at their grinning faces, and he felt such a power that it made him desperate, volatile.

The Scandinavians had taken him for a feast at one of the better hotels; they put arms around his neck and slurred promises at him. He stuffed money in his pockets with knuckle skinflaps catching on the wool, and nodded down into the faces of his chroniclers.

Joseph climbed onto the old horse his father had given him and rode slowly to the dock. The ancient Clydesdale refused to eat when Joseph shoved hay under his mouth. He would turn his wooden head and scratch it against a post. The stableboy laughed and reiterated that the horse wouldn't eat. And when Joseph saddled him, the horse would sigh and cough in the dripping air outside, and try to scratch his face against anything. 'That horse wants to die,' the boy always said from the warm stables behind the hotel; the boy spent his days eating biscuits and looking at the rain in the mountains.

Joseph's hands were scabbed at the knuckles. Borg would soak his hands personally in ice water and rub mentholated grease on them. If he were busy, Ebenhoch would usually do it; someone would. Joseph walked the muddy street and others nodded up at him, and he would flex his arm or lift up the back of a cart so the wheels came out of the mud, and the harnessed horses would shuffle for balance under the weight. He tried out these confident acts, yet always felt his shoulders wanting to hunch up, as if a boy from Chemainus were going to come along any minute and say, 'Shut up, ogre,' and hit him with a rock.

The stableboy had told Joseph that the Indians called him 'Sasquatch' and some avoided him for fear of his appetite.

'That's not true,' he offered.

'Oh you bet it is! They say you got so big by eatin' your family,' the boy laughed and threw an armload of hay into a stable. 'Not only that, your victims' souls look out through your eyes, and that's why they so huge.'

Joseph looked out at the cold morning. The boy squinted up at him.

'Old demon. Windigo.'

'You finished?' He was nervous and the boy somehow knew it.

'Hey, I'm just having fun,' said the boy, watching him shy in the lamplight.

Joseph turned up his collar with his back to the lad, walking away, breathing clouds in the wet air. He climbed up into the creaking saddle.

The boy shook the biscuit box and Joseph shook his head.

Down at the dock, the river curled past and bubbled in the rocks. The steamer was chugging upriver with a crowd at the bow. George Vittens, his spindly beard like solid vapour, strode down the ramp to the dock. He smiled and tilted his chin at men who didn't know him, and he adjusted his top hat as he came around the old Clydesdale.

Joseph looked down at him. Though he lived with the Vittens family, he hardly saw either George or Bill. Joseph left the hotel before daylight, and he drank with the Scandinavians. If he was in bed of an evening, the Vittens duo would be out somewhere, and he would feign sleep when they came in, thumping and arguing in harsh whispers. He had begun avoiding them.

George looked up into his face, squinting and shadowless under a diffused sun.

'I see you're doing pretty good for yourself. Old horse there still alive,' George said, and he touched the flank with one finger. 'My goddamn father is coughing a lot these days.'

George doubled over with a barking phlegm and spat into the mud. His cheeks were red when he straightened. 'Say, you have any work?'

'There's work for the taking around here.' Joseph waved a cracked hand over his shoulder. 'You could jump on any crew.'

'Well, therein lies the problem,' and he shrugged out a small laugh, 'as I'm known to a few track bosses.' He bit his lips and smirked up at Joseph.

'For not showing up?'

'That, sure. Well, I was accused of stealing. It sure wasn't me,' he said.

Joseph's hair tonic and one of his small knives had vanished from their hotel room. George had lasted all of one week in the hotel kitchen before being fired, and he'd been working a few days here and there since.

Joseph was supposed to be meeting some new employees coming up from New Westminster, near the mouth of the Fraser, as well as taking men who looked strong away from other companies. It was like an auction, with men yelling and pointing at the tallest heads coming off the steamers, offering the best pay and accommodation, or the only company that cooks all meals for you, or the only employer to pay in gold.

He looked down at little George, and adjusted his collar high against his face. This made him look taller, armoured.

Joseph said, 'You know what the Indians call me?' then he shrugged and looked blindly across the river, tried a small laugh that died in the white air.

George pressed a finger into the horse's stomach. 'What?'

'Windigo. It's an Indian word.'

'I know what a damn Indian word is when I hear one.'

Joseph looked down again at the top of George's hat. 'A windigo eats other men and gains their power, and the years they have left.' He looked off like a cat trying to gain attention, eyes half closed.

'Big fucking deal. You think you're one of them now, one of them windy whatnots?' George jabbed his finger twice into the flank, hard, and then turned to walk back to town. 'After all my poor sick father and I done for you.'

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Joseph sat in the saddle and moved his feet, as they'd just begun tingling. He watched men unload a cart of rail ties.

'Hi, Joseph,' he heard behind him.

Sam Feather stood in the mud next to the Clydesdale, pudgy and widefaced, smiling with his eyes closed. He had a wicker creel strapped to his back, and reeked of bad salmon.

'Sam, hello!' Joseph swung down on the opposite side, came around the horse to shake hands.

'Haven't talked to you since we were kids. Seen you in Chemainus a few times.'

'Oh?'

'Hard not to see you,' Sam laughed and then stopped. He looked up at Joseph with a flicker of something, maybe fear, in his face.

Joseph remembered Sam when they were children, telling stories about Kuper Island and scaring him; the stories were strange and confused. Sam's uncle had been taken to the big house for biting a woman's breast, and kept there for a long time in sweat ceremonies. Sam and his cousin were stuck in a tree during a full moon because a pack of dogs ran below them, in and out of the black bushes, and the dogs were supposedly rabid or affected in some other way.

Joseph had grown up terrified of Kuper Island, and he would watch the Indians rowing from there in canoes, to see if any had wild dogs with them. Or if the people looked like they would bite anyone.

‘Look at you, mister foreman. Don’t need to get dirty or nothing like that.’ Sam stood in his shadow and grinned up at him.

‘Ha. No, no, I still work of course,’ Joseph said. He strode through the men and gripped one of the lumber ties, and heaved it onto his shoulder. Each tie was unloaded and carried by two men, one at each end, yet Joseph swung his above their heads as he turned to throw it from his shoulder onto the stack by the muddy rail bed.

‘Come on, work,’ he shouted to the navvies around him, and walked back to where Sam stood.

‘Big Joseph,’ Sam said. ‘You been in Yale for long?’

‘About half a year now. Just a bit less.’ He looked up. He *had* been here less than half a year, and he was going to be a track boss when the Scandinavians finished building camps along their contract section. He was known on the river. None called him a freak in derision, and if he was called a freak, it was in compliment. The black mountains veined with snow, and the dripping forest filled with tents and shacks. The town of Yale, below on the bank of the mighty Fraser River, sat under a hood of smoke. He could walk the streets there and hear men call out to him, or cheer.

‘You’re looking good, there, Joseph,’ Sam said.

‘Ha. Yes. I am.’ He grinned like a child.

Sam beat his hat against his grimy pants and watched the men work.

‘Where are you working?’ Joseph asked. ‘I could maybe get you a job.’

‘Hey, I fish.’ Sam turned to show his creel, and the stench bloomed forth.

‘Aren’t they spawning?’ Joseph turned his face away. ‘Fucking rotten fish, Sam.’

‘Hey, I fish and sell salmon to all them Chinese fellows. They love that salmon.’ He laughed, and looked around, and his face sobered.

‘What, like that?’ Joseph said.

‘Sure, I teach them how to dry and smoke it. Hell, they grind up that rotten salmon and eat it with rice.’

Sam beat his hat steady on his leg. ‘I thought I’d come make my fortune,’ he said, and laughed.

The empty carts creaked by, pulled by filthy and tired mules and horses.

‘I’ve got to get these loaded down at the yards,’ Joseph said, nodding at the carts. ‘Well, Sam Feather, it’s been nice seeing you.’

Joseph climbed back into the saddle.

Sam held the stirrup. ‘You ever in town drinking? Buy you a whisky.’

‘Sure, that would be fine. I’m usually at the Dead Branch, he lied.’

‘Oh, that’s a rough one.’ Sam squinted up at him and pulled his hat on. ‘Big fellow like you, no problems at the Dead Branch.’

Joseph nodded down at him, and though he didn’t mean a word of it, said, ‘You let me know if anyone gives you a hard time. I’m not afraid.’

Sam smiled, gesticulated with his hands at a few of the Chinese workers. He turned back to Joseph.

‘Hey, Joseph. I was never one of those kids.’

‘Oh, I know,’ Joseph said too quickly.

‘No, I mean it. I never threw any rocks or chased you. Any of those things they used to do.’

Joseph tried to smile. ‘I’d like to see anyone try that now.’

‘Right. They would get a surprise.’

‘Hell. I’d kill them.’ He nodded again.

‘I’m sure you would. Big Joseph there, foreman and everything.’ Sam stood back so Joseph could turn the horse.

‘See you.’

‘Hopefully.’

Sam waved at his back and watched Joseph ride away behind the squealing carts, a black mass on a workhorse, high above the muddy and crooked road.

\*\*\*

The grading crews and tracklayers moved into bunkhouses hastily built. Tarpaper dripped above the men and gaps in the logs became vermin nests and caches for letters and money. The hoteliers were putting prices up with every steamship of new flesh, and the *Inland Sentinel* newspaper rode on a speculator’s vision of glory, calling Yale ‘the liveliest place on the Pacific’ with ‘more saloons to the acre than any place in the world.’

Joseph collected his meager possessions while Bill Vittens snored. Young George hunkered on his bunk wringing his hands as he watched their meal ticket packing up. Joseph knew this, and he thought: *It’s not my damned fault they came here with no money. I hardly had any myself, but I’ve been working since I got off the boat. They can beg in the street for all I care.* Yet he felt terrible leaving them.

Joseph hung his head and touched the two photographs of himself that sat atop the dresser. He picked up one, and looked at the tumid eyes in the portrait. He'd sat embarrassed while the photographer's assistant tried to paint smaller eyes onto the finished picture, before insisting that another photograph be taken without the eyeglasses. In the second photograph, Joseph saw himself as he could look: a defiant mammoth staring into the lens without the magnified visage of his handicap.

He was packing up because he'd been told that he was moving to the bunkhouse. He was relieved, as it was much cheaper to bunk, and had been a struggle to pay the hotel rent. He was always careful to show he hadn't noticed that the Vittens senior and junior were his dependents. Being instructed to move to the bunkhouse meant leaving the hotel wasn't his fault, his decision.

'Where's your bunkhouse?'

Joseph lifted his glasses to relieve his nose. 'Not sure yet. I need to check with Ebenhoch, or Mr. Borg.'

'Mr. Borg. Ebenhoch.' George's hair sat greasy against his white forehead. He turned to the window and sniffed. 'All we ever hear is Mr. Borg. Ebenhoch.'

Joseph sighed and shook out his Sunday shirt, looked it over.

'When's your next big fight?' George muttered into his arm.

'Ah, soon. I don't know. Apparently he's a Russian.' Joseph bent his huge fingers into a fist, and held the fist up in the middle of the room. He turned it over and bent his head, considering the hand like a jeweller.

'Oh, for Christ's sake. You're making me sick.' George spat on the floor and hugged his knees.

Joseph dropped his hand and they looked at each other.

George said, 'What? This is what you look like.' He lifted his thin fist and pursed his lips, turning the hand over in the light and admiring it. 'Fucking stupid.'

'Well, I'm sorry that I'm proud of myself for the first time.' Joseph opened a dresser drawer.

George scoffed. He looked at the wide back and splayed legs of the largest man he'd ever seen, a human eclipse in the room. 'Make sure your glasses don't fall off. You wouldn't want Mr. Borg to see you crying again.'

'Why would you say that?'

'Perhaps my father and I will be too busy to corner for you.'

'Mr. Borg—' Joseph stopped and his nostrils flared, and he turned.

'Him again.'

‘He has been cornering for me, or the others have. You know that.’

‘Well, once you start blubbering they might retire you.’ George picked at his arm hairs and lifted an eyebrow at Joseph. ‘Just letting you know the Vittens family may not be available.’

‘I haven’t asked you or your father for anything.’

‘Oh, well that’s a sudden convenience.’

Joseph turned back to the dresser. George was muttering behind him in the close air of the little room, revelations of Joseph the cash cow, the easy mark. Joseph picked up the two photographs, held them next to each other. In one, he looked bizarre. In the other, he looked iconic, proud.

And he was angry. He put the photographs carefully into his suitcase, glanced around the room again to be certain he hadn’t forgotten anything. He knew that even if he realized later he had left something behind, he wouldn’t dare come back into this room.

He lifted his hat off the crooked coat-rack, placed it on his head, turned to scan the room again. George had increased in volume as he watched Joseph move around, and he sat pouring a croaking drone of invective.

Joseph picked up his suitcase and leaned over little George so that he sat in darkness.

‘Shut your God damned fucking mouth,’ Joseph roared in his face, and Bill snorted twice and kicked around on his bed, sitting up with his eyes open. George was curled facing the wall. The door was thrown wide, and Joseph had left.

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Munter fetched him from the hotel. They rode in a cart behind the muddy sweating rumps of mules, rhythmic approach to the bunkhouses in the chill afternoon. Each bunkhouse camp sat along the grade of the railbed, roughly one camp per kilometre. Four or five houses to a camp, each sleeping between twenty and thirty men, with a manager’s house, mess hall with cookhouse, and a tool shed. *My own camp*, Joseph thought. *I’m a foreman*.

Acke Munter swayed the wheels deep in mud as he pulled into the camp. The yellow peeled logs of the houses were still slimy, mourning their corticate safety.

Men stood around outside, having disposed of their gear, and unsure of whether to sit inside in the gloom, or stand out in the light drizzle. Joseph was hailed by a few, and he jumped down from the cart with his suitcase.

‘This one, the large one, is your bunkhouse. Find yourself a bed you like. If a man is there, you move him.’ And Munter laughed as he shook the reins. ‘See you tonight,’ he called as he drove away in the grooved road.

Joseph hunched through the door, and nodded around him at the few staring workers reclining inside. The bunkhouse bloomed with sap and acrid tarpaper. Cigar, pipe and wood smoke gripped the wet clothes hanging on strings throughout, and cast a musk that hung thick around the men.

Joseph walked bent in half to avoid the woollen shirts and coats and the myriad protuberances. He peered into the dark recesses of bunks to find one available. The men’s eyes followed and studied him from head to toe in the clomping silence as he shopped. There was a long table with benches either side of it, and a potbellied stove in the middle of the room cast a dry heat. He couldn’t find an empty bed; each had clothes or luggage, or some books or small knickknacks, so he sat at the table close to the stove, and took his bible from his suitcase and yawned in the close warmth.

Later, voices outside rose in conversation, and Joseph heard his name. He stuffed the book into his suitcase and got up from the bench as the door swung daylight into the bunkhouse.

‘Richard,’ said Ebenhoch from the doorway. It was so dark inside that when Joseph turned, Ebenhoch’s white face and hair glowed with the mist around him.

‘Ha, look at you. Like a cave bear. Ha,’ Ebenhoch said.

‘Hello there,’ Joseph said, and came to the door. He stepped out into the air and straightened his back with loud pops as they shook hands. Ebenhoch had his horse and Joseph’s horse with him. The men were getting a fire lit outside; they sat or stood around the wet smoldering branches, smoked and spat.

Ebenhoch said, ‘Okay, so you have a bunk?’

‘I haven’t found one yet.’

Ebenhoch stared at Joseph, and pushed past him into the gloom. He flung his arms and pulled the clothes down as he looked for an empty bunk, stomping mud across the floor. The men on their beds watched.

‘Well, here is one right here. Close to the stove. Very good,’ Ebenhoch said as he pulled the blanket off a lower bunk, and scattered the trinkets and a couple of books that had been on the bed.



Joseph, already bent, picked up the possessions and held them as he watched Ebenhoch shake out the blanket.

‘What about these?’ he said. ‘It must be someone’s bed.’

Ebenhoch looked at him like a weary mother. ‘Did Munter not tell you to find a bunk?’

‘Yes, but I can’t—’

The other waved his hands. ‘We’re wanted at the saloon anyway. Put those things on the floor. Put your suitcase on the bed.’

Again Ebenhoch considered him, as one would an expensive and faulty piece of equipment.

Joseph looked around at the witnesses but none seemed interested in his violation, so he dropped the man’s things onto a chair and placed his suitcase on the brown pillow, before following Ebenhoch back out into the drizzle. The men standing outside nodded up at him, and a few said ‘Mr. Richard.’

The rain hissed about them, and sat heavy against the black mountains and forests. Tan rivulets of water wormed through the fresh mud, and the horses’ hooves were clayed with it. Joseph and Ebenhoch put their hats on and climbed into the saddles.

At the saloon, Mr. Borg and Munter sat at a corner table with a behemoth. The man’s sleeves were rolled to the elbows. He had his head shaved, and he wore a thick black moustache.

Ebenhoch and Joseph crossed the floor and stood next to the table. Borg nodded to them and opened his hand at the new man.

‘This is the Russian. Kibirov. I can’t pronounce his first name.’

Kibirov stood to shake hands, and he came up to Joseph’s nose. Joseph grinned at him with his bulging eyes. Yet he could see the blank destructiveness in the other man, and his hand was a vice.

Each trying to crush the other’s knuckles, twisting almost imperceptibly to find a sweet spot of pain in his opponent’s hand. The Russian was smiling up into his face.

‘I heard about your fight with MacMillan,’ Kibirov said, ‘He’d be about half your weight.’

‘Oh, yes, well he’s definitely fierce. He’s really a strong man for his size,’ said Joseph.

‘Ha. Well perhaps not anymore. Not so fierce.’

Joseph remembered MacMillan's crushed nose and his face with blood pouring from it.

The Russian still grinned up at him and Joseph let go of his hand. Borg and his men muttered among themselves in Nordic tongue, hunched in their pungent wool and oilcloth. Joseph had never seen one of them without his overcoat, and they seldom removed their hats except in church. *Probably bristling with pistols and daggers*, George Vittens had said.

Joseph looked to Borg for guidance and, ignored, said to the Russian, 'You working for the railway?'

'Me? I don't work.'

'Oh.'

'I make my money fighting.'

'Ah, well it's not much to get by on.'

'Ha. You know who's getting by on your money.' Kibirov spoke low and darted his eyes at the Scandinavians.

He was solid, with a neck that started behind the ears and spread to his round shoulders. Although Joseph still loomed over the man in height and width, he felt smaller than him, as if through the sheer pressure of the body, this Russian had compressed his true form into a deceptive vessel.

Joseph looked at the jaw and couldn't foresee being able to knock him unconscious by striking there. His jaw muscles actually protruded and the presence of bone was impossible to mark. The neck came almost straight down into his immense chest. He had the heavy moustache of a labourer and the shaved head of a prisoner.

Joseph had no desire to fight this man. If anything, he wanted to learn from him. He trusted something in the unapologetic brutality of the Russian's presence, as though he, like a bull or sire lion, had nothing to prove his worth outside of the natural act of his duties. He looked literally born to fight.

Each fight for Joseph was a struggle upward against the very granite of his being, his desire to help and take hardship away from those around him. He still had to force himself to want to damage each opponent, and the nausea of striking a man never diminished. Yet he felt elated each time he won and was cheered. Power, no matter its form or cause, is difficult to turn away from. Once Joseph felt it, and realized he could grasp it as quickly as it took him to heave a rail tie over his head, or punch a man unconscious, he experienced his need to self-efface less and less.

Seeing Sam Feather with his creel of rotting salmon brought flooding that embarrassment of running from tormentors, of hating his own face and watery magnified eyes in the hand-mirror on his mother's dresser. Sam Feather and the other Indian children staring through the windows at him in his men's clothing, lumped at his desk in the schoolroom like a mentally retarded adult.

And still he knew he would strip to the waist one night soon and fight this Russian who grinned behind a black moustache.

Borg looked up at them and said, 'Sit, sit.'

They sat at the table across from each other and turned to Borg.

'You make us nervous,' said Ebenhoch, 'standing there like fucking ogres.'

He laughed and struck the table, and his teeth were wet in the lamplight.

'Look, Richard,' Borg said to Joseph. 'I want to hear that when someone tells you to find a bed, you find a bed. I need foremen who have will. That's why I thought I hired you.'

'Yes, I just didn't want—'

'No. You be quiet.' Borg pointed a stub finger at him. 'You are in charge of those men, idiot. They see you wringing your hands because you can't find something, they get ideas.'

Joseph lowered his head and looked at the glass of dark whisky in front of him. He was ashamed that Kibirov was hearing this.

Borg sipped, and clunked his glass on the table. 'Stop sulking. Just be a man.'

Joseph raised his head and faced Borg. 'I am a man.'

Joseph in the bunkhouse, sitting drunk on his bed. The warm smells of sweat, gas and the woodstove kept the air closed around him. Men snored, coughed and thumped against the walls. There was a small pile of clothes and a few books on the table, and the boy whose bunk Joseph had taken lay on one of the benches. He lay on his stomach with his arms folded under his head. He watched Joseph even at this hour and made mucousy noises in his throat. He had a small face in the centre of a head gourd-swollen and pasty.

'Stop it,' Joseph muttered.

The boy said something in a foreign tongue, and closed his eyes.

In the early morning, they awoke and rolled out of bed, shaking out stiff pants and work shirts, a dusty rattle of dirt and dried mud onto the floor. Joseph wasn't sure if he'd

slept, curled into the small bunk's recess with his head pulsing and enraged by the sounds around him. The grey daylight washed in as the men stumbled outside to piss and gag phlegm into the mud, laughing and complaining in all languages of the old world.

Joseph sat up and struggled into his woollen workshirt. The boy was gone, and his possessions had been cast to the floor by men sitting down to eat breakfast at the table. Beans, bread and coffee. Joseph went outside to line up wherever his stomach would guide him, to the outhouse or the mess hall. He was clammy with sleeplessness; he felt shaky and sour. Across the rough grade of the roadbed, thirty feet away, there was a small row of tents with Chinese workers squatted around two cooking fires. The tents were set up in the muddy debris between the cliff base and the roadbed. Snow fingered down from the mountains, trickling water constantly to the river, and here were men sleeping one or two canvas layers from the muck.

Some whites near Joseph were laughing in a group, while one bent to pick up rocks. He lobbed one across the grade to the tent camp, bouncing it past one of the cookfires. The Chinese men didn't look up. The next rock hit one of them in the hip, and the group of whites cheered. The man who'd been hit looked over at them, and then back to the fire.

'What are you doing?' Joseph walked over to the whites with his head pulsing behind his eyes and his guts sliding.

'Trying to hit the damned ricepot.'

They watched as the athlete dug another few rocks and flung one skipping across the road. It went wide and his audience moaned.

'How about getting some grub so we can start work on time?' Joseph said.

The men turned to him, and the rock thrower shrugged.

*They're watching me*, Joseph thought. He said, 'Come on, let's go.'

'Who in the fuck are you?' the man asked, tossing his handful of rocks into the bush.

'I'm your foreman,' Joseph said, and drove his fist into the man's side. He collapsed to the mud, writhing with his face bunched.

Joseph looked around him at the others, thrust his chin forward, and when no one moved, he turned to walk away.

'I can't breathe,' the man whispered. He kicked at the legs around him and wheezed.

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The heartbeat of explosions brought the roadbed and tunnels to life from first light to dusk. There was a constant pulsating fog of rockdust and dirt throughout the valley. When the sun dropped between the mountains for that half hour daily, the valley was a red murk, hellish end to every workday.

Joseph perched on the dray in that sanguine glow, wiping grime from his neck and cleaning his glasses with a kerchief. Men filed past the cart, workworn and dusty, a sepia procession. They nodded or lifted their hats to him. He took it for respect, and it was this, but also fear and wariness that kept their attention when he spoke or worked among them. His disarming gaze and thick forearms befit a leader, as he heaved the rail ties onto his shoulder or hollered at the men to keep their hands off the theodolite. He worked twice the speed of his crew, terrified of making mistakes and tireless with nervous energy.

Ebenhoch rode up, white wraith on his lank horse. Joseph raised his hand as one last explosion bloomed in a tunnel ahead. The tiny dribbling of dirt and rock against the dray.

‘They found a contractor to take over the Fraser jobs,’ Ebenhoch said.

‘How many sections?’

‘All of them.’ He swept his hand up and down the river canyon.

‘Yale? Hell’s Gate?’

Ebenhoch watched a group of chattering Englishmen as they passed. He spat in the dirt dramatically in front of them, and raised his pale eyebrows at the only one who looked up.

‘They’re good men,’ Joseph muttered after they were out of earshot.

Ebenhoch shrugged and continued, ‘He’s taking on the whole river, all or nothing was his offer. Some American.’

‘Phew, the whole river.’

‘Contracts sixty to sixty-three, and ninety-two or one of them. He’s a bigshot with American backing.’

‘Huh.’ Joseph looked around at the day’s work and smiled, patted the planks of the cart.

‘Guess where he’s going to be stationed?’

‘New Westminster? Close to the delta somewhere?’

Ebenhoch took his hat off and put it on the saddle's horn. 'No sir. He's coming right to Yale. Himself, family, whole operations setting up in Yale.'

'What?'

'Things are going to change around here.'

Joseph wasn't sure how things were going to change, so he nodded, squinting.

Ebenhoch shook his head, looking off toward town. 'Police. Maybe a God damned school. Thousands of men coming, Borg says.'

'Shit.'

'Say goodbye to fun.' He turned his hoarfrost visage on Joseph and laughed.

Joseph Richard had only seen Kibirov once since being introduced that night in the tavern. He rode past the hotel the Russian was staying at, and wanted to go see him on some pretence, but he sat his horse in the middle of the street and watched the building like a dullard instead, with explosions pluming in the hills. When rain tapped his shoulders and hat, he rode on through the jostling filthy town.

On Sunday morning Joseph entered the clean little church and found a pew. Several rows ahead, Borg and his men sat with raw-scalped and solid Kibirov among them. Kibirov's neck was wider than Borg's, and when he turned his head, his shoulders turned with it.

The only quiet place in town was the church. Every Sunday during prayer the building was stuffed with hatless and scrubbed men, half of whom understood nothing of the priest's oration. Men stood in the small churchyard, holding their hats and pressing to see in, to hear the sermon. By the time church was let out, there would be a wall of bodies blocking the doorway and the few steps. The restorative nature of tradition gave them something to hold through the pounding week.

Inside, the windows were brilliant with colour. Joseph breathed slow in the orange light and tried to follow the sermon, but the brutal presence of the Russian pulled at him. He focused on the wooden painted feet of Jesus up there on the wall, blurry at the brink of his sight, as the priest droned in the dusty warmth. The soft creaking benches with knee-rests flipped up, and grungy boots rubbing against them. *Give me strength*, Joseph thought as he took off his glasses and tried not to drowse.

He left immediately after the hymns; he didn't want to be seen by the Scandinavians. He walked back to the camp in the frigid morning, with birds whirling silent and rain fogging the mountains.

Joseph spent the last Sunday before the fight on his bunk, reading his little bible distractedly and eating extra bread confiscated from the cookhouse.

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In one of the railway's yet-to-be warehouses, they gathered out of the reddish fog to mark out a ring. Men sat drunk already against the walls.

Joseph arrived with Acke Munter and almost the entire crew from his camp. The Chinese were not allowed to attend. The fight had been titled 'The Foreman versus the Russian' on posters and a banner across Front St, hung between the Old Yale tavern and a new telegraph pole.

Joseph was nervous enough that he had drooled bile into the bushes behind the outhouse before leaving camp. By the time the fighters showed up, the warehouse was filled with men reeking of sweat and tobacco juice and sour whisky. He was shaking as Munter wrapped his hands in one of the rooms meant for an office. Munter grinned, toothy and negligent.

Kibirov cleared the ropes to a roar from the slathering crowd, chanting 'Russian, Russian, Russian.'

Munter said, 'You wait till you walk out. They'll make a damned racket.'

Joseph nodded and watched the floorboards between his knees.

'Lucky for you, Kibirov insisted on gloves for the fight.'

'I've never fought with gloves,' Joseph muttered, trying to open and close his hand inside the padding.

'You'll see, they're not so bad.'

'I'm worried about my eyeglasses. These,' he held up the enormous gloves, 'take up a lot more room than bare fists.'

'Ah,' Munter waved his hand, 'don't bother. Just crush him before he hits your face.' He laughed, then stopped when he saw the fighter retching.

'His God damned neck—' Joseph whined.

When the gloves were on, Munter opened the office door and led him out. Joseph kept his face low so he couldn't see the crowd. They turned the corner into the cavernous sour heat where men howled and stomped a lifting thunder around him, beasts venerating the ogre-god.

Not only his camp crew, nor the Scandinavians, but a swarm of faces wild and homogeneous. He realized the hundreds were cheering for him, screaming 'foreman,

foreman.’ Joseph pounded the huge gloves together and raised them above his head, grinning, leering in stupor.

Sweat ran freely on his white flesh as he stepped over the rope. Kibirov circled, unreadable dead eyes on his opponent. Borg and Ebenhoch stood along the rope and Joseph lifted the gloves and shrugged. Borg waved him over. Ebenhoch grabbed the gloves, looked them over, testing the laces.

‘Tight enough?’ he asked.

‘What?’

‘Are these tight enough?’

‘I think so. I’ve never worn them,’ Joseph yelled.

Borg squinted up at him. ‘You want to keep these glasses on?’

‘What?’

‘You keep the glasses?’ Borg pointed to his eyes and mimed taking glasses off.

‘Oh, yes.’

‘Don’t let them distract you,’ Borg hollered, holding his throat. ‘Seriously. Kibirov is good. You need to fight—’ he turned away and coughed, ‘don’t just wait for him to make mistakes.’

‘What?’ Joseph yelled.

Borg closed his eyes and nudged Ebenhoch.

‘Don’t think about your glasses. Kibirov is good; you need to bring the fight to him.’

‘Right.’ Joseph yelled.

Joseph went to his corner and Munter put grease on his cheeks and forehead, speaking words that Joseph couldn’t hear.

Kibirov still paced, mashing his gloves and watching Joseph with empty gaze. The announcer stepped under the rope in waistcoat and rolled shirtsleeves, bowler on his head.

Joseph recognized him as the man in the railway office who had given him a job, and then pointed a revolver at his face.

‘Gentlemen,’ he wailed into a speaking-trumpet, ‘this historical bout is provided for your entertainment in the facilities of the world’s largest construction project, the future of our young nation, your employer, unless you’re a layabout, a prostitute, or a drunk... and Britain’s latest in a long list of legacies, the Canadian Pacific Railway!’



His voice rasped the last words and was drowned in a cacophony that brought Joseph's gloves to his ears and carried on a full minute, heat pouring down on the ring from hundreds of open mouths.

'Straight from the frozen wastes of Russia, the destroyer Kibirov,' the man bellowed with the insane crowd.

'And Canada's own, Yale's own, and a foreman of the Canadian Pacific, Joseph Richard!'

The men around him howled such that Joseph's skin crawled. He raised his arms and yelled indecipherables with his heart blasting inside him. The announcer looked at him and nodded, and stepped into the crowd.

The referee stood between the huge fighters and spoke rules that neither could hear, and Kibirov still had that blank observance of the shark. Joseph nodded down at him, knowing his own eyes showed panic and strain magnified for the Russian to read.

Someone clanged a bell and Kibirov moved sidelong toward him, jabbing the leather bulb to further obstruct his vision. Joseph pawed at the hand, and found his back already against the rope and the shoving crowd. He swung, and watched in horror as the huge glove drifted. Kibirov stood well back with disdain.

Joseph could no longer hear or see features of the crowd, but was paired in a vacuum with the Russian, watching fearfully as the man moved in and out of his range, jabbing, jabbing and staring blackness. His guts went cold when Kibirov landed a kidney shot, and he curled away from it with teeth bared. A glove came for his face and he struck it down in reflex, now remembering his glasses. He straightened to full height and fought leaned back to keep his head away. They circumnavigated the ring in this manner, one jabbing and the other arched and staggering as if in comic surprise.

Munter brayed instruction but was muted in the chorus, and Joseph went past him staring at the moving mouth. His back hurt with the strain of keeping his spectacles out of reach. The Russian pressed like a mechanized golem. His one arm ratcheted in the air.

'Kill him,' someone shrieked right behind Joseph, who was now almost completely panicking.

He drove both hands into Kibirov's face to shake him off. The crowd boomed but Joseph kept walking while the Russian back-stepped across the ring, and then Joseph pulled one arm back and hooked under Kibirov's arms into his stomach. The gloves felt like he was fighting in a dream, rabid with anger and hitting nothing, but Kibirov hunched after the blow.

They stepped apart and again the pistoned jab sent him cornered against the rope and the pushing hands.

‘God damn you!’ Joseph yelled as he flailed arms over his face.

The bell clanged and he felt hands on his shoulders pulling him back to a stool. The crowd screeched and then fell to chatter.

‘Calm down, keep those hooks coming,’ said Munter.

Borg was standing in the neutral corner. He nodded at Joseph, and then looked across the ring at the Russian who sat on his stool looking as though he’d written their act.

Joseph said, ‘Take my glasses off.’

Munter knelt in front of him and pulled his glasses off, and Joseph looked around the ring.

‘Put them back on,’ Joseph said.

The bell clanged and the hundreds of men roared again. He stood up and Munter slapped his back, took the stool away. The referee stepped along the rope eyeing the fighters.

Kibirov marched across the ring, arms bent. He jabbed once, twice, and then sent an uppercut between Joseph’s forearms. The ring went white and silent, and Joseph grabbed at the legs in front of him.

The referee yelled, ‘Let go. Fucking get up.’

His head was full of a dense metallic liquid and he studied his bent legs in frustration. Silent roaring mouths around him, and the Russian stalking the far corner of the ring. The referee was counting with thrown finger at Joseph, and he rolled to his hands and knees on the plank floor and pushed himself up. He shoved his glasses tight against his face with the gloves and took snorting breaths while sparkles danced away from the corners of his vision, and he shook his head and advanced. The din of the crowd poured back in around them to an insane bellowing.

Kibirov nodded at him and came again straight forward. Joseph struck the jabbing glove dead on and felt the impact deep into his shoulder and back. Kibirov pulled the hand back and shook it quickly, then his eyes showed a wandering thought, a check of the body’s machine. He came forward again, jabbing the hand, and when Joseph again drove his fist at it, the Russian pulled it back tight to his side. Joseph grinned a rictus as he marched forward himself now, jabbing at the broken hand. Kibirov threw a hook that caught him in the jaw and his face went cold. He grabbed the Russian and tied him up with his arms, and the referee squeezed in between them.

‘Fight!’ the referee yelled amid the booing.

Kibirov shoved Joseph and immediately hugged the busted hand against his body. Joseph jabbed him backwards and threw a looping overhand right. The hand collided with Kibirov’s eye, which absorbed the full force of Joseph’s massive panicked strength. Kibirov staggered, holding his crushed hand up to the eye.

Joseph watched, saw the fight drained out of the lethal creation in front of him. He swung into the hand, into the face, and could feel bone give way through his glove. The Russian bent against the ropes, turning away from him, and the thousand mouths bellowed in unison shrieks of bloodlust. Joseph followed him along the rope, the shoving hands, and could see blood all over the gloves. He was already winging his huge fist, using his back as a fulcrum and driving his legs into the wooden floor, when he saw blood and something white was coming from the Russian’s eye under the cover of the glove. He tried to stop his momentum, but he’d thrown himself bodily into the swing. His fist pounded upward into the mashed face and his weight threw them both against the men behind the rope, who went down with the fighters.

Joseph scrambled up and reached to help Kibirov to his feet, but the Russian lay sprawled and white among the kicking men on the floor. Joseph looked into the crushed face, and shook his head, already trying to explain to someone that he hadn’t meant to, that he’d wanted to stop at the last second.

‘Oh god,’ he said aloud, and looked to Borg for help. The Scandinavians were already rushing into the ring under the rope and pushing past the referee to look at the Russian. Borg turned to Joseph and grabbed his arm.

He pulled him over to Munter and said, ‘Get him out of here.’

They forced through the stunned and craning crowd, those in the front who could see the exploded face of Kibirov and those behind who were jostling to see what had stopped the fight. Joseph struck out at the men in front of him as Munter barged through the arms and bodies. They went down the hall past the office they’d sat in before the fight. Joseph looked at the door, thinking *I was just in there* as they rushed to the back door of the warehouse. Munter was hissing something in his old-world tongue.

Joseph said, ‘Wait, my clothes,’ as Munter dragged him into the night outside, the cold blasting draft from up the valley.

Joseph pawed at his gloves and tried to pull them off, running to catch up with his escort.

Munter said, ‘Come on, man,’ as the door opened behind them and yowling voices poured forth from the building.

They ducked behind a workshop and went through the frigid dark toward the stables just north of town.

‘Idiot,’ said Munter.

Above, the constellated nightsea hung in frozen observance. The men passed wolflike behind shacks, panting with stiff mud underfoot. They ran into the stable and the boy jumped up.

‘Get our horses,’ Munter said.

The boy looked at Joseph towering in the narrow raw wooded space. At his flesh clouded red and the bulbous gloves hanging from his arms. Joseph was wild with his eyes rolling and blood sprayed up his forearms.

‘What—’ began the boy, and Munter gripped his thin jacket.

‘Get our God damned horses,’ he repeated.

The boy went quickly to the stable doors and they heard the clomp and snuff in the glowing rooms.

‘Help me get these off,’ Joseph said, his hands upturned under Munter’s face.

Munter pulled his knife and hacked the laces apart, and Joseph dropped the gloves in the hay. The boy led the horses, rolling their eyes at the iron bloodstink. They took the animals into the black night and mounted. Joseph sat and convulsed on the wizened Clydesdale.

‘I can’t stop,’ he said. His throat was seized and he shook in waves. His white pall skin was a beacon in the dark stableyard.

‘Get us a blanket,’ Munter said, ‘quick about it.’

The boy ran out with a blanket spread as if he’d damp a fire.

‘Throw it,’ Joseph said, and wrapped the blanket over his shoulders. He kicked the horse and it loped toward the paleness of the road. Munter came behind on his black mare, directing them urgently northward.

They rode in the dismal chill to Joseph’s camp. Munter stayed mounted while Joseph went in to stuff his suitcase with clothes, grab his old coat and hat. He was angry about his good clothing back at the warehouse. Someone would already be gone with it underarm in the chaos, and sure to be walking the muddy streets ill-fitted like a child in his father’s clothes. Around Joseph, a few illiterates snored and thumped in the bunkhouse. All others would be at the fight’s wake, or raging into town for whisky.

He folded his two photographs in a wool shirt, and grabbed his books. Munter called something outside and Joseph cursed him. In the recessed bunks, he could see

nothing but the opened head of Kibirov against a wooden floor, against a swarm of mouths. Joseph threw on a heavy shirt and his worn coat, and pulled the door open.

‘My tools,’ he said.

Munter shrugged. ‘Worry about that later.’

Across the smoothed right of way were small fires blinking and the tent rows of the Chinese camp. He climbed into the saddle and followed Munter still northward on the lunar road. Joseph was gnawed with cold, looking at the damp canvas tents. He rode past them, white sails in the dark, wondering how those men could survive uncomplaining and want to work their lives away, swallowed in these alien mountains.

With the tents behind, the world was dark and they heard creaking leather. The valley walls were a vacuous black, and above them the strip of sky carried the stars, the gods, the eye that counted sin. Joseph pulled at the throat of his old jacket and cowered.

They reined the horses in front of a two-storey gabled house set back from the roadbed, with a stockyard and stables. One of the Scandinavians sat smoking on the porch, the one with face overgrown by a beard that reached almost into his eyes. He stood and leaned on the banister as Munter spoke urgent and low. He summoned Joseph, who followed to the stables.

They untacked and curried the mounts by flurid lanternlight. Joseph blew air out his mouth and his eyes hurt, as did his body and jaw where he’d been hit. He rubbed at the dried blood until the man suggested the washbasin in the corner, his voice weird and high.

‘You can bathe in the house anyway,’ he said.

Joseph nodded and looked the Clydesdale over, old recluse begging euthanasia. The horse loomed and watched sidelong with a wet eye.

He followed the bearded man to the house, clean and smelling of pine floorboards, lantern oil. Munter was taking his coat off. He said a few things and the man looked at Joseph’s hands and face, nodding.

‘Borg and the others will be here soon,’ Munter hung his coat and hat, and bent to reef his boots off. He flicked a hand at the rack for Joseph.

Joseph wasn’t sure why he was at this house, but he was stunned and willing to be led. The house felt safe, and the idea of being sent back to the muddy stink of his bunkhouse made him silent. In the kitchen, he stripped to the waist and Munter gave him a washcloth and clean wool shirt.

‘You should have a drink,’ he said as he poured two glasses from the nameless bottle on the table.

They sat across from each other. Joseph ached and his thoughts went skittering. He was clean and dry and dozing in the warmth. He touched his glass, turned it slowly, sucked at the burning whisky. Munter left the room and returned to place a long-barrelled revolver on the table, then took up a newspaper and read. He scoffed and turned the paper to show Joseph the headline, ‘Pugilistic bout scheduled in C.P.R. warehouse.’

Horses sounded across the yard, and voices called back and forth. Munter put down the paper and stood, looked him over, took the pistol and left the kitchen. Joseph slid the newspaper away across the table. Borg and Ebenhoch entered the house at the front door, clomping and coughing, talking to Munter.

Joseph stood and then sat down again, lifted his glass and put it down. He stood up, dusted his pants and waited, looking at himself warped in the window reflection. The house reminded him of his mother’s home, and the silent meals watching his father’s inked hands as he ripped bread apart.

Borg came in, hat in hand and white, haunted. He looked at Joseph in the kitchen, blinked a few times and sighed.

‘You’ll have to stay here. You can’t go to Yale.’

Joseph waited.

‘The police know. I can’t stop them coming here; I must have nothing to hide. You understand.’

Joseph said, ‘Yes, I’m sorry.’ He sat back down at the table because his legs felt spongy and cold.

Ebenhoch walked into the kitchen and sat down, sprawled in a narrow chair, and glanced at Joseph with his teeth showing. He ran a hand through his white hair and poured a glass from the bottle before filling Joseph’s.

‘Well, that was a fight,’ he said, looking up at Borg, and they laughed for a second. Joseph bleated and picked up his drink, sipped and shook his head.

‘What will the police do?’

‘I don’t know,’ Borg said. He rubbed the table with his dense hand. ‘There was an officer at the fight, so he may have seen everything.’

Borg went to the counter and put a loaf of bread on the table. He unwrapped some cheese. Ebenhoch was looking at Joseph and chewing the inside of his mouth.

‘So,’ Joseph said, ‘you knew there was a police officer at the fight.’

Borg turned.

‘Why does that matter?’

‘Oh. Well, it doesn’t.’ Joseph massaged his hands and studied the floor.

Borg put the cutting board on the table and Ebenhoch poured a glass for him.

‘It’s just that... you might have let me know.’

Borg stood at the head of the table and bowed his mouth as if considering.

Ebenhoch folded his arms, leaned back with boots splayed. One of the boots touched Joseph’s foot and he jerked his leg away. His head was down but he flicked his eyes at the other men like one interrogated.

Borg looked through him, patriarch considering a rude guest. The oblong moustache was trimmed severely to the width of his mouth, and grey flecked the hair showing under his wool cap. His eyes sat in the shadows of his brow.

He spoke slowly, ‘I don’t have to let you know anything.’

They sat eating and drinking around him, and he talked when spoken to, and even offered a few opinions and anecdotes from work, but he could not raise his eyes above their chests, and the liquid in his glass shook.

Joseph stood outside in the frozen night air, surrounded by the teeth of eternal mountains. He could picture his parents snoring and fragile in their little wooden house a few hundred kilometres away. Pierre’s hands lying black on top of the blankets, and Jeannette unmoving till morning light. Joseph wept in the yawning silence, and knew he would have to escape.

The reverberation of a hacking cough in a small room woke Joseph. There was a pop of settled bones moving. He reached for his glasses under the bed. The room was white and Munter sat looking around in his drooping underwear.

‘Lucky Joseph doesn’t have to work today,’ he said, rubbing at his eyes.

Ebenhoch crossed the room. His aim was lackadaisical and the wallpaper around the chamber-pot had warped already.

He spoke over his shoulder, ‘You want to be in his spot?’

Joseph yawned and felt the weight of each memory from the day before as he lay there, as if someone were throwing heavy blankets onto him.

Ebenhoch stretched and his milky eyes held the daylight. He leaned over Joseph, smiling. Joseph frowned, raised his hand and shoved him away.

‘Why, what’s the problem?’ Ebenhoch asked in feigned surprise.

Joseph sat up and shrugged, looking at the floor. He yawned and grabbed his pants off the bedframe.

‘I asked you a question,’ Ebenhoch said, with Munter watching them and breathing through his heavy mouth.

‘I just don’t appreciate being studied.’ Joseph kept his eyes down as he pulled on his pants and began buttoning his shirt.

Ebenhoch still stood in the centre of the room in his underwear. He was sinewed and hardlined, with his severe head glowing in the early light. Joseph weighed almost twice as much, but they both knew Ebenhoch was so much more truculent, a fan of violence. Joseph felt nervous just standing in front of him to button his pants, before sitting back on the bed. He knew the men would be gone soon to start work. Chairs scraped and moaned downstairs, and deep voices mumbled.

‘Let’s go down for breakfast,’ said Munter. ‘Richard, you won’t believe the coffee Mr. Borg gets his hands on. It’ll have you singing.’

Joseph smiled at Munter’s chest and nodded.

‘Well, let’s go then.’ Ebenhoch raised his hands and clapped loud in the blank room. His eyes were meaningless and clouded as he grinned down at Joseph.

Joseph and Mr. Borg sat in chairs on the porch. The house overlooked the work on their side of the river valley. Men shuffled along the grade, small and careful with their reckoning equipment, pointing and shaking their heads to each other on the roadwork. Borg lifted a telescope from time to time and scrutinized the men, talking to himself. He kept a ledger on the floor next to his chair covered in ink scratches. Joseph kept glancing at the telescope until Borg handed it to him. He took off his glasses and held the scope to his eye. The sky was shot through with crows and an eagle wafted high above the river. The cliff on the far side of the valley was dusty green, creased by exposed rock and tiny waterfalls. Joseph gaped, glassing the distant world until Borg started clearing his throat. He lowered his hands and handed back the telescope, and replaced the spectacles, already a headache behind his eyes.

A horseman turned off the grade and moved in a lilted dust toward the house. The rider entered the yard, pulled by a crooked shadowrider on the dusty earth. He wore an overcoat buttoned to his chin and a tan stetson. Borg stood and motioned to Joseph with his hand. Joseph got out of his chair and dusted himself, leaned on the handrail next to Borg. The rider swung his leg and dismounted on the far side, held the reins and



led his horse within earshot of the house, touching the brim of his hat as he called to them.

‘Good morning. I’m looking for a Mr. Borg.’

‘Yes, that’s me,’ Borg said as he pulled off his cap and tossed it on the chair behind him. He waddled badgerlike to the steps and went down into the dry yard with his hand outstretched. Joseph stayed where he was, with the man looking up at him in the shadows of the porch.

‘He is just one enormous specimen, isn’t he though,’ the rider said, shaking Borg’s hand with his eyes on Joseph.

‘He is that,’ said Borg.

‘My God, you just may be the biggest man I’ve ever seen,’ he called with almost a laughing joy in his voice.

Joseph waved and put his hands back on the rail. The man went to his large saddlebag and pulled out a black coat.

‘I think this is yours,’ he called.

Joseph beamed.

‘If so, I have your hat as well.’

‘Yes, yes. They’re both mine. Thank you,’ Joseph said and wanted to clap his hands.

Borg led the man and horse to the stables and Joseph looked around. The yard was silent with chill, and smoke rolled off the chimney and went into the trees.

At the murmur of talk, he straightened his shirt. Borg and the man crossed the yard, and entered the shadow of the porch, Borg glancing once at Joseph and the man halfsmiling as he marvelled, staring at Joseph against the handrail. He held the coat folded over his arm and Joseph’s hat in the other hand. Joseph took them like an aunt lifting a baby and thanked him again.

‘Open the door,’ said Borg.

Inside, Joseph hung his clothes over his old jacket then followed the men into the kitchen and stood beside the door, while Borg waved to a seat. The guest unbuttoned his long coat and sat, hat in hand. He was thrown back at the shoulders with almost tortured correctness in his posture. His moustaches hung below a sharp chin, and he looked drowsy.

Borg said, ‘Put on the kettle.’

He sat at the head of the table and folded his fingers, while Joseph lumbered across the room to the stove.

‘You planning to introduce us,’ the man said.

Joseph shoved two pieces of wood into the red coals and closed the stove. He turned around and reached out a hand.

‘Joseph Richard.’ He smiled with his eyes bulbous in the bright kitchen.

The man stood and gripped his hand.

‘Sergeant Hilliard,’ he said. ‘Pleased to finally meet you.’

Joseph nodded, and his smile went twitching off his face.

‘Sergeant? Of what?’

‘Northwest Mounted Police.’

‘I didn’t mean to do anything.’ Joseph let go of Hilliard’s fingers and pulled his bruised hand back, and Hilliard stepped forward with his grip tight. Joseph looked at the hands and pulled weakly, while the other’s fingers sought out his injuries.

‘You don’t plan on running, do you?’ Hilliard opened his coat to show the revolver slung on his hip.

‘No sir,’ he whined.

Hilliard dropped his hand, and smiled with such warmth as to confuse Joseph tremendously. Hilliard put a hand on his shoulder, and shook him.

‘I’m sorry. I just have to deal with so many vagabonds in my work, it makes a man edgy. But I can see you’re decent.’

He sat down again and pulled his coat to hide the gun, lifted his hat off the table and held it.

Joseph looked to Borg, stumpy and inert, eyeing them with no language in his face.

‘I’d prefer a coffee if you have it,’ Hilliard said.

Borg coughed and said, ‘Make coffee.’

Joseph turned and banged around the kitchen, opening canisters and shrugging at them, his hands shaking.

‘Oh, sit down for Christ’s sake,’ snapped Borg. He pushed his chair back.

Joseph sat in a chair by the door, and Hilliard shook his head, nodded to the seat next to him at the table.

‘Okay, Joseph. I just need to ask you about last night’s event.’ He chewed something and put his elbows on the table.

‘Were you there?’

‘I was, yes. I would like to say I saw everything clearly, but the nature of policework dictates that there are variables everywhere one looks.’

Joseph started speaking and Hilliard put his hand up.

‘I understand you want me to know you did nothing wrong, that’s fine. But we’ll save time by focusing on what I need from you.’

Borg put two cups on the table and a pot of honey. Hilliard twinkled his eyes at the coffeepot and thanked Borg as he poured it.

‘And I’d appreciate if you refrain from any more earthy language, Mr. Borg.’ He winked at Joseph as he said it.

Borg inhaled with his eyes and chest expanding, and stared at the back of Hilliard’s head. But he didn’t reply, and Hilliard watched Joseph with boredom. Joseph asked Hilliard what he needed to know.

‘Were you aware that Mr. Kibirov is deceased as a result of his injuries?’

Joseph felt ill and his hands were white and damp. ‘No.’

‘Did you know Mr. Kibirov previous to the bout?’

‘No.’

‘They met once,’ Borg said. He came to the table with his own cup of coffee and sat down.

Hilliard nodded. ‘Did you have any reason to wish him harm? Other than under pugilistic guidelines?’

‘I liked him,’ Joseph said to the tabletop. His eyes were hot and he started crying.

‘Now now.’

Borg scoffed, and crossed his arms. Hilliard looked up at him.

‘Mr. Borg, could I have some time with Joseph? This might be a little tedious for you.’

Borg stood and leaned over the table, looking at Joseph’s wet face.

‘Don’t,’ he said.

Joseph turned to him, and Borg pointed a finger.

‘Don’t waste Sergeant Hilliard’s time with snivelling.’

He took his coffee and left the kitchen. The front door slammed shut, and the room seemed large and bright. Sheepish Joseph rubbed his eyes and sighed.

‘That man has a few issues to work out before he learns to embrace his new country.’ Hilliard smirked and nodded to Joseph. ‘You and I. Just a couple of old natives solving a problem together, eh?’

Joseph sniffed.

Hilliard got up and went to the window. He looked out, then crossed to the other window, studying the scene with his tongue on his lower lip. He left the kitchen silently and Joseph sat begging for his father or mother to appear.

Hilliard came back, and nodded around the kitchen. He sat down again.

‘Just wanted to make sure nobody’s lurking.’

He pulled his chair in tight and leaned across the table.

‘Now, Joseph. Do you know who I am?’ He looked at the huge gory eyes, from one to another quickly.

‘Sergeant... Hilliard?’

They sat studying each other. Hilliard leaned back.

‘Your father didn’t mention me at all?’

‘What?’

‘I know your father.’ He smiled and wiggled his fingers. ‘Those horrible tattoos.’

Joseph looked at him in wonder. ‘How do you know him? Is he well? My mother?’

‘Oh, I don’t know her. And I haven’t seen your father in a while.’

Joseph sagged in his doll’s chair.

‘However. It’s a real pleasure, like I said, to meet the son.’ He picked up his cup. ‘Your father made me some excellent coffee.’

Joseph sat with his brain heaving through the debris. He started a question, then stopped and looked out the window.

‘I wanted to talk to you and your brother Paul. This was some time ago, before Paul left.’ Hilliard watched him. ‘You don’t know what came of Paul, do you?’

‘He went to Australia,’ Joseph mumbled.

‘Technically, yes.’ The sergeant pulled his chair back and crossed his legs, folded his arms. He studied his grimy boots as he spoke. ‘I was interested in asking Paul some questions, when he up and decided Australian shores beckoned.’

‘My father—’

‘Oh I know, trust me. Anyways, I was lucky enough to spot Paul the day he sailed out of Chemainus. Since I wanted to talk to him, I decided to board the ship. He had no idea who I was, and I made conversation as a fellow passenger. He bought me a beer in the saloon onboard, polite enough and all that, but miserable eyes. He has such a mean face.’

‘Am I going to jail or not?’ Joseph spilled his coffee and looked at the table but didn’t move to wipe it up. He ran hands over his face, took his glasses off. He sat blindly facing away in the kitchen with motes igniting in the light along the windows.

Hilliard said, ‘Don’t start getting unravelled just yet. I’m here to talk to you about all that. Nobody is going to show up with a posse; I’m the law and I’m already sitting here with you. You’re halfway to getting this all sorted out.’

He unfolded his arms and swirled what was left in his cup, then stood and fetched the pot off the stove.

‘You want another cup, there, Joseph?’

Joseph shook his head.

Hilliard sat down, smiling and nodding around the kitchen. He yawned.

‘So. Where was I?’ he said.

Joseph put his glasses back on, and looked at the sergeant with the sallow importunity of the urchin.

‘Your brother. Mean as ribs. I could see it. I didn’t want him making a scene once I showed my hand. You get this... certain feeling as a peace officer.’ He squinted at Joseph. ‘Show your hand and you’ve got a fight. All of a sudden, man jumps up and bites. Conversely, play it out for too long, and he starts to see what you’re up to.’

He smiled and nodded, pinched his moustache and smoothed it.

‘Now Paul is wily. You know that, being his brother all these years.’

Joseph looked at him. ‘What the hell did you want to talk to him about?’

‘You recall some trouble about a young Indian fellow going missing?’

‘No.’

‘Half-breed.’

‘Yes.’

‘Jack’s his name. I was sent up from Victoria to investigate.’ He drank, looking sidelong at Joseph over the cup. ‘So, that half-breed’s father just happens to be pretty high up in the Hudson’s Bay Company. For your modesty and mine I’ll leave his name out of our conversations.’

‘I remember something about that,’ Joseph nodded, ‘being passed around before Paul left.’

He frowned at the table as Hilliard watched him.

‘And your brother happened to come up in a few conversations on account of you all living so close to the river there, and your brother having a twitchy attitude.’

‘Paul never did anything,’ Joseph said.

‘Anyway, I kept making chatter to him on the ship about where I was going, sights to see and all of that, as a tourist to Victoria. He mentioned he was sticking close to the wharf until he could board a ship for Australia. Did you not ever hear from your father that we came by your house? Myself and the Indian agent, a few times. Your brother was a suspect. Your father wouldn’t tell us anything. And pressure was on my head from Victoria.’

He showed Joseph a scar that ran corkscrewed from wrist to elbow, pulling up his white sleeve.

‘That boy’s father did this when I went to him and suggested Jack maybe just jumped the border, on account of having such a brood of children with his woman.’

Joseph considered the puckered worm of purple skin and shook his head slowly.

‘So I was, as you can imagine, keen to have a suspect in custody. When the steamer berthed in Victoria I went with Paul and we checked with the shipping agent at the wharves for the next boat to points south across the Pacific. The *Queen Mary* was sailing in two days as it turned out, so I saw Paul to a boarding house at the wharf, bought him a couple glasses of beer, and went to headquarters to write up a warrant. Also I contacted my good friend at the Company for permission to proceed. They have their own take on how law should be executed.’

Joseph looked up at the word.

Hilliard said ‘No, no.’

They sat in the warm kitchen as light moved into the forest and cast treeshadows that shrunk the yard’s perimeter. Joseph stood to add sticks to the fire; he lifted the kettle and glanced out the window, wondering vaguely what time it was. Hilliard marvelled at the dense legs and back. Joseph sat down and put his hands on the table. He rubbed his clammy fingers and felt so weak and tired.

Hilliard yawned, and Joseph yawned with him. They looked at each other, one almost entirely aware of the situation at hand as well as the story being relayed, and the other exhausted from the stress of ignorance.

‘Well,’ Hilliard said, ‘I couldn’t get my warrant through before the ship sailed. No reply telegraph from Ottawa. They don’t care much what happens out on the western shores. The wild west. The Hudson’s Bay man wanted Paul for himself, so I had to chase him down to the wharves as he was hot for your brother’s blood. Of course Paul was half tossed on whisky, and he still managed to lay out the accuser on the planks.’

Joseph smiled and missed his brother with a visceral pain.

‘I couldn’t stop him boarding the ship, and I couldn’t board myself. We always get our man, you may have heard. The best I could do was to give notice to the captain that Paul was to be apprehended once the ship docked in Australia. I was confident I’d have the evidence settled and a warrant in print by then. So Paul sailed, and I telegraphed to the Melbourne police commission to arrest him on Commonwealth criminal suspicion.’

‘How could you do that?’ Joseph said. He leaned back in his chair, pushed his glasses up his nose and studied Hilliard with his face darkening.

‘I was sure I had my man; it was just a matter of ticking off my list of necessities before he landed in Australia.’

Hilliard chewed his lip and looked around the kitchen, nodding at the stained wooden furniture and cans of foodstuffs with their painted labels. Outside, the chimneysmoke moved across the cold yard and bothered the horses inside the stable.

‘What happened?’ Joseph asked.

‘Those Indians dropped the charges. I had a letter in Victoria from the agent, so I caught the next steamer up to Chemainus. We sat down with the chief and his council, and believe me, I tried to talk them out of it. They wouldn’t listen. You know what a windigo is?’ Hilliard said.

Joseph looked at him and worked his throat, but could not swallow.

Hilliard sighed and began. ‘A windigo is a man in Algonquian lore who gets him a taste for flesh, human flesh. He cannibalizes his fellows.’

Hilliard looked around as if embarrassed.

‘They say he gains their soul. He eats a man, and takes that man’s body into himself. Gets his strength, his number of years on this earth. He does it over and over as he can’t rightly stop himself, and eventually he eats up so many souls that he just becomes, you know...’

Joseph sat watching the other.

‘... immortal,’ Hilliard said, facing away with a shrug. ‘There are variations on the legend, depending on where you go. Some say the windigo will travel, looking for the strongest men he can, the most powerful souls or some such. He’ll only destroy himself when he runs up against a man greater than him.’

Hilliard looked at Joseph and raised his eyebrows. ‘Sure enough, right in the middle of this fiasco, I had a telegram from Melbourne that Paul had been taken into custody and held pending further discoveries in the case.’

‘Windigo. I’m not making this up. Sure as shit, they showed us a site along the river where it looked like someone had burned a real mess of something. And there was all this talk of a windigo haunting the woods. The Indians just gave up thinking a white man had done away with young Jack. They figured a windigo from another tribe was on the loose. You know the Haida Indians up in the Queen Charlotte Islands?’

Joseph nodded.

‘Tough bunch up there. Wouldn’t put it past them to send lunatics up and down the coast. But this supernatural business... well. Anyway, the Indian agent had to submit his reports along that line of thought. And I had to wire back to Melbourne for Paul’s release.’

Joseph smiled and laughed once.

‘That was just some bear. Paul never did anything. Paul just burned a bear,’ and even as Joseph said it he could feel his mouth trying to slow and stop, yet the words came out. ‘He shot this bear sow and it was with cub so he burned it.’

And Hilliard sat looking at him.

‘No,’ said Joseph.

‘Now, why would someone do that?’ Hilliard raised his eyebrows.

Joseph was a wooden effigy with no say or movement, terrified and wanting to suck the words back onto his mouth. Hilliard tilted his head and looked into Joseph’s eyes, which carried his thoughts in magnified clarity across the room, as if there was too much story there to hold in.

‘Well,’ Hilliard said. ‘Paul did have himself a fire after all.’

‘Where is he?’ asked Joseph.

And Hilliard said, with shimmer in his eyes, ‘I have no idea, but this was a couple months ago, so I’d assume he found himself work or some such thing. That Melbourne court is loath to just release anyone, however. They may have found some other reason to keep Paul around.’

He took a notepad from inside his coat, licked his thumb and opened to a new page. He sat moving his lips, with moustache jerking, and watched Joseph shift around in his seat and clear his throat. Hilliard shook his head and wrote a few lines with a pencil.

‘I’m just curious as to why you Richard brothers can’t keep out of trouble.’

‘I—’ Joseph ran his hands over the table and his face was slack. ‘I can’t see Paul hurting anyone.’

‘You can’t see much.’



‘He’s not that type of person.’

‘I’ve seen some violent acts, friend. Most of them perpetrated by folks who are not that type of person.’ He smirked and tapped the pencil on the notepad.

‘Well, I suspect it’s time to discuss your near future.’

Joseph slumped as if already in a cell, looking at the table’s surface in the slanting afternoon light. Hilliard inspected the kitchen, and then stood up.

‘I might ask Mr. Borg back in,’ he said.

Joseph sat with his skin worming and sweat coming up on his back and forehead. Hilliard walked heel to toe across the boards and left the kitchen.

‘Mr. Borg,’ Joseph heard him call.

Joseph stood and looked through the doorway at his coat and hat hanging by the entrance. The front door, which Hilliard had just gone through, stood open. Joseph strode to the staircase and went up three at a time to the bedroom he shared with Ebenhoch and Munter, and dropped to his knees to fold his worldly possessions into a shirt. He was gasping. He crawled to the window that looked onto the dooryard, but could see nothing. He stood and left the room and slid down the stairs with the closest he could come to silence. Hilliard was at the front door talking to Borg, who would be standing on the porch in front of him. Joseph went around the corner and crossed the kitchen to the largest window. He slid it up half a foot before it jammed, so he struck the bottom of the frame with his palm and it opened with a bang. He coughed loud twice, and crammed his huge body through with the frame cracking. As he got his hips past the window, he kicked his heel through a pane and glass sprayed on the kitchen floor. He slid to the ground on his head and rolled to his feet, already running wildly. He aimed straight for the wall of trees at the back of the property. Someone yelled out and there was silence.

He ran into the dense bush and heard one loud clap of a pistol. Joseph ground his teeth as he ducked, swinging his cargo in front of him. He pounded forth and ran through the close and ancient forest until his lungs scorched his insides and he had to drop to his knees and pant in the branches and needles.

‘Oh God,’ he moaned over and over again, gasping while his ears collected the forest. The wind blew a constant shushing, and he could not see twenty feet away through the bush and enormous cedars.

*My horse, my coat,* he thought. He unfolded the bundle, panicked until he laid eyes on the photographs safe inside his bible. He put his back to a tree and sat in the

moss, watching the sky turn yellow and feeling the air cool as birds called lonely and repetitive in a world of creaking and gentle snapping branches. A universe of suspect sounds around him. He hugged his legs and lowered his head.

The forest darkened as the sun fell away over the mountain range. Joseph cursed himself, cursed his situation. He stood up in the cacophonous woods but could decipher nothing of human sounds. He walked back toward the house slowly, and stopped when the strain of getting too near began to hurt his chest. Borg had the telescope, and Joseph's eyesight was a burden. He sat again on an ancient log, half sunk in moss and ferns, the soft red earth pungent with fungus and bulbous mushrooms.

Shaking his head and enraged at the foolish turns that had brought him here. He had to creep toward the house while there was still some daylight, or he'd never find it once dark settled in the forest. With heart burning he trampled the gloomy distance, straight back the way he'd come through the soaring conifers, creaking and snowing down needles eternally.

The house glowed in tiny orange eyes. He squatted and watched for darkened shapes in the yard.

He slid closer across the empty detail of the stumped yard, hissing with fear and blinking. His bundle of possessions was a beacon so he left it at the edge of the yard, where the bushes cast a black murk. Nothing sounded out save his scraping in the grass and dirt, and he watched for human shapes in the few windows upstairs and down which were candleglowed. The stable was a black box beyond the house. The air was crisp around him and his skin was painful and stiff. An owl called out somewhere in the woods. He was trying not to moan as he got halfway across the yard. The house was alive with light but no one moved, and no noise came forth. He blew out and sucked air in forced breathing. A black shape moved across the light upstairs. He stopped in a bent lurch, a giant statue of a satyr prowling. The shape went back in the opposite direction and Joseph sidled now almost into the halo of soft light underneath the room in which someone was awake. He stopped to look around the yard but his eyes had adjusted too much to the light and he could make out nothing save blackness. Joseph put a foot onto the lowest step of the porch and could hear his knee creak like swollen wood. He went up the steps holding the banister and wearing his jaw down. The door was there, and the window along the porch showed a flickering lamplight in the room just inside the door.

He could not breathe and blood raged inside his head. He stepped across the porch to the door, holding the handle as a sailor would clutch rigging in a storm. He

turned the handle, and the door was so silent as it opened that he wanted to weep. Joseph grabbed at the coat-rack, felt it tipping into the room and he caught it with both hands. He felt for his coat and hat, put the hat on and gripped the coat desperately.

He stood the coat-rack and pulled the door closed. He slid across to the top step and jumped down into the dirt. The stable was black against a sky shot through with sparkles. Joseph approached it, trying to picture in his head where his horse would be, what the interior stable looked like, and he couldn't work out its difference to the stables in Yale he'd been to. The horses already were snuffing at his sound. He traipsed the moonshadow yard and reached the rough wall of the stable.

Joseph went along the wall with his hands and came to the front corner. He looked into the black maw of the room and waited for his eyes to adjust. There was a man in a chair. Joseph jumped and bit the inside of his mouth. He stood in front of the stable door waiting and terrified. The blackness clarified again and there was still the shape of a man in a chair, slumped. Joseph stared and blinked. The horses scraped the hay and rubbed their faces against the raw wood. He fingered along the stable door to find the latch, and stopped. There was no way he could get in and release the Clydesdale. He had no idea if the man in the chair was awake, watching him, and he stood with heart blasting away in his throat. The chill air made his face sore, and he held his coat in a talon as he watched the shape, waiting for any movement. His poor horse, intimate follower and fellow, last gift from his parents. He had to leave the creature behind, and he wanted to rub its bony face one last time, to apologize to its ancient eyes and be at some peace. The horse was right there, and he raged against the presence in the chair, no surety of a firearm and the man's role in an ambush obvious.

He patted the door and looked in vain for the horse's eyes in the dark, then turned and slunk along the perimeter of the open yard back to the forest edge for his bundle of possessions. Joseph crept back into the woods to wait out the night before trying to find his way downriver to Yale. The only way out of the valley was along the exposed coach road, or aboard one of the steamships that brought men and supplies to Yale. He knew the near impossibility of getting on a steamer without being recognized, but he was panicked and willing to risk it. Stumbling around in the forest and following the coach road would be his demise as certainly as the trophy animal is brought to bay by dogs and men fixated enough.

His blindness was almost complete once out of the light-collecting block of land around the house, and the warm orange squares floating against the shaped of the house. He found a tree with curved base, a hollow to put his back against, and covered himself

with his good black coat. He embraced the bundle and took off his heavy glasses finally, and curled upon himself to try and sleep the rest of the night.

He woke to the human voice of an owl calling out nearby. He stared at the black around him, realizing where he was and why he was craned in a wedged treebody, face aching and wet. The forest was silent and coated with a rime of frost. He shifted and cold air sought out the weak folds of his covering. He moved his neck and dug in his lap for the eyeglasses, put them on and blinked at the dim shapes and branches that crawled across the night world above him. Joseph heard the owl again, alone in a dead world. He gripped the overcoat with creaking fingers and took his glasses off again, folded his head down into his arms and slept the fitful sleep of one terrified and exhausted with emotion.

Morning brought a grey light to sketch details into the trees and the forest floor puzzled with dead leaves and branches blown to earth. Joseph lifted his head and gasped at the ache running deep into his back and all over his shoulders. He unfolded his arms and slowly put down the bundle, then straightened his legs in the filthy stiff pants and put his head back against the tree. The earth glistened, ferns dripping and garish against the decayed logs. He rolled and got to his feet, knowing he had to take every second of early light and make it his. He stood looking at the woods, remembered the gaps between a few of the trees and set off in that direction. The house was so close to where he'd slept that his heart started banging away again. The stable was closer than the house, and he thought about running to it to try and get the jump on the sleeper within, but he knew he didn't have the coordination, and it would only be a matter of minutes for anyone alerted to catch up with his lumbering animal, especially out on the dust road, in the light.

Joseph watched the house, and then slid back into the woods once smoke wafted from the chimney. He needed to move downriver. He pawed low, climbing over the land gingerly until out of sight of the house, out of earshot and well way from the road, and then he ran whenever he could and walked when his chest burned. The wet woods were thick with rotten leaves and frost. Bowels writhing, he stopped to shit nervously with cold leaves touching his naked hams. Through the trees, glimpses of the far cliff face on the opposite wall of the valley. He moved through the brush and over fallen trees, whipped by branches, frustrated and sweating, with his stomach stitching a hollow pain across his body. He rubbed at his face when he got irritated and had to slow a few times as he was faint with weak hunger and stress.

At some point Joseph heard the scream of heavy iron over rocks and the low rumble of a grader being hauled by a team. He moved alert toward the noise, and could see a crew of men grading with mules and oxen, and yelling to each other above the roar of the grader. The squeals when the heavy blade hit bedrock were almost crippling, and he shrunk away from the scene. The crew was dragging up a wall of dust as it plodded past his vantage. Joseph crept forward through the forest until he was well away, darting and blinking like a deer.

He came to his own camp by full light and lurched out of the bush to see if anyone was around. The cook worked at a basin of water that steamed in the heavy morning air. He was a wiry Quebecois who had a relationship with food that was lacklustre and at times abusive. Joseph watched the cook in profile as he scrubbed and sang low. The cookhouse was fresh and white against the dishevelled landscape. Joseph waited to see if anyone else would appear, and then walked toward the cook's tent where the Frenchman washed pots.

'Hello Michel,' he said, and raised his hand.

The cook faced him and his eyes showed alarm, yet he smiled and waved. Joseph went past him to the cookhouse and pushed the door open. He grabbed a loaf of bread and ripped it in half. He started slicing a leg of ham that hung above the table. He took handfuls of meat and stuffed it inside the loaf, then looked around for the water jug. Michel stood in the doorway.

'Where have you been?' he asked, studying Joseph in the wide low room.

Joseph shook his head and gulped from the jug as water ran down the sides of his neck.

'What happened after the fight?' asked Michel. He dried his hands on his apron.

'Acke Munter got me out of there, and I've been at Borg's house.' He turned to Michel with desperation in his red eyes. 'They're going to come after me.'

'Why?'

'I escaped. There was a police officer there. My brother's in trouble.'

'Brother?' Michel came into the cookhouse, looking around.

Joseph picked up his filthy bundle of clothing and books, gripped the loaf and backed away along the wall.

'Just stay back, please,' he said. He moved toward the door, around the cook.

'Oh. I wasn't—'

'I'm feeling jumpy so I'd ask you to give me some space.'

The cook stood by the table. Joseph passed him, cleared the doorway and stepped into the open camp, wondered if he should check his bed in case he'd forgotten anything in the scramble. His bunkhouse was far across the quiet muddy camp. Michel came to the door of the cookhouse. Joseph turned and walked quickly back to the woods, looking over his shoulder. The cook watched him recede into the bushes. Joseph waved once and then ran, with his loaf of bread dropping to the forest floor.

He devoured as he loped along next to the road, out of sight and guided toward Yale. The strip of forest between river and mountain bottlenecked until the trees were sparse, and he had to sprint between covers. Finally he came to the jutting creakery of the coach road that sat tight against the cliff, a miraculous engineered bridge-like construction tacked to the cliff and wavering out over the drop to the river below.

Joseph sat in the bushes and watched the roadway while the sun worked its way through the narrow valley. He stood up and ran to the bridge, and once there kept running until he rounded the corner and the valley opened up clear to Yale below on the riverbank, with chimney smoke pencilling up against the trees. The boards thudded beneath him and he could see the road past the bridge empty at the noon-hour.

Once on the fringe of town, he hunched and bent, drew his lapels up to his face, assumed the wretched shuffle of a drunkard, and made his way to the crowded Front Street where men caroused and all save gunshots and giants went unnoticed.

He pulled his glasses off and pocketed them, stooped and blundered his way along, and surprisingly no one stopped him. He coughed a few times for effect, channelling an oversized Bill Vittens. Blurred faces shifted along and the backs of animals shone darkly around him.

He staggered and dragged himself with his filthy bundle, feeling ridiculous, until he was across the road from the ramp to the steamboat landing. Joseph stepped up into the shade of the boardwalk in front of a store, and sat against the wall. He waited, coughing into his lapels, and when nobody called his name or accosted him, he put his glasses back on to observe.

Down at the landing, the *Reliance* was being unloaded. She sat long and white against the beach, and stevedores navigated the gangplanks with boxes and barrels. Ebenhoch sat on his horse, pointing to a cart and yelling. The horses tethered there looked at their hooves. Men rushed about him, and Ebenhoch turned his white face toward the town. Joseph shrank with a chill over his skin.

He couldn't see the man's eyes but could make out which way the head turned. Joseph waited till Ebenhoch was facing the steamship, and then he stood up and went along the wall of the store, hunched and terrified. He wouldn't be able to get near the steamer without one of the stevedores or one of Borg's crew recognizing him, and he ground his teeth against the stupid exposed place he was in. He knew the steamboat would stop at Emory Creek, four and a half miles downriver, on its return run to New Westminster and the ocean beyond.

Joseph stepped down into the muddy street and shoved his glasses back in his pocket. Wind pushed up the valley and the sky moved, a leaden blanket pulled across the mountains above. Men drifted aimless in the mud or held each other up with monotone chatter. He spat and coughed, moving along with jester's mimicry of a nameless crowdmember, something he'd never been in his life. Joseph turned a corner and went up the street away from the river, fighting the need to look over his shoulder.

Track was being laid through the centre of town. Great piles of gravel like shoddy miniature pyramids rose from the mud. Stacks of wooden ties and steel rails stood along the right of way. He approached slowly, unsure who had the contract and who might recognize him in his role of hunchback. Men in wool shirts and heavy denim spread the ballast from muleteamed carts, spitting tobacco juice and arguing. Joseph lumbered past with his heart overworked and pulsing high in his body, squinting his eyes nearly shut at them. He expected constantly a hand on his shoulder, a yell, his name being roared across the cold street.

Once past the crew, he put his glasses back on and shuffled along quicker. He looked over into the eyes of a young teenager, filthy and hollow, sitting in a doorway and watching the limp of a giant actor. They nodded at each other. The boy warped and passed blurring out of the sphere of his eyeglasses.

Joseph passed a family of Indians, wrapped in blankets and top-hatted, carrying baskets into town. They watched him with smiles of genuine mirth and he pulled his lips back to show his teeth before turning to the road in front of him.

At the stables south of town, a team of horses stood with men harnessing and hitching them to a coach. The horses shook their long heads and snorted with heads up in disdain. Joseph abandoned his affected sidle and strode to the entrance, pulling a crushed bundle of notes with care from his coat pocket.

The farrier watched his approach with mouth agape, holding a set of reins in one hand with hat tilted up off his white forehead. He spoke to the man with him and they both turned to consider this gargantuan.

Joseph spoke first. 'I need a horse.'

The stableman looked up into his face, with a line of grime across the mark of his hatband, and sweat running the dirt down his temples in dark veins. He opened his mouth and Joseph could see no white therein.

The assistant said, 'Don't know if we have none that would accommodate your frame.'

Joseph turned to him. 'I need to get to Emory Creek right away.'

'Well, this coach is leaving soon.' The assistant waved at the overbundled carriage, and then pointed at the family watching them from the shade of the stable entrance. A man and his dumpy brood, gazing at Joseph in some wonder. Joseph looked at the coach, tied haphazard and sunk in the mud with too heavy a load, and the family still waiting to board.

'I need my own horse,' he said.

The two men, young and old, heads listing in his shadow.

Joseph thrust two dollars into the assistant's hand. 'I'll leave the horse at the stables in Emory. Hurry now, please.'

'Ha, you're overpaying about a dollar and fifty cents,' said the farrier, finally voiced.

The assistant spat through his teeth and snapped his fingers, hissed at the older man, as if producing some strange music. He ran to fetch a horse while Joseph put his ragged bundle in the back of a cart and unfolded it. He counted his bible, a penny dreadful about the Australian bushranger Ned Kelly, the two photographs, some wool underclothes, two shirts, his crucifix, and a few coins. Joseph opened the bible and smoothed his remaining notes into the middle of it. He closed the bible, stacked his meagre collection and folded it all back in the old coat he carried.

The grinning assistant came out of the shadows with a sorrel mare saddled and bridled. He pushed past the family standing bunched at the doorway. The stableman walked over to the coach, took off his hat and scratched his head at the bundle of luggage, and began untying one of the many ropes. He stopped, and then came back toward Joseph.

'How tall are you, stranger?'

'I'm not sure,' said Joseph. 'Over seven feet?'



‘Haw.’ The man squinted and slowly pored over all the details of Joseph, across his shoulders and at his hands. ‘How much do you weigh? Must be a lot.’

Joseph shook his head and moved his lips around. He shrugged and then turned to the horse presented him. The young assistant presented a ledgerbook for him to sign, before lengthening the stirrups.

The mare, wheezing and lathered, delivered him to the fringes of Emory Creek. Joseph rode to the stables of the little settlement. The heavy sky had burned off and a noon sun stood overhead and warmed the eternal mud. The steamboat landing was occupied by a solitary figure in shirtsleeves and hat, pacing the dock out on the river. Emory Creek boasted a real estate office and a newspaper, both convinced of boom and prosper for the little town, and indignant towards the growth of Yale, up the valley a few miles and spreading like a disease along the bank of the river. The newspaper editor came to the door to watch Joseph plod past, and hallooed, waved. Joseph touched his hat brim and rode on.

The stables were empty as he dismounted. He dragged the mare into the gloom and tried to walk her into a stall. She snuffed and rolled her eyes and Joseph struck her bony face once and tied her to a post.

He looked around for a stablehand and called out. There were a few flies cruising the pickled hay underfoot but no other movement. Joseph stepped into the cold sunlight, stressed and weak. Sweat itched his lower back. He shrugged the coat off, called again for someone to validate his handing over of the horse.

The steamboat landing was a scow with a wooden deck. It sat low in the riffling water, connected to the shore by a gangplank sitting on floats. The man on the scow walked the length of the deck slowly. Joseph chewed his thumbnail and watched, and looked up the rivervalley for the black mess that would denote the steamer’s approach.

He squatted against the wall of the stables and put his head to the wood, closed his eyes in the sunlight with flies landing like pollen on his white shirtsleeves. A distant hammering or the thunk of an axe clocklike and soothing among the ruins of a ghost town not yet built. He felt his throat and the high thin pulse against his jaw. Stress tangible in that warm stubbled flesh.

Coalsmoke wafted between the cleft mountains like dust from some nightmare army on the march, and the pumping of an engine grew as if a drummer led them, weaponless and high-chinned down the valley. Joseph went back to the stable and untied the horse. He led her outside and stuffed his foot into the stirrup before swinging

up, both of them groaning and unbalanced. He walked the mare toward the landing, out of rhythm and miserable, thinking of his poor Clydesdale staring at the inside of a stall and waiting to die.

The mare balked at the gangplank and pirouetted in the mud with Joseph thumping her cheekbone. He slid from the saddle and cursed the animal before tying her off to a leafless alder. The heartbeat of the sternwheeler grew to a resound that bounced off the trees and rock faces, and the smoke eclipsed the northward river. Joseph stepped onto the gangway with his coat over his arm, holding his bundle of worldly possessions. He walked toward the scow, squinting to find details of the single passenger. A suitcase at the edge of the deck, and a coat folded on top of it. The cedar boards of the gangway thudded, standing bright yellow against the grey water. Halfway to the scow deck, he watched the man stop his pacing.

‘Oh God, no,’ Joseph said, for there was Hilliard turning toward him in the middle of the scow, already a hand on his holster. Joseph stopped with one leg stiff to pivot back toward shore. Hilliard began nodding and his moustache lifted.

‘I was thinking you might catch the steamboat from here,’ he said.

Joseph stood.

‘Rode down straightaway once you moved out of Mr. Borg’s house. I figured they could watch for you up that end, and I’d just wait it out in Emory Creek.’

Hilliard waved him forward.

‘Come on now, Joseph. Let’s sail together down to New Westminster. I’ll buy you a drink.’

‘Where is your horse?’

‘In the bush. They’ll hold the boat while I go get her, don’t worry.’

They watched each other, both in shirtsleeves and shaking in the cold mountain noon. Hilliard’s moustache dropped below his jaw. He pulled the gun and shook his head.

‘We always get our man, I told you that. I don’t want to shoot you.’

Joseph breathed the cold air and his face ached.

‘Come on now.’

*Could this be all I’ve managed to do with life?* thought Joseph.

He walked the remaining distance to the scow’s deck, with the mountains reaching up the sides of the wild canyon and black smoke pounding the steamship towards them somewhere up the muscled frigid river, with the police officer holding a hunk of metal that could terminate him with the thin pressure of a finger.

Hilliard scrutinized Joseph's eyes as he approached. He read nothing in the oversized things. The giant boy loomed along the gangway with his bundle and coat over his arm. He put his head down as he stepped onto the deck, and nodded with sadness pulling his face.

Hilliard's moustache lifted again. 'Smarter men than you have plumbed the depths of my resolve.'

As he began to speak further, Joseph heaved his great mass across the yellow and sweet-smelling deck, and struck Hilliard with the wide expanse of his chest so that both men scattered their bodies the few strides to the edge. Hilliard's weight was taken on the back of his head, and followed instantly by Joseph's, so that the skull contacted the wooden boards with a half-second to bounce up before being driven back down by a much greater force.

Joseph lay with his eyes closed, and then felt around the deck for his eyeglasses. He knelt up off Hilliard and crawled to the edge of the scow where the glasses were, casting twin moons of sunlight onto the wood.

He looked down with his skin crawling at the slack face with one eye half open and upturned. Joseph grabbed a wrist and heaved the man up over his shoulder. He picked up Hilliard's suitcase and coat and marched him down the gangplank to the muddy beach. Half-constructed Emory township sitting empty and silent in the winter sunlight. Joseph packed Hilliard to the newspaper office with blood seeping from the man's ears up into his hair and his arms touching Joseph's legs.

He laid the sergeant down in a slump against the building, next to the editor, who frowned at the spectacle as if already frustrated at the lack of readers to relay it to.

'Found him down at the steamboat landing,' he said, looking into the editor's knowing eyes with such depraved control in this moment that the man only nodded up at him.

Joseph waded into the bushes by the river and found Hilliard's steed pulling leaves off a bush and sniffing the air. The saddlebags were full of papers and equipment, and Joseph led the horse onto the beach and hobbled it next to his rental.

He waited in the bush until the *Reliance* came into view, sending a wash before and a tenebrous storm above. Joseph emerged from the trees and walked the muddy beach past the two horses. He stepped onto the gangplank.

The engine's pulsing slowed and the boat approached the Emory landing. Joseph shook in small fits of exhaustion. His shadow leaned across the suitcase belonging to Hilliard. He focused his drifting eyes on the clean leather, and at his own grimy bundle

next it. He touched the suitcase with the toe of his heavy boot and licked his lips, then bent down to put his coat back on.

The steamship drifted into the dock, white and boxy like a hotel dislodged by floods. Passengers looked down at him, their faces floating in and out of the dry shadows. A stevedore at the bow gestured to him with a rope. Joseph nodded and grabbed the rope end when it landed on the boards. He tied it off to a cleat and walked to the other end of the dock to do the same again. A young deckhand waved to him and stepped onto the scow.

He touched Joseph's arm and said, 'What brings you down to Emory?' and spat into the few inches of space between the steamship and the dock.

Joseph looked for the umpteenth time at the little halftown and tried smiling.

'Haven't seen ye at the Yale docks for a while, is why I ask.'

He looked down at the sailor, and showed his teeth. 'I've been in charge of a grading crew.'

They both nodded and spat together, and then Joseph pointed to his bundle down the dock.

'Well, I should get aboard.'

He turned from the boy and glanced over the boat for any recognizable faces thereupon.

The deckhand said, 'Mr. Ebenhoch didn't seem too pleased this morning.'

Joseph asked, 'Didn't he?'

He was standing with his back to the lad.

'Nope.'

Joseph stepped with grave finality onboard the *Reliance*, ogled and staring back dully. The steward took his money and gave him a ticket.

The deckhand called to him from the scow, Hilliard's suitcase at his feet, 'Your luggage.'

Joseph turned and walked back to the edge of the boat's deck.

'It's not mine,' he said.

'Whose is it?'

Joseph shrugged. He looked up into the pale township but could see neither the newspaper editor nor his charge. The horses stood looking bored on the narrow muddy beach, nodding.

'You reckon someone will claim it?' the boy said.

Joseph shuddered in the empty noon air and turned his back, carrying his bundle into the warmth of the cabin to find something to drink.

The deckhand picked up the suitcase and stood in the sun holding it, then put it back down on the dock. He marched to the cleat and unwrapped the rope. He threw it back onto the boat, walked the length of the scow to the other cleat to untie that rope so they could get underway.

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In New Westminster's evening light he hunched among the shapes watching one beating after another. His ship was to depart in two days' time, and he kept to the shadowed docks, bent and surreptitious and unravelling.

A moustached stevedore stood rolling his sleeves while bet makers hawked, and his opponent sat on a barrel whistling a monotone and staring him down. His braids hung either side of his broad chest. Joseph sat in the half gloom, arms folded on his knees and chin on his arms. He strategized the braided hair for a handle and wondered if the stevedore would do the same.

A drunkard recited, 'Three to one against the Indian,' facing away from the crowd as if practicing for the stage.

Lamplight cast their faces ghoulish and featureless in jury.

The Indian rushed low for a takedown and the stevedore caught him under the arms, a slumping wave of fat and muscle. He drove the torso sideways and isolated the man's head until he could get a fistful of hair. The Indian shoved him off and grabbed the front of the other's shirt, drove his head into the man's face, once. Twice. The stevedore collapsed and the Indian stood over him, using the torn shirt as a throttle. Joseph looked into the shadowed masks around as the Indian twisted with one hand and hammered with the other, a blacksmith forging his opponent's face into obscure shapes.

Among the crowd there stood a captain with overcoat reaching almost to his ankles and a face darkened with no reflection from his eyes. His sailors stood about him cussing and glancing into the captain's hollow face. Joseph studied them, wondering at the company he found himself in. Two police officers appeared and Joseph shrank back into his crossed arms. The officers watched the fluttering hands of the stevedore and then backed out of the orange scene.

The Indian stood heaving as men dragged the opponent away, head hanging just above the ground. A few low cheers and not much else save the muttered exchanges of

money. Joseph saw the black sky, saw a meteor burning out toward the invisible sea. He questioned his lot, to be slinking among the shadowed violence. He tried to mull over whether he deserved it, and his mind went bumping along in the dark while he rubbed his fingers together.

Joseph snored in a dockside hotel with his arms over his face as if fending off nightmares. The next night, he moped at the harbour in Victoria while watching a preliminary bout between two tanned sailors, greased and bare-chested and clinching too much to avoid having their faces marred. The crowd booed their reluctance and pelted debris at their twining backs.

A group of officers inquired their way through the docks over the two nights he had to wait there for his ship, and Joseph watched their hands lifted up and out in description of a tall man with wide shoulders. He hunched and sidled when necessary, and bent in fits of hacked coughing. As they sauntered off along the boardwalk, he grimaced and his heart pinged inside his chest, and he was hyperventilating and overcome, leaning against a stone wall for the coolness on his face.

There was a ship schedule with Chemainus listed, and he stared at the word with absolute misery. Mother and Father, fifty miles north and perhaps not to be seen again.

In the morning they lined up to board an enormous steamship, bound for points south. San Francisco, with service to Hawaii, Japan, the Philippines, Australia. Joseph had wrangled a cheap suitcase from a dockside vendor of such late necessities, and his meagres were stored within. He carried what cash he had, wore his heavy black coat and hat. He loomed over the travellers and sighed at the grey choppy water and the barnacles. Gulls lingered and wailed at the stevedores and perched like shabby regals atop the wharf piles.

‘Name?’ The steward blinked behind the kind of eyeglasses Joseph wished he could wear, thin and secretarial, rather than the antediluvian blocks of glass on his face.

‘Name?’

‘Yes sir. Your name.’

His warped eyes roved, and the steward recognized instantly the performance of a self-christening before regeneration via sea.

‘George Vittens.’

The steward dipped his quill and scratched the logbook, nodding. ‘One piece of luggage.’

Joseph smiled.

*'Bon voyage,'* said the steward, looking past Joseph's arm to the next in line.

# THREE

Glenrowan, 1880.

Grey light began to expose the singular trees and individual structures. Paul Richard sat down on the crate outside his tent with black tea in a tin cup. His moustache touched his jaw when he moved his mouth and if it tickled him he would scratch his face furiously and scratch his legs or clench his fists and look for something to punch.

The foreman's boots shuffled out of the next tent, digging in the pebbled earth, and with a hiss he farted in the cold air before standing up. He stretched his stubby arms and stomped to get the boots comfortable.

'Morning, Richard.'

Paul spat in the dirt and thrust his chin at the foreman they called Dutch. 'Yeah.'

'It is goddamn freezing out here. You lot are going to have to work up a sweat to beat it.'

Paul breathed in through his nose and felt the sharp air touch his brain. It felt like snow. Across the railroad, the town was opening its doors to the fog. Lanterns were lit and dogs barked. The mist circled them and ghosted the trees.

'Come on, get up!' The foreman began to beat the few tents with a stick, and Paul reached inside his own and shook the foot there – Oslo, his room-mate, a devout but churchless Roman Catholic who was jealous of Paul's French-Canadian background. Oslo kicked until he hit Paul's hand.

They came to a slow start when it was so cold, and by eight o'clock no one had picked up a thing. They were blowing into their hands and stamping while the porridge shot steam and the billycan had a mist around it.

'Oh, for God's sake,' Dutch moaned as he paced, but they knew he was in no hurry for them to begin work. The only time they were meant to really look busy was the passing of a train or a visit from the railway authority. The crew was made up of parolees and low-risk convicts. A few came on for honest employment, but soon left to find it elsewhere when their possessions got rifled through or they were bullied by a crew member focused on maintaining hierarchy. As it was, Paul Richard was considered the worst of the lot and none of the men would begin work until he groaned and picked up a shovel or told someone else to. Even Dutch, a guard-cum-foreman, let Paul alone and went carefully when asking him to do anything.



Paul ate first; he took more bacon than the others and if he couldn't have two cups of tea out of what was made, then someone would forfeit theirs. He longed for coffee and disliked tea so much that he drank it in gulps and denied it to the other men.

They sat around the fire eating and muttering, a six-man crew not including the foreman, sent along the line north from Benalla to ballast the gravel around stations and curves. Not always six, but often. If someone was sent up from Melbourne to join them, Dutch might retire the least favourite and thereby maintain the small number and low expectation of work produced. Perkins had been sent back to Melbourne with the ranger because he was an invert and frowned during crude conversations.

Dutch took out his watch and looked across at the little town to see if they were being observed. 'Come on Richard,' he said finally, 'I'd like to get *some* Jesus-loving work done today.'

'Leave Frenchie alone, would you?' said Oslo the hopeful. 'He'll get the job done.'

'Shut your mouth. I'm not even French. I'm Canadian.'

Oslo spat in the fire and the rest laughed at him. 'Don't laugh,' he flared. 'It was the French who settled Canada in the first place.'

The men around the fire guffawed or fell silent and studied their worn boots. Paul looked at Oslo without turning his scarred face. He looked until Oslo met his eyes, and continued unblinking until the other glanced away. He stared at the side of Oslo's head until his eyes became dry with smoke and cold and he had to blink. He wanted to lean over and hit the man, but his moustache touched his face and he scrubbed at his cheek with his teeth clenched instead.

Farms, fields, horses, dogs, scrappy cows. Australia. The grey-green-leaved trees which refused to die and their wood iron-hard and white barked. Everywhere he'd been in this colony looked the same. Not dry, not necessarily red-earthed and crawling with heat vapour, for he hadn't seen that side of it. What he had seen was an endless depth of similar trees with small leaves and green that became ridiculous in its vibrancy. Odorous eucalypts. A face full of sweat half the year, and swirling with aching wind the other half. The land wore greens that refused to shrivel or turn so that seasons meant nothing more than temperature and difference in winds. Bushfires threatened from November to February, and July in the middle of winter was a miserable wet almost-freeze, or it could be a perfection of soft clouds and clownish blue, the kind of cold that inspired outdoor work for one never broke a sweat from light to dark. But it was that green, whether tinged pewter or a luminescent almost-yellow, that constant dusty

verdant stupidity that wore him down. He wanted to watch the trees shrivel and die and then bloom forth, like the maples that haunted his dreams. He couldn't see the subtle and busy season-changes in flora and fauna all around him year after year for he was waiting for the North American version, the powerful white and all-destroying winter and the lush pollen-plump juiciness of late spring. Instead, he decided on irreverence and hatred for a land that refused to display its changes to him personally.

Paul's chewing and his grinding brain snuffed his eyes for the time-being while he ate. But always the chomping teeth and swallowing of his companions bloomed inside him so that the tiny respite from his anger soon cancelled itself out, and he stared around him at the busy throats, at the sparse long neck hairs bumping up and down against pasty skin, and he began almost to pant.

His was an anger that exploded outward, and perhaps he was fortunate for that (of course those around him were not fortunate), unlike his brother Joseph who experienced only anger in-guided and wore the annoyance of others inward also, as Joseph was always willing to say or think, 'Yes, my thick glasses are annoying, my hugeness is freakery and therefore despicable,' and so therefore never willing to turn the anger outward, but to absorb spongelike the annoyance of strangers. Paul carried his anger forward like a sabre at the end of a rigid unshaking arm or a lantern with a fixed beam. When he first saw bushfires, saw the sky painted a wet black and a greasy brown and saw trees exploding as cattle burst stomach-first in the white heat, he began to nod his head as those around him beat with wet sugar bags at the margins of the fire. The bushfire was something he could understand, even empathize with in its consummation and indiscriminate lashing-out, as a boy will see a battleship and think not of the men hither and thither on her decks but only of her, the ship anthropomorphized into a beautiful carnivore for his respect and fantasy.

Paul was fortunate in that. His anger was never for himself, except self as guidance. Guided by his mind but capable, like a blinkered horse, of only a certain range of focus and that never capable in itself of turning back to its origin, but forever pushing forward, the horse that will make nine miles an hour all day long, or the sabre or the lantern with its fixed beam.

'Tomorrow,' he said, 'I'm going to Jones' hotel for breakfast and I am not emerging until there is mashed food coming out of my mouth.'

'Ah, yes,' they said remembering that it was Saturday. Already late starting work, and a clear sky waiting above the mist.

Large Bob said, 'I'll eat in Wangaratta after church.'

‘Oh, let’s do that,’ said Oslo with his unconscious glance at Paul. ‘They have coffee!’

Dutch ahemmed and coughed as he collected their random bowls and plates, stepping between them.

‘Alright, Dutch,’ Paul hissed and spat through his teeth into the fire. ‘We get it.’

‘Will you eat after church with us tomorrow?’ Oslo asked as he stood too near Paul’s face. Paul jumped up, towered to his full sinewy height, and stumbled back over his crate, already rocking bodily with each thump of his heart. ‘To hell with your breakfast,’ he shouted, ‘and to hell with your church.’

‘What did,’ Oslo began, ‘... what?’

Paul marched off and grabbed an iron pike out of the wagon, hefted it to find the balance, and hurled it spear-like at one of the tents. The pike gathered the canvas around it and flapped the tent to the ground, billowing as it collapsed with a hole through it, and the pike lying in the dirt.

He sat that night outside his tent as the sticks of white wood spat and curled in flakes around fading red hearts. His pipe bobbed as he inhaled and his moustache and nose faintly glowed from the bowl. There was still a band of sky left over the fluffy trees and birds called in fear or loneliness or simply for noise.

‘Think I just broke my toe,’ said Large Bob as he materialized out of the night song. ‘Fuck, my boot’s getting tight.’ He sat on a barrel and stared at his foot for a minute. ‘You worked up a sweat today, there, Paul.’

Paul took the pipe from his mouth and squirted a hissing venom into the diminished fire. ‘Someone had to.’

Bob spat in the fire himself. ‘Not really.’

They looked at each other sidelong and Paul smiled. Bob blinked and his head moved back in a small flinch.

Insectcloud night around them and punctuated snoring behind. The smoke came away in thin lines like souls might.

‘Think you’ll ever go back to Canada?’

‘Canada. Huh – where I come from was barely called that when I left. I’m from British Columbia.’

Large Bob looked at the fire and at him and at the fire because he didn’t know how to proceed without perhaps ruining the conversation. ‘Ah. So,’ and he nodded at the fire.

‘So, *Bob*, British Columbia joined in ’71. It’s been part of Canada for less than ten years and Canada being something to be part of not much longer than that.’

‘Really?’

‘We’ve been there a long time, the French and English and other bastards from old Europe but it was until recently separate colonies like your fine continent here is,’ and he drew his pipe across the entire night as if that reach would then move outward of its own volition and touch all the shores. ‘Far as I know, the whole middle of it still belongs to the goddamn fur traders and Indians on the buffalo hunt.’ He shook the pipe over each shoulder and scooped firesmoke over his head and hummed something chantlike with his eyes closed. ‘Your blackfellows have shamans among them, Bob?’

‘I don’t know what those blackfellows do.’

‘You should.’ He looked at the other man. ‘You goddamn should.’ And he lifted his sharp heel and brought it down hard beside the foot that Bob was being ginger with.

Bob had fought the urge to yank his foot back and was glad for it.

Paul brayed at him and began refilling his pipe.

On his upper arm he carried in murky bruised ink the letters

M.G.

MDCCCLXXVIII

He had been detained in 1878 and put in Melbourne Gaol. For the first month, he was terrified. The gallows stood at one end of the prison hallway, open and visible whenever he was marched past. The trapdoor and the long iron handle waited for the hangman’s touch. There was a thick beam with the middle worn by the rope, and men would see themselves kicking and silent in the void below the trapdoor.

When a prisoner was moved in and out of solitary confinement, he wore a humiliation hood of white calico. Paul would watch the clanking procession and see the little eyeholes turning in the centre of that empty mask, as if seeking comfort and finding only repulsion in the staring eyes of the regular prisoners.

Eventually Paul realized his own amount of strength in the willingness to survive. He adapted to discipline and his animal functions; once he renounced control he began to almost appreciate the idea that his life was doled to him in routine.

He entertained the guards and inmates with stories of the Canadian wilderness. If Paul’s stories were combined, he had escaped the clutches of drooling grizzly bears

twice, outrun a lynx and a cougar, having turned and stabbed the latter through the neck, fought a pack of wolves off his half-eaten and bleating horse in the middle of a blizzard, seen the Queen herself disembarking a ship in the Victoria harbour, and slain an Indian by caving his head in with a rock. The last story was true, and the first few times he told it, Paul surprised himself by being able to do so without shivering or sweating, only by mixing it in with so many lies.

The first night he'd told it, he had just finished describing the rotten-meat stench of a grizzly's breath as it roared into his face, mortally wounded and fading in the heavy woods with blood soaking its fur.

'What about Indians?' asked one weepy-eyed boy who had been put in gaol for raping his sister.

Except for the clanging footfalls of guards on the iron walkway, the echoing storeys carried his voice uninterrupted and adhered to by a willing audience. He realized he could tell it with almost an erotic excitement, a sinful catharsis made all the more powerful for its nil effect on his safety. Safety? He was already behind bars.

Confession? He was already behind a thick wooden bolted riveted door, reinforced with brown iron, looking through the eyehole face-sized in the middle of that door that creaked and moaned, and boomed throughout his thick tiny cell so that each locking entry was a new damnation.

There was nothing to fear in telling it, and the first time, his voice choked with the relief of it, the telling.

He had been down at the river in late summer and the chilling air was full of mosquitoes and flying termites. The water ran over rocks that shifted year after year and were swept along by the snowmelt from the mountains in massive power, and the river's very path would change and warp. Paul would swim all summer until he had the river's image imprinted like a lithograph on his mind, then he'd return in the spring once the waters had receded and find that it looked nothing like that river he'd left half a year ago.

He smiled through his teeth at his listeners as a low moan or a jangling of keys came through the echoing silence. Then he described the half-rotten trees and logs either side of the river, salmon and trout skeletons, Indian nets crumbling in the white summer heat.

Paul told them he had been down at the river every dusk with his rifle hunting for one bear he'd seen gorging on salmon. His audience pictured enormous grizzlies

with foaming jaws and knife-claws the length of a hand, but Paul had only ever seen or heard of the small rotund black bears on the island.

He described spotting the bear, poised on a rock with its legs drawn close together, balancing. Paul made his way through the blackberries and little trees, and the bear couldn't hear him over the water's chortling. He brought his rifle up slowly, aimed the bear down, the beast's head stretched forward as it studied movement below the surface. Paul closed an eye and laid his sight behind the bear's ear, focused deep into the lustre of its black pelt. The plump bear was immobile, posed as if in agreement to Paul's right to end his lonely existence, and Paul touched the cold trigger, began to press his finger into it, when a spear came sailing across his vision and sank into the bear's neck.

'Out of nowhere! Right into his God damned neck!' Paul pounded on his door and whooped, and the sound carried up to the gallows and back down that long stone and iron corridor of little stone and iron rooms.

What he wasn't telling them, the truth, was that an Indian, crouched with a rifle trained on the black bear, was quietly surprised by Paul coming through the blackberries behind him with a rifle aimed at his face, saying in a whisper, 'You just ease up, Jack, you just ease up and let me have this one,' and the Indian's eyes so white that they looked ready to come out of his face, even as the barrel came closer unshaking and smooth, betraying Paul's sightless travel over the rocks toward him, rather like the rifle was on a smooth track guided in steady flow until it touched his hairless cheek and so forced him to rebalance on his far foot or be pushed over by the machinelike gliding of the cold barrel. He unhammered his own rifle and tilted the barrel up with his boiled egg eyes on Paul's thorn-scratched and bleeding face.

'That's it, that's it,' Paul soothed as he reached for the rifle and put his foot on it, pressing it gently onto the rocks and crushing the Indian's fingers until he pulled his hand away.

'Shh, hush now,' Paul whispered. He moved crouching to where exactly the Indian had been and set his sights identically on the spot, almost the same hair follicles even, on the bear's black neck.

When the rifle cracked and the bear dropped forward into the moving water, they both hollered and ran together after the black body really not much larger than a cow's calf.

And here the two stories came back together in Paul's remembering truthfulness, his confession almost honest again.

He and the Indian raced each other to get to the bear, to drag it from the river before it could be pulled into the deeper, stronger current just downstream, knowing that neither one of them would be going home with meat or a pelt if they couldn't pull the animal out in time.

They jumped in the painful cold of the river and caught the bear out of the water, and dragged it over the rocks so that only its hind paws were still in. They were both laughing in a serious manner, for they knew that there had been a violation. A violation of right and ownership over the kill. Paul watched Jack unsheathe his hunting knife to give thanks and to release the bear's spirit. He grabbed the man's arm and they argued, one frantic over the quality of the pelt and the other frantic over the ceremony, the offering. Paul shook Jack's arm to try and release the knife, and his eyes drilled in dark void at the other man's face. The Indian's eyes whirled and he tried to jump away from Paul's grip and his intent shaking. Paul latched onto him in an embrace, pinning his arms to his sides in a horrible intimacy on the wet rocky sand of the river's edge.

The Indian threw Paul over his hip and Paul spun away, falling back and hitting his head on the rocks, so that he had a coppery taste in his mouth, that flavour that comes when one is almost knocked unconscious. Sparks floated all through his vision, and he struggled to regain his feet, the whole while watching Jack advance on the bear with his big Indian knife in hand.

Here Paul slowed in his telling, methodical but his voice drifting so they who were listening leaned forward, as if a few inches would improve the sound quality or the detail of the words.

'I had to stop him, he was really going to butcher that pelt, I've seen it. I don't recall grabbing a rock or even thinking about it.'

Paul watched his black hair moving back and forth and his silly collared shirt that was too big for him, and he suddenly felt sick watching the fingers go beneath the fur of that wet dead animal, with the blood so red between the white rocks. He couldn't stand knowing those entrails were going to be exposed, to come out. He wanted to walk home and get his father and explain that he couldn't touch the bear, and ask him to help gut it and pull it home on the hunting sled. He only remembered wanting Jack to stop.

'There was a hollow sound. How to describe it? When you hit two large rocks together underwater. A game we played as children.'

Here his voice broke apart and became damp until he swallowed quickly a few times, and continued almost in a drunken slur, slow and weak. 'The sound rocks make when you hit them. And it was over.'

His voice trickled through the small door-window and barely any further. The men across the hall had their faces pressed hard to their own windows and the guard was leaned against Paul's door.

'The two mammals lain across each other like an offering. I was offering nothing. I don't remember the rock. I cannot recall accepting into my hands a rock or bringing it over his head or releasing it. How can you not remember that decision? But I could not, and I still do not nor will I ever.'

And then he laughed, a dry bark that ripped the air and hid his gasped sob behind it. The bark fluctuated down the hall, the three levels, the close stone and the banging iron, and he barked again to refill the sound, to allow him one more sob behind it.

But even then, he was disgusted with himself for confessing, and his anger came lashing up in the cell, and he ground his teeth and rubbed his knuckles against the stone.

The guard finally said, 'Okay, Richard, that's enough,' more a mutter than a command.

The men leaned hanging on the vanished words and pressed their faces still to the stone or left them emerged in those square face-windows, like a gallery of portraits done oversized and with the thickest frames possible. A gallery of men petulant or hard and blank, smooth-cheeked or grizzled, some merely over the tipping point where boyhood becomes somehow manhood, tipped yet still rocking, as a glass not quite ready to fall and shatter, but already pouring liquid onto the table, might with the loss of even half an ounce decide to lean back and become upright again; these men could find themselves behind bars and then decide to lean back into boyhood and petulance, a fearful nightmare for them who realized too late that they were not ready for this adult punishment of their un-adult behaviours.

On the other end, the long-shattered glasses collecting dust and left unswept, long after the spilled liquid has evaporated or been milled over and taken away in crystallized sugary particles by ants, so that any sweetness or colour is removed and only the empty vessel with its edges and dust remains. These men, accustomed to prison life and uncomprehending the want of anything else, perhaps recipients of the ultimate justice, to be so removed from the world as to renege it, also remained pressed to their portrait frames in the wooden doors. Some were relieved to have a young storyteller among them with his odd accent, some merely attentive of the movement outside their cells and enthralled, as a baby who cannot focus his eyesight yet jiggles in the arms of a woman who takes him from room to room, seeking out the brightest things to show him.



This again another ultimate justice, to be brought cyclical through life and have spurned the opportunities given, and therefore return to that helpless jiggling and reaching for the bright unfocused objects, carried through the rooms by a system, a nameless matriarch.

Paul, blindly exhausted after a confession far too late, was already sitting on his pallet bed and kicking impotently in struggle to remove the leather slippers before he fell asleep, unable to even attempt to pull the stiff blanket out from under his body and wrap it around himself.

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The warden had received a telegraph from Canada exonerating Paul Richard. Paul did not know this. He was allowed, however, as a result of good behaviour and for showing a penchant for labour, to join a gravel-crew working up from Melbourne toward the New South Wales border, following the railway and maintaining it, ballasting it with gravel where the pressure of the trains was too much. His anger followed him, led him.

And now Paul sat by the fire in Glenrowan. He spat a brown arc into the hissing sticks and sucked at his moustache. Large Bob faced the night blindly and moved his injured foot back and forth in the pointy boot. He was not afraid of Paul at all times, but was wary of him.

Paul looked out into the blackening birdcalled night, remembering the clicking rocks on the riverbed as the purple dusk became colourless and his skin prickled in the gusty downstream airwash. After he'd killed the Indian, he had dragged the slack body into the thin bushes, laid him, even rolled him once, in underneath the blackberries and absorbed more thin bleeding scratches across his face so it bore almost a sloppy grid. He touched the bear to see if he could drag it into the bushes, but that one touch of stiff wet fur sent him leaping back and wringing his hand as if burned.

After his confession to those strangers, he turned away from the memory and never spoke of it again.

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They stepped into the hotel with Paul in the lead, taking his hat off and sizing up the few men in the place. He swung a long leg over a chair and sat down. Large Bob and Oslo sat in the other chairs and looked sheepish. One of the local Irish came in, walked

to the bar and leaned muttering with the bartender, who took down three bottles and handed them over. The local man touched his hat brim and turned to leave.

‘When do we get service like that?’ asked Paul.

The bartender looked over and the local stood in the middle of the room. Paul stood up. ‘We’re fixing your God damned railroad and you ignore us every time we come into your rat piss hotel.’

He thrust his chin and Large Bob hung his head, looking sideways in case anyone moved toward Paul.

‘Calm down sir, I’ll be right there to serve you,’ said the bartender.

The local man carefully put down the bottles on a close table and smiled at Paul. ‘You a navvy, then?’ he asked.

Paul turned to him and Oslo put his hand up, unnoticed.

‘My family has been in these ranges for three generations,’ the local said. ‘I don’t need to wait when I come in here.’

Paul spat on the wood floorboards nowhere near a cuspidor and turned to the bartender.

‘Well?’ he said. ‘Where’s the menu?’

The bartender came away from the bar and crossed the room to their table. He nodded a few times to the local man, who smirked at the table of workers.

‘What, McCullough, that it? Used to be more gumption in ye than that,’ he said.

Paul swung his leg over the chair and stepped toward the man.

‘Who’s to tell him he has no sand? We’re his customers.’ Paul said.

The local laughed sharp in the pensive room and tipped his hat brim off his white forehead. Dark hair stuck in coils to the skin.

He said, ‘You’ve got character, I’ll give you that.’

Paul stepped toward him still, a slow reckoning. The man glanced at the door and touched one of the bottles.

‘However,’ he said, ‘my cousin may not enjoy hearing your opinions on local hospitality.’

‘Your cousin,’ said Paul.

The local man picked up the three bottles and smiled at Paul as one would a child working through an equation on a chalkboard.

‘My cousin Ned,’ he said.

‘What do I care about your cousin?’

‘He keeps an eye on the district. So to speak.’

‘What, Ned Kelly?’

‘The one. Yes.’

Paul watched his eyes awhile. The man stood matching Paul’s gaze and holding his bottles.

‘That who those are for?’ Paul said.

‘Now now,’ said the local. ‘You think I’d give up that kind of information?’

‘Well,’ Paul said, turning away and then catching the man’s eyes again. ‘If your cousin was in the area, you tell him his old friend is here.’

The local pursed his lips and then cleared his throat. He looked at the window, at the men sitting alone and listening.

‘And who is that?’ He spoke low and looked at the floor behind Paul.

‘Paul Richard,’ he said. ‘Good mate of his.’

‘Oh. He’d know you by name, would he?’

Paul yanked up his sleeve and showed the man his murky tattoo. He shook the arm in the man’s face.

‘You tell him his friend is in Glenrowan. I heard a few things in Melbourne Gaol that he’d like to know.’

The man looked at his arm as if he weren’t very interested. Paul pulled his sleeve down and shrugged.

‘Who knows,’ he said. ‘He may want to visit. You know where we are.’

The man picked up his bottles and looked them over as if unsure of their contents. He turned to the bartender and said, ‘McCullough, good day.’ He walked out of the hotel into the muddy street.

Paul returned to the table and sat down. He looked up at the turkey neck of the bartender and said, ‘Eggs, bacon, whatever you’ve got.’

He watched the hat of the local man pass the window. Paul sat looking at the bright sky outside, and he smiled, thinking for the first time in a long while about his brother Joseph. Joseph with his cheap thriller books about outlaw Jesse James and bushranger Ned Kelly. And here he was, sitting in a hotel where Kelly was known.

Paul woke in the freezing night and listened to huffing outside. The tent canvas was light under the moon and he looked up at it while he puzzled on where he was. Someone hissed his surname. He snored once and yawned, and then pushed the wool blanket off so that cold air sat all along his skin while he scrambled for his shirt and coat.

Paul crouched and put his boots on unlaced, breathing nasally with his eyes heavy. He pawed the tent flaps open and saw legs black against the other tents in the moonlight. He covered his face with an arm and launched to his feet, expecting to be struck.

He stood confounded in the bitter night, surrounded by sentinel figures like a trapped fairybook troll. His scars veined deep across the blue illumined skin and his long underwear made him look stump-legged and deformed.

‘Who is it?’ he said.

They shifted with creaks of leather and turned from him as one, sidling in file away from the tents. He counted three men if that they were, and skewered his face at the reasoning of the scene.

They reached horsebodies in the mist, past the white cocoons where his fellows snored warmly. Paul stood shaking and breath plumed from his mouth. The moon was huge in the spackled darkness. Paul looked around himself and shrugged at no-one.

‘Come and see your friend,’ one of the dark riders muttered.

They stood next to the mounts and none moved that he could see. Paul knelt and reached into the tent for his felt hat and kicked his boots off to step into his heavy work pants. He laced the boots back on, feeling for the shoddy piece of armory folded into his knapsack. It was a cap and ball operation that he’d never used, but he took some comfort in its weight.

They had a horse for him, and he stepped up into the saddle, looking around at the men and the smoking mouths of the horses. One of the riders presented a kerchief and began folding it, handed it to Paul. He nodded his chin at Paul and gestured for him to put it on as a blindfold.

Paul sat looking at them but they gave him no further direction or option. He tied the kerchief around his head, and heard someone snap their fingers in front of his face. He couldn’t see anything save a moonlit saddle and his own hands when he looked down.

They filed out and his horse rocked along with them, with the cold wind biting at his neck and fatigue making him shake.

The group rode in silence through a world of two shades. The cosmos winked, shot through with white lines that faded out. Treeshadows lay black under the hooves and the horses clopped the dirt and grass with a spotlight moon pointing over the hills.

‘What’s the idea here?’ Paul said. ‘Kelly around here? Is that it?’

He wasn't afraid of their number or the silence which bore them along the road, but he was wary in the way of a feral scavenger, wanting to understand the appetites of his fellows. They rode un-answering and he spat and pulled his jacket closed at the throat.

Once away from town, his horse lurched and he grabbed at the reins, as they all broke into gallop without any signal that Paul could hear. They thudded along in the glowing and sparse field. The men rode up into the foothills and wove among trees, silent except mouth clicks and a few git ups at the horses. The dense bloomed trees hid them from the moon so that they rode in and out of the light, a flickering of horse rumps and bleached hats.

Up in the ranges were boulders and snaking roots in detail, blue and unreal in the clear night. The riders crossed a plot of open land and stopped. Someone told Paul he could remove the blindfold and he did. They had come to a dense shack, a hut of layered armour made of slabs and bark, planks, hides, all manner of flora and fauna integument.

Paul looked throughout the clearing and could see nothing save the shelter and his few fellows. They dismounted and he watched them, sitting his horse woodenly and measuring his environs. Smoke rose untouched by any wind, a pole of white that grew straight up from the crooked chimney and disintegrated somewhere above them.

The riders drifted into the hut and Paul sat alone in the glowing night with shadows cut from black cloth laid out on the soft earth. He looked at his own horseshadow. He yawned and lifted his leg out of the stirrup, slid off the horse. He hobbled it although it stood motionless like the others.

Paul walked to the hut and looked at the perpendicular line of orange light. He reached for the leather handle and pulled the door open, then stepped into the warm light of the room.

Kelly sat at a thick crooked table, nodding up at him. Paul had been in the presence of men who seemed to control the climate around them and this was the case again. The air felt taken up by Kelly and even a few paces away Paul wanted to lean back from the man. He felt a discomfort and a gnawing that he could not place, as indistinct as the sadness brought on by intense physical pain.

He stepped forward and put his hand out. Kelly stood up and sniffed, and rubbed his hands on his pants. Paul was a head taller but did not feel it. He took his hat off and touched his moustaches, looked at the other men now that he could see them in the lamplight.

He recognized none of them, and they seemed uninterested in him outside of politeness.

‘Well, this is as good a place as any,’ Paul said.

Kelly sat down and looked up at him, his eyes slightly out of alignment and still calculating. He pushed a chair out with his boot and nodded at it.

Paul sat down rubbing his hands, and smiled at Ned.

‘I don’t know you at all,’ Kelly said.

‘Aye,’ said Paul. ‘I was in Melbourne with some of your friends. Your mother too.’

Ned winced at that, and Paul raised his hands, and then put them back on his lap.

Kelly said, ‘My cousin told me two things. That you are rude. And you claim to know something I don’t.’

The two men sat looking at each other, neither even close to thirty years old and both weary and scarred, doyens strategizing inwardly.

‘Let me help you,’ Paul said.

One of the men coughed and scraped his boots on the floor.

‘Be quiet,’ said Kelly.

‘Help you? Who is this joker?’ the cougher said.

Paul turned to him and stared. ‘I will gut you, and show you the results as you fade,’ he said to the man’s downturned eyes.

‘Alright,’ said Kelly. ‘Enough of that.’

Paul kept his eyes on the forehead of the man. He sucked his teeth and then turned back to Kelly.

‘There are police spies all over north-eastern Victoria,’ said Paul.

‘I’m aware of that.’

Paul nodded. ‘I work with one. On the railway. He reports to Benalla headquarters. I caused that scene in the pub so that word would get to him about it.’

‘Why would you do that,’ said Kelly.

‘He reports on all the comings and goings of your—’ he waved his hand, ‘—friends. And he gets paid for it. When your cousin showed up, I figured I could maybe get a chance to speak with you, find out what you want and don’t want known. He’d believe anything I tell him.’

He looked at the bottles on the wood slab table, two empty and one less than half. Kelly looked at them and scratched his neck.

‘There are more police spies chasing their tails than I care to hear about,’ said Kelly. ‘I’m not interested in telling or not telling you anything. You’re here because I want to hear about Melbourne Gaol. It would be in your best interest to have genuine information regarding that topic.’

‘Ah, well.’ Paul leaned on the table and nodded at the half empty bottle, then looked to his host.

Ned sat watching him. One of the others stood and reached for the bottle, and Kelly moved his head, and the man sat back down and smirked at Paul with his eyebrows raised.

The room stunk of sweat and kerosene. It was warm but thin lines of cold air poured through the cracks between sheet metal and treebark. Shadows sat heavy against their clothes, and their faces were obscured by beardgrowth.

Paul said, ‘I can’t say much for the hospitality in this area of the world.’

They sat immobile watching him.

Paul sneered and crossed his arms, breathing with his mouth open and sweat on his forehead.

‘Fine, fine,’ he said. ‘They’re not going to let your mother free. No matter what negotiations you offer up, they’re bent on bringing you in. And keeping her there.’

‘Some of the sympathizers have been let go,’ one of the men said.

‘That’s to draw you out.’

‘And my mother? You saw her in the prison—did you speak to her?’

Paul shrugged.

Kelly leaned forward and put his forearms on the table. His fists were under Paul’s face.

‘What do you know about my mother?’ he said through his teeth.

Paul looked down at the fists. He sat thinking and then looked away.

‘You’ve been robbing banks. Must have some of that money floating around,’ he said to the wall. ‘Loosens the tongue, it does.’

‘Get him out of here,’ Kelly said, leaning back and looking in the opposite direction.

The men moved fluidly to each side of Paul and lifted him by his armpits as he stared down at Ned. He shrugged free and brought his fists up till they gave him space to leave the shack on his own. The men filed out behind him. Paul bent to un-hobble his horse, expecting the heavy strike of a boot to his head as he knelt between the hooves. He stood and climbed into the saddle, looking at the other riders as they again led their

horse silent across the clearing and into the soft drifting branches. He turned and looked at the little hut with its white line of smoke and the orange slit of doorglow.

‘Turn around and forget that sight,’ one of the men said to him, as he tied Paul’s blindfold roughly, twisting it in his hair. ‘Don’t bother trying to come back up here. We’re known to move around.’

Paul rode in file sightless and concentrating on sound. One man rode ahead of him and two behind. He listened for a cocking hammer, for a clink of steel, anything that would allow him to know his fate. He felt the shifting body of the horse under him, and he sat rocking and breathing in darkness until the horse started negotiating a downward slope out of the ranges, and he tightened his legs and leaned back in the saddle.

They moved through the glowing tree world, the white orbs of rock. They sunk into the low mist of the fields and clopped along the quiet road into Glenrowan, and stopped.

‘That’s the last time you’re trusted in these parts, friend,’ one of the riders said.

Paul clawed the kerchief off his face, left it tied at his neck. He spat and didn’t say anything. They rode forward through town and reached the little camp tents, white and angular in the liquid mist. Paul slid from the horse. He turned and looked at each rider as they moved around him. They wheeled slowly and faded back into the fogged night. Paul stood shivering and watched until he could see no mark of horse or shadow, and then he stepped off a few paces and pissed steaming against a tree. He sniffed and spat again on the ground. Then he found his tent and knelt to crawl back inside.

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On the railway siding, they shovelled gravel off a flatbed car in the waning light. Paul stretched his back and looked around.

‘Where the hell is Gibson?’ he said.

Dutch walked over to the flatbed and stood below the men as gravel fanned down around his boots. He took out his watch and glanced at it, rubbed the face and put it back in his pocket.

‘I let him quit early.’

‘What did you do that for?’ Paul stabbed his shovel blade at the deck of the car.

‘This has to be done tonight, idiot.’

Dutch pulled the watch out again. ‘I suppose I can help.’



Paul looked at the pile behind him and shook his head. He hit the shovel on the deck twice as though gaveling for silence.

The others worked in bentbacked repetition and small birds whipped through the hued cooling air around them. Paul took a shovelful of gravel and thrust it at Dutch so that he had to step back from the car.

‘That’s enough, Richard,’ he said. He walked off to the camp and came back with a shovel in hand.

‘Where is he, anyway?’ Paul said.

‘He had an appointment in Benalla.’ Dutch climbed up onto the flatbed and propped the shovel against his chest while he unbuttoned and rolled up his sleeves.

They toiled in silence as the sky darkened and chilled, and orange lights grew in windows of the little town. The smell of smoke drifted down the railway track and spawned in most of them thoughts of home, of warmth and family gone.

These men were each single and alone save each other, and they were not a group who sought each other’s company. The common sentiments were dislike and tolerance, and loneliness. The locals were guarded and polite with no young women among them interested in the ballast workers, recent convicts and waywards that they were. Paul’s stature and flowing moustaches stood him out, and he labored to maintain his hygiene in their dismal camp, with his Sunday clothes strung between two gum trees and furling in the green air. At a glance he was appealing, but his posture was rigid and forced as if the result of a doctor’s counsel and not an impression of his character. The scars on his face were as self-inflicted as not, and he looked at others with an apathy that seethed.

Paul knew Gibson was making his police reports as the rest of the crew worked. He’d be sitting in someone’s office with a snifter of brandy or treated at the tavern by an officer in plainclothes.

Paul was angry also that Kelly wanted nothing to do with him. He’d assumed his own impression, that his strength and worth would be reckoned instantly by men all. He tried to unfocus, to soften his eyes when he was speaking to women, but he would grow bored or be angered by some imagined slight and his eyes would recede into a glassy darkness, and his interviewee may as well be reading from a Latin bible for all the weight he gave her words.

Down the tracks from where they worked was a dog carcass with ribs exposed and flyspecked.

‘Poor dog,’ said Large Bob when he spotted the deceased.

‘More police antics,’ Dutch said. He stopped the minimal shovelling he’d been doing.

‘Oh it’s true,’ he said, ‘the constabulary poisons dogs so they’re not setting the alarm when they do their night riding and sneaking around the district.’

They looked to Paul and Paul told Dutch to shut up his foolishness.

‘Why do you figure every second dog is muzzled?’ Dutch said. ‘I’ve got it on authority. The dogs are fed strychnined meat and the police can sneak up on houses in the night without everyone inside diving for rifles and firepokers.’

Oslo stood beside Dutch and rested a boot on the blade of his shovel, leaning his chin on the butt of the handle.

He pursed his lips and said, ‘The whole Murray District is choc a bloc with Kelly gang sympathizers.’

Paul ground his teeth and fought against a lust for kicking the blade of Oslo’s shovel as hard as he could. Oslo looked with grave secrecy at the men around him.

‘There are police spies about as well. Apparently it pays well. I’d rather claim that £8,000 reward for myself but I’d take a steady police paycheque.’

‘You’d take a steady Victorian railway paycheque if you did some God damned work,’ Paul said.

Oslo looked at him with the vacancy of expected violence, unmoving and tense.

‘Get back to work,’ Paul roared.

They jumped collectively and he drove the shovelblade deep into the gravel pile.

A Cobb & Co. stagecoach came creaking along out of town and the driver further shielded his eyes past the wide brim of his hat though it was overcast and no reminiscence of summer. As though he realized this he dropped his hand.

‘Any mail to go out?’ he called.

Dutch glanced at the scowling Paul and let his shovel clatter down from the flatcar. He crouched and dropped after it and approached the mailcoach, dusting his hands on his trousers.

He spoke to the driver, who looked about and laughed. Dutch tipped his cabbage tree hat to a woman in bonnet and frilled dress sitting inside the coach with a small boy. They watched the navvies silhouetted against the blank sky working like awkward machinery above the flatcar. Dutch stepped back from the coach and the driver sent his reins in a slow wave, and the horses moved simultaneous, producing the creaking music again.

They scraped the last of the gravel from the wooden deck. Paul swept it quickly and struck Oslo in the shin with the broom when he was too slow getting out of the way.

‘Well, there’s another day done,’ said Dutch. He smiled around but each man was soured by Paul’s anger and reluctant to betray relief at anything. They stood back as he jumped from the bed and each picked up his shovel and they turned to walk to the tent camp in a sifting mist. A few last birds shot above them, black and silent against the freezing mauve sky.

Glenrowan’s windows sat floating and orange, and foretold stories that would have prodded the heart of each of these men with different pressure.

Gibson stood waiting in front of their tents.

‘Why didn’t you make a fire?’ Dutch said. He threw his shovel into the tool crib and flipped his hands at Gibson.

Gibson leaned toward him and moved his arm in theatrical jerks, mouth open and slack.

‘He’s drunk,’ said Large Bob.

Gibson smiled at them and brought a finger to his lips, with his head swivelling man to man like an owl.

‘Shush,’ he said.

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On Sunday they donned what finery could be possessed and maintained in canvas tents and they took the train to Wangaratta for the races. Paul sat apart on the train and chewed his lips at the emerald distance shot through with marred treeshapes dividing sky and earth.

His co-workers were drinking from a flask and strolling the length of the carriage, nodding and flipping the hats of random passengers. Dutch moaned at them like a defeated mother.

Paul’s window had one fly crawling and he bonked his hand against the glass while the fly spun away and landed again. He glanced around after each attempt to kill it and rubbed his eyebrows with the other hand. A young girl chortled, watching like a baleful gnome granted nothing more than an insect with which to torment man.

Paul let his hand drop and he watched the crawling fly against the window while a calming panorama eluded him just beyond the glass.

The train station was full and excited with groups awaiting coaches and wagons to the raceground. Paul walked the few kilometers and his troupe followed talking. They watched his stiff progress and Oslo greeted the passing coaches full of men and women adorned nicely. He jogged after a carriage and the ladies seated laughed and waved him on.

The race-grounds milled with parasols and top hats and bright neckerchiefs. Triangle flags whipped in the chill sunlight. The navvies trod the mud with hands in their pockets, moping at the women. Four policemen stood in jury and drank from a flask.

Gibson caught up to Paul among the tables and took his elbow.

‘See the bookmaker? He’s a police officer.’

‘How do you know?’ Paul said.

Gibson laughed. ‘A ruse. Get the Kellys when they show up.’

Still holding Paul’s elbow he approached the table and the bookmaker gave Gibson a wink and began such a scripted dialogue that Paul wandered off uninterested in hearing a word of their exchange. He stuffed his hands in his pockets and walked like a darkness among bright colours.

Gibson trotted over, reaching again for his elbow, but Paul jerked his arm enough that he couldn’t find purchase.

‘What did I tell you?’ Gibson said as if Paul had witnessed the excellence of the interaction.

The rest of their crew were gathered in front of a tent with the words Coffee Tent in black paint on the canvas. Paul’s eyes widened and he marched over. A rickety ancestor sat in the shade of the tent, doling his wares. A rusty beard spread below his face and he poured a few glugs of something into a cup, twisting his body to obscure the act. Paul could smell the pulpy reek of moonshine as soon as he stood among his co-workers.

‘Any actual coffee?’ he asked.

The old man jerked his head around and took in his environs. He winked and spat, tapped a boot against a coffeepot sitting cold and ignored on a little table.

‘Nary a bean in sight,’ he said, and wheezed with his teeth showing shades of brown.

The others laughed and then stopped in unison, glancing at their silent anchor.

Paul nodded a few times, and he twisted his fingers together, looking at the wary eyes of the old man. Paul raised his hand and patted Large Bob on the shoulder, as the latter flinched.

‘Well, maybe next time,’ Paul said, and turned out of the circle.

He walked back through the crowded entrance and panned around for a vantage point where he could sit alone. He found an empty horse-cart and took his derby off to scratch his scalp. Gibson followed. The ancient trees were as stone for only their leaves moved in the breeze.

‘Oh there may be some real excitement today,’ Gibson began. ‘Man goes by the tag ‘Irish Bullock’ on police record. He’s going to send up a signal if the Kellys show.’

He smirked and spat through his teeth and glanced over before wiping his chin.

‘Really,’ Paul said, looking away.

Gibson said, ‘He knows them by sight.’

‘You’d be more interesting if you brought a hot saveloy next time you came over here.’

Gibson spoke on. ‘I hear it’s getting hot for any outlaw sympathizers around here. Personally I just want to have a safe community.’ Gibson was a man recently incarcerated for unprovoked beatings and violations.

‘Good money to be made if you know anything,’ he said. He turned to study Paul’s face. ‘Look, I hear you had a run-in at McDonnell’s pub. We can work together here. I’ve got the ear of the traps. Let’s make some real money.’

Paul surveyed the floral crowd and the horses beyond led walking the circumference of the track. He snorted and sent a grey phlegm loping through the air. He turned to Gibson, and very slowly waved his hand in dismissal. He touched his hatbrim to bid Gibson farewell, yet the other failed to move on.

‘You’re an idiot,’ Paul said, and he gazed with bland unseeing at the man until Gibson looked away.

‘Suit yourself,’ Gibson said.

They sat listening to a concertina and fiddle and laughter with birds chipping the air. Paul shivered and his lips moved with darkness behind his eyes. He stood up and dusted his rear. Gibson looked up and sneered to himself before standing. Paul walked in his stiff way and stepped over the sliprail at one of the gates.

The grading crew reeled and hollered in the middle of the crowd. Large Bob held a glass of gin and lemon in each hand as he walked back to front yelling inconsequential to his mates. Paul saw among the onlookers a few frowns and heads

shaking. An elderly landowner sat with his family at picnic and he was turned in his chair to mark the presence of rowdiness. He wore a red and gold tartan waistcoat and muttonchop sideburns. Paul saw him motion to an officer nearby and beckon.

Some of the jockeys were saddled and being led on their mounts to the starting line. Paul recognized one jockey as having been in the warm armoured hut in the mountain range. The man sat his horse remarkably, hands on his thighs and chatting to the handler as the horse stepped backwards under him. The jockey nodded to a smiling onlooker leaned with friends against the rail. Paul could see that it was Kelly even at first glance, though he'd met the man only that one night.

Here was a man worth £2,000 deceased or alive and Paul felt a thrill as ancient as the first hunt flush through him. He began to pant and stepped sideways behind a few women so that Kelly or his company wouldn't spot him.

He went and stood near the bookmaker's table only to avoid the crowd. The policeman staged there was so obvious in his charade that none dared converse even for fear of the locals present thinking them sympathetic to the police.

'Place your bets,' the actor said to Paul as if reading aloud, and Paul flicked a hand at him.

'Take a chance there, fellow,' he continued. 'Vagabond is the favourite, could be a good year for Sweetheart. Three to one.'

'Go fuck yourself,' Paul said.

The policeman flared behind his bookmaker's ruse yet stayed seated, working his jaws with his hands pressed whitely to the tabletop.

Paul turned and positioned himself so that he faced directly away from the racecourse and the people. The eternal greenery of this winterland was his focus as he churned his mind on a course of action.

He was unarmed. That unreliable piece of shoddy pistol lay tucked under his bedding in the Glenrowan camp, and he conjured it in hatred. Dutch carried a small derringer in a beltholster against the mutiny of his crew. Paul turned an eye to find him in the crowd. The four uniformed police stood close to the drunken gravelworkers, with Dutch gesturing his hands in some kind of appeal to both groups.

Paul looked again to the starting line and Kelly was still there, speaking with that jockey replete in silks.

He heard voices raised from his crew and the police, some high in explanation and others blatant and few sharp and accusatory. He heard his name.

Paul closed his eyes with a chorus now of his familiars calling him to intercede. He turned and marched to the scene of argument, looking although telling himself not to, again toward that quarter where Kelly stood. Kelly had been watching him. They looked direct at each other as Paul moved, a head taller than the crowd. Kelly turned his face slightly so that his other eye was on Paul. Then he stepped back among his friends and seemed to fade already flickering from sight.

Paul changed tack and loped in that direction. One of the police yelled something and the voices intensified the further he went. Behind him, Large Bob pushed the landowner by the face, directly into the small group of officers. They staggered, holding the old man under the arms and now yelling in chorus with the navvies.

Their yelling became the yelps of physical struggle.

Paul was blocked by a man out of the crowd and then another so that his progress stopped as he tried to see where Kelly had gone. He struck out around him and spun back toward the police confrontation and Dutch's pistol.

The gravelworkers were in full fray with the police, snarling and striking out, clothes muddied and faces red in the middle of a crowd of racegoers in Sunday best. Paul reached them and an officer loomed from beside him, face close and overdetailed with open pores and blemishes. He put his hands out to calm or confine. Paul stepped back and Large Bob came charging along, chased by a constable swinging a sap aloft. He struck out with the sap and Large Bob dropped from sight.

Paul said to the officer in front of him, 'Ned Kelly is here.'

They stared at each other for long seconds, and then the officer tried again to latch onto Paul, who knocked his hand away. He turned back again into the bodies of those anonymous crowdmembers barring him from following Kelly's retreat, and the officer grabbed his collar.

Paul bloomed in that action which became him, raising his fists and lashing out freely, un-tethered finally into that void he stood on the edge of, the black sea of ugliness. He struck and struck and was merry for some time with a dark music up around his ears. Then a heavy cudgel came down on the back of his head twice and he sprawled dreamless in the mud.

Paul woke moaning with his co-workers in various repose in a limestone box. He spat a maroon clot against the wall and immediately they looked over and started outspeaking each other to be the first to tell him what had happened.

Dutch was gone. He was sitting an exit interview down in Melbourne, discharged from his services as foreman. Large Bob had been fined two pounds or one month for assault. He'd wired his father in Melbourne for the amount. Someone had broken the lock on their tool crib at the camp but nothing was missing and the lock was replaced. Rumour had it that Ned Kelly had been seen in the area. A replacement foreman for Dutch was being sent up the track from Melbourne.

'He's a prizefighter from Canada,' Oslo said. He smirked with one eye like a plum and the other sighting around the cell.

Paul sat up and touched the gelatinous back of his head. He looked at Oslo.

'He's a what?'

'Canadian. A pugilist and foreman apparently.' Oslo put his hand out and it glowed in a square of daylight with motes drifting around it.

'You probably know him,' he added.

'Why would I know him?'

'You're both Canadian.'

Paul sighed and looked around at the others, and at the daylight sitting on the floor. Large Bob coughed into his hamfist and wiped the contents on his pants. Paul spat blood again, this time brighter and redder. He scuttled back against the wall and closed his eyes. He recalled Kelly at the racecourse. Then he remembered telling the police officer and felt embarrassed and freshly angry, short respite from that his unconsciousness had allowed him.

He spent the day resting against the wall, shifting whenever his back went numb. It was cold and a police officer came with a stack of wool blankets. He told them there would be no charges. Nonetheless they waited out the afternoon and evening, slept, and it was not until the next morning that the cell door whined open.

They stepped off the train at Glenrowan, bruised and still wearing the Sunday clothes they'd left in. Paul's overcoat was stiff with dried blood and dirty water. He rubbed at it with one sleeve as he stood on the railway platform in the damp cold. The others filed off the train looking like derelicts in grimy stolen outfits.

'My damn shirt is ruined,' said Whittaker.

He walked bowlegged because his genitals were crushed during the racecourse fight. The police escort got back on the train, having seen the men to Glenrowan. The crew stood on the platform and the two officers shooed them with their hands. When the whistle sounded and smoke pumped from the locomotive they traded insults and shook



their fists at each other until the train pulled away, groaning and banging down the track.

‘What a great outing that was,’ Oslo said.

The men stepped down from the platform and walked to their camp, close-by and forlorn under the grey swollen sky. Paul sneezed and the back of his head itched where the hair was matted with blood under his hat.

They set about lighting a fire.

‘I’m going to buy some bread,’ said Paul.

He dug around in his tent and checked his leather bag to make certain nothing was missing. The sounds of rummage came from the other tents. Oslo was standing outside when Paul threw aside the flap and came out.

‘Everything accounted for?’

‘Yes.’

‘Good. I’ll make the bread.’

‘Never mind. I’m going to buy some.’ Paul stuffed his hands in his coat pockets.

‘Won’t take me ten minutes,’ Oslo said.

Paul turned as he was talking and walked away toward the little town. A looming sea of black cloud rolled above him.

In the tavern he stood with his arms folded on the bar.

‘Sir,’ the barkeep said.

‘Give me a whiskey and a bottle to take with me.’

The barkeep poured his glass and put a bottle next to it on the bar. Paul sipped and smacked his lips, then took his hat off. He clenched his teeth when the inside of the hat-brim came unstuck from the head wound. Outside a few crows barked across the dead air and trees stood misted and grey. Four men sat playing cards, mute and nodding. Paul drank and shared a few muttered comments with the bartender.

The clap of someone splitting firewood sounded out in the day, a rhythm ticking away lonely and giving an unproductive staleness to the air in the tavern. Paul rested his chin on his hand and pushed a coin around with the other. He watched the barkeep and nodded as if he were a local and this another year of custom, as if he belonged at this tavern on a cold Tuesday late morning. He cleared his throat after a long while to get the barkeep’s attention, and stared at the man until he had to acknowledge.

‘Sir?’ he said, looking at Paul with little interest. ‘Get ye something else?’

Paul took a sip and raised a glance over his shoulder at the men.

‘Bit of action on Sunday,’ he almost whispered, intent again on the barkeep.

‘Over at Wangaratta races anyway.’

‘So I hear.’

‘Saw someone there I’d like to speak to.’

‘You did, did you?’ The bartender sighed and looked past him to the empty tables as if to will customers other than Paul.

‘Look,’ Paul said, ‘I need to get in touch with him. I can be a good man to know. When things get tight.’

He lowered his head and looked up at the bartender from under his eyebrows, with his moustache a dark line covering his mouth.

‘Sir, that will be one and six for the grog. Care for something to eat?’

Paul struck the bar and hissed, ‘Ah you ignorant cur. Damn you.’

The bartender smiled and stepped back, became occupied looking around for his towel.

Paul slammed the coins on the bar.

‘Then tell me who went through our tool crib. Do that at least, damn you.’

The man shrugged and stayed back against the shelves of coloured bottles. He glanced into Paul’s eyes and looked down a few times.

Paul moved his lips in silent wrath with his knuckles showing white through the skin. He swiped the bottle of spirits and turned to leave. The card players watched with no discretion, eyes drifting from one man to another. Paul stopped and looked back at the barkeep.

‘That’s twice you cross me. See what a third time delivers on your head.’

‘Your hat,’ the barkeep said, nodding to it on the bar.

Paul clawed his face and stepped over to grab the hat. He carried it in one hand and the bottle in the other and marched out of the tavern.

He stepped up into the general store and put a few coins on the counter with his hand shaking.

‘Bread,’ he said without looking at the woman at the counter.

‘Sir?’ she said.

‘Give me some God damned bread.’

‘Well.’ She stood looking at him. ‘I never.’

‘Beg your pardon ma’am. Just feeling poorly,’ Paul said with his eyes closed.

‘No excuse. What kind of bread are you after that you have to abuse me?’ She moved down the counter to a few wicker baskets at the far end.

He didn't open his eyes. 'Anything. I don't care.'

The woman came back with two loaves and watched the wild movement behind his eyelids.

'Sourdough,' she said, offering the loaves.

He opened his eyes and snatched them from her and nearly ran from the store while she looked down at the overpayment by almost four times.

Paul sat by the fire drinking from a cup with the bottle between his feet. The others sat around the fire eating bread and wrongly recollecting the fight. Scratched and bruised and drunk in the afternoon light, they hadn't bothered to work at all.

Gibson sat down on a cask next to Paul and leaned his elbows on his knees.

'I heard you know something about the Kellys,' he muttered. 'Share and share alike I always say.'

Paul spat through his teeth and it hissed in the ashes. 'You first,' he said.

Gibson worked his mouth and looked at the side of Paul's head. He sniffed and nodded, then glanced around as if someone might be standing over his shoulder. He wore the self-impressed look that people get when drunk, when they want to tell dangerous stories about themselves or have succumbed to the temptation to boast about what they know or have done. He studied Paul in the overcast shadowless day, his head moving slightly and fumed with spirits.

Gibson said, 'You're not going to tell me a damned thing, Richard. Me first? I'm the one with stories. Information worth money.'

He rubbed his fingers. Again he looked around them and nudged Paul.

'Come on. What have ye got on the Kellys? I'm on first names with some deep locals. I can help you make money out of it. Me first, ha.'

He giggled suddenly and Paul grimaced at him as he would a grotesque in a cage.

Gibson said, 'Men like us know how to get on with both sides.'

He spat in the fire and eyed the bottle at Paul's feet. 'Set here drinking, a couple of virtuosos. Thirsty though.'

He rubbed his throat.

Paul picked the bottleneck in his fingers and swirled it. He sipped his cup. 'You first,' he repeated.

Gibson frowned and his head moved about like it was in a breeze.

'I know they're fixing to make it hot for the traps,' Gibson said. 'They're going to shake the police right up.'

‘When?’

‘Really soon. Can’t say exactly.’

He smirked and rubbed his knees.

Paul looked at him and back to the fire, almost invisible in the day. He sat with his blank eyes reflecting the sky and white smoke coming up around his head. A few dogs ran past, away across a paddock, in silence. Paul took off his hat and touched the dried mess at the back of his head and cursed quietly. He was drunk enough that everything went sliding down to one side when he tried to focus.

‘What else?’ he said.

‘They have a cousin buys grog for them at the tavern.’ Gibson nodded wisely.

Paul sighed. ‘I could have told you that.’

‘How about telling me what you’ve got, eh?’ said Gibson.

‘I don’t know anything about any damned Kellys,’ Paul said.

‘That’s not what I’ve heard. Come on, man.’

Paul turned to Gibson and studied his face as it drifted. He sneered and stood up, holding the muddy bottle, and walked to his tent. He crouched and pulled one flap aside and disappeared.

The train from Melbourne came that night, chugging and invisible behind the headlamp. The whistle howled and Paul sat up in his tent. His head ached so badly he gagged and leaned on his arms, and breathed through his drooling mouth.

Outside, the men sat around the fire laughing and arguing. Paul stood above them and looked at their orange faces.

‘Morning,’ said Large Bob.

They watched the locomotive’s headlight pouring detail down the train track, illuminating the bushes and trees. Sparks bloomed along the brakes as it slowed into Glenrowan, sparks that glittered yellow and cast the gravel visible beneath.

‘That’s the new foreman then,’ Oslo said, standing up and dusting himself.

They looked a shabby conglomerate of wanderers set upon by some bruising illness. Paul shook his head and smoothed down his moustache. He put his hat on tilted forward so it sat above the dried gash on his head.

‘Let’s go meet him at the train,’ Paul said.

The men got up slowly from the fire and darkened as they stepped away from the orange light.

Large Bob said, ‘I hope he cooks better than Dutch.’

They shambled to the train station coughing and wrapped in their overcoats with the silent darkness sitting wet on their clothes. The conductor watched them materialize and approach the platform.

‘Evening,’ he said.

Paul nodded. Two women got off the passenger car pulling children and rousing them awake. The women glanced at Paul and looked down, then both again glanced at him. He stared at them until they stepped down on the far side of the platform and walked away.

Oslo got up on the platform and dusted his sleeves, pulled his coat straight. The others filed up the steps and stood on the boards with him, watching the few disembarkers and trying to pick who their foreman would be. A porter slid open the boxcar door and led out a bay mare, claimed by a small man wearing a starched collar and bowler. The porter disappeared back into the boxcar and then came out, guiding an enormous ebony Percheron snuffing and nodding its huge head at the rain.

Paul stepped back and almost went off the side of the platform, feeling ill and shaky.

‘Would ye look at that horse,’ one of them said, as it stood motionless above them with discernible intelligence in its glassy eyes. It seemed nothing like a horse, so thick with exaggerated muscle and such sheen to its coat. They were as simple as children in their awe and their want to touch it, singleminded and drunk, slack faced on the lamplit railway platform.

Large Bob reached out his hand and then dropped it when the horse’s owner stepped off the passenger car onto the platform in front of them. It was obvious the Percheron was his mount for he looked too huge to sit an ordinary horse. He was the largest human any of them had seen.

Of course, Paul had seen him many times and recognized him instantly, but he puzzled dimly on who exactly it was. Perhaps it was the head injury or the amount of whiskey he’d been drinking, or the strangeness of seeing his brother suddenly there, standing in the gaslight and blinking around with his bulging eyes and warped eyeglasses.

Joseph’s entire face rose as he smiled with his mouth open and then laughed. He bumped past Oslo to grab his older brother. He embraced Paul, who stood rigid, before giving Joseph’s back a few frantic pats as though putting out a fire. The crew stood and gaped.

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Joseph moved into the tent vacated by Dutch, with the suitcase he'd found before leaving the shores of British Columbia. The grading crew stared at him as he loomed above the nighttime fire, moving around in the dark. His horse chomped slowly at the grass and didn't need to be hobbled.

'I've been trying to find you,' he said to Paul once he was settled. 'They wouldn't tell me much at Melbourne Gaol.'

He looked Paul over whenever he mentioned the prison, as if inspecting for damage. Paul met his eyes and could see the others openly watching. He was quiet and edgy with the unsought attention, as people who rely on intimidation usually are. He swivelled his head at the men or gazed into the red coals while Joseph prattled at his ear.

'Can I say,' Whittaker stood up from his seat across the fire, 'that it is an honour to meet Paul's brother, especially you being such a God damned giant.'

Joseph pulled his eyes away from Paul as if it hurt to do so, and thanked Whittaker, and laughed.

'Shut your mouth,' Paul said.

They looked at him and he glowered at the fire.

'Shut your mouth, Whittaker, you toady,' he said.

Joseph frowned at Paul and then glanced at the hung faces and chose to say nothing.

The fire smoked straight up into the starless dark and its effect on the cold was small. Sparks drifted and went out. Their clothes were heavy with moisture, and the blankets inside the tents lay damp like animal skins.

Joseph pulled his collar around his chin and smiled at Paul.

'Hey. I saw old Sam Feather when I was working on the railway in the Fraser.'

Oslo sat with his peaked eyebrows and his expectant look, watching Paul.

'I don't know any Sam Feather.'

'Sure you do. His brother Tokala? They had an uncle who went to the sweat lodge for biting a woman.'

Paul sniffed and moved his feet closer to the fire. 'Right. I remember them.'

'I sure was surprised to see Sam Feather,' Joseph said.

Paul didn't turn away from the fire. Joseph glanced around at the others, his eyes looking panicked, made worse by the thick glasses. Joseph suddenly thought of

Sergeant Hilliard, of his stories about Paul, and he stopped himself before mentioning him.

Joseph also wanted to tell his brother about the sea voyage, to ask if Paul's journey had been similar, to talk about his great fights and the fact that he could knock a man upside down and unconscious before the crowd even settled into watching the fight. He had questions for Paul as well. About Hilliard, and about prison. And what he was suspected of doing. But sitting next to his brother and watching his moustache twitch in the distracted firelight, he remembered all the years of anger, of Paul looking disgusted by just the sound of Joseph's voice.

He wondered if Paul was even glad to see him, and this gave him a horrible feeling all down his back and his cold hands. Joseph smiled at Paul, and the smile hung on his face like a weight.

In the white morning Joseph and Oslo looked over the tools, and Gibson stood with them to correct Oslo's explanations of the job and the details of the contract.

'It says here two tonnes crushed gravel per section,' said Joseph, looking up from the sheet and squinting down the track.

'We've only been using one. The ground's hard,' Gibson said.

'But we could always go back to two if you wish,' said Oslo, with Gibson shaking his head and already interrupting.

Joseph, uncomfortable helot, looked at them and shrugged. 'Whatever works.'

In his black coat and heavy boots, standing almost two feet taller than the men, he looked as though he could give any order and it would be carried out. Yet he demurred and shrugged, and seemed nervous.

Paul sat with Large Bob and Whittaker in front of the fire. The breakfast dishes were in a crooked stack on the ground, licked clean and ignored. They held cups and steam came up around their faces. Joseph looked over and waved for them to get up, and Paul nodded his chin at his younger brother, with nothing in his eyes, and turned back to the fire. Large Bob said something and they laughed.

Joseph watched and blinked his owl eyes. He was tired with stress, and there sat on his chest an ache that he had to fight through to breathe. He wanted to embrace Paul, and to talk to him about everything. Joseph had conversed so many times with Paul in his mind on the long journey here, and had imagined their reunion and drinking together, and some rough customer forcing Joseph to knock him sprawling while Paul looked on proudly. Joseph had allowed himself to conjure myriad scenes between them.

He'd thought up languid and mature conversations, barroom scrapes in which Joseph would save Paul from some unseen blade. He'd gone far enough to imagine them in church with wives, with intelligent and earnest children. In all his conjurations he hadn't seen this reality whatsoever, and it frightened him. He wanted desperately to take Paul by the shoulders, force him to acknowledge the brother who loved and missed him. He only wanted Paul to recognize that. Yet he knew the bland stare, and he'd seen it usher unreasonable violence. He crawled with this struggle. It made him already regret coming here.

And his own troubles, which he had pushed down so that they were faded and the details murky. The terror when he walked off the ship in Melbourne, waiting for policemen to stop him and ask his name, and the almost insane joy at watching someone scrawl *George Vittens* and wave him on. He had aged in certain ways: his eyes would twitch and he sometimes spoke to himself too much. He had aches in his fingers when he bent them. He had skittering thoughts and then couldn't remember what they were, even as he was thinking them.

Joseph also submerged the thoughts of Kibirov, who had died unnecessarily, accident or not. As mean as he looked it was apparent to Joseph in those few moments they'd spent together that the man had been fair, perhaps even kind.

He even thought it possible that the Russian had been full of sacrifice, perhaps a generous uncle to his sister's children, and one incident or injustice after another had led him to where he ended up, in a hasty grave in Canada.

Joseph understood that men like Kibirov, like himself, sometimes were coerced or forced to hurt by other men who couldn't hurt but wished to. Because Joseph had unnatural strength and size, and looked as if he could be made to fight like a wild animal, he became an instrument of men who wanted to fight and hurt, but were physically weak or too old. As in war: old men with breasts and round uncomfortable bodies used younger men who didn't have the assertiveness or cynicism to say no. Simply the word no and a show of resolve would be enough to send those weaker men back like scavengers beyond the light. The tragedy was always in that failure to say no, or the faith that saying yes would not be a mistake. And Joseph could see how many times he had been used. Even on the great steamship to Australia he had let it happen. Even in Melbourne, he had let it happen. He hoped he could begin to stand against it. He did hope.

He watched his brother's closed face in the splashing firelight and felt weak and sad. He opened his mouth to speak, looked around at the strange faces. He tried again to



speak, and then just sat with his mouth half open and the fire popping in his ears. The Percheron's muscles rippled light as it moved like a living wall around the little camp.

Paul took his hat off, touched the back of his head and groaned. He looked at Joseph, started to say something and stopped when he saw the needy eyes bulging at him. After a long while of silence, Paul stood. He spat through his teeth and turned to his tent. The spit hissed in the coals. The older Richard brother bent and disappeared into the grubby tent. They could hear a few coughs and then silence.

'Good night,' Joseph said to the canvas.

Later, after the fire had gone out, Paul emerged from his tent in the black night. He moved with the silence of a haunting vision. He put the flat of his hand against the Percheron's bony face. He lifted the bridle from a branch that Joseph hung it on, and gently worked the bit into the horse's mouth. He led the mammoth animal away from the tents before throwing the saddle over its back.

Paul rode all night trying to find the spot where he'd followed those horsemen up into the hills. He kicked at the horse and struck it when it balked and refused to enter the scrub. The moon lay behind invisible clouds and Paul stared out at black nothings, shaking his head. He rode back to Glenrowan before light and took off the bridle, disappeared into his tent and lay in his clothes for an hour before the men got up for work.

On Saturday the Cobb & Co. coach brought mail and their pay from Melbourne. There was a letter to Joseph from the superintendent, a reminder outlining the legalities of his position, the responsibility that went with his sidearm. He kept the pistol hidden in his tent, wrapped in the musty bundle of his careworn possessions, and he never carried it.

On Sunday they voted to drink brandy and lemonade. Joseph rode the Percheron the short distance to the pub, more for its company than any vehicular purpose. On the oversized horse he looked like a magnified rider, a detailed unnatural shadow of some omen set to befall the walking men below him. They dusty and marching and he in black wool atop the ebony creature. Further reason to be stared at and for Paul to wish him vanished. Paul was as usual walking a few paces ahead of the others and unreasonably thinking someone else to blame for his cloister. Hearing the thump of the hooves behind him and clenching his jaw.

They walked into the crowded tavern and pulled two tables together. The long bar and the wall of variegated bottles stood waiting, with light along the bottle edges. There seemed to be fewer spittoons here than in Canada.

Joseph made a comment about the drinking holes he'd seen in Yale, and Paul ignored him. Paul went and stood by himself at the bar.

All the locals had heard of Joseph or seen him working, and the tavern was full of men buying him drinks. He laughed with them and introduced himself around, and a skinny entrepreneur kept trying to sell him a knife, always the same one, which he refused.

The entrepreneur said, 'It's a shame I don't sell eyeglasses,' and there was a good deal of laughter.

Paul stood at the bar and rubbed his face, took his hat off and scratched his scalp, and looked over whenever someone new entered the room, as if he expected a visitor.

Large Bob stood next to Joseph, and already the other navvies were just calling him Bob.

The sun moved sideways across the trees as though attempting to escape.

The cousin, the local man, came into the tavern for his three bottles and Paul nodded his chin. The cousin stepped up to the bar and greeted the bartender, looked over at Paul and blinked slowly then looked away like a cat.

The barkeep handed him the bottles. He then asked for a whiskey and leaned his elbows on the bar next to Paul. He watched Joseph for a while and sipped his drink.

'God, who is that fellow?' he asked.

Paul scoffed. 'Who indeed.'

'Works with you lot?'

'Doesn't do much work,' Paul said to the wall of bottles behind the bar. Of course this was untrue: Joseph was tireless at work. He was fair to the men and seemed to thrill at the day's labour. Paul hated to work despite his strength, and he would watch his brother's sweating back with denigration.

'Looks like a prize bull,' said the local.

They both drank, facing opposite directions.

Paul said, 'Tell your cousin he doesn't have to fear me.'

Yet he turned and stared at the local with almost desperate frustration in his eyes.

The local said, 'Mate, you are a guest in this region. Don't lose sight of that.' He shook his head and frowned.

Paul wanted to drive his glass into the man's face. He leaned on the bar and said something under his breath.

'What?' asked the local.

'Said your region can burn.' He spat on the floor while the local man watched the giant in the middle of the barroom and considered striking Paul.

He didn't hit him because there was a chance he'd miss, and he could see in the scarred face and pewter eyes, and the fingers spread on the bar that he was no match for Paul.

'That thing you're so interested in is my brother,' Paul said.

The local turned. 'Are you serious?'

Paul looked down at his drink, lifted it to his mouth and finished it. He wiped a hand across his mouth and said nothing further, though the cousin kept asking him questions. He gave up after a few moments and insulted Paul. He picked up the three bottles and left the tavern, glancing again at Joseph as he passed.

Paul smiled genuinely for the first time in a long while and rapped the empty glass on the bar. Of course, Joseph saw the smile and stepped towards his brother even as it disappeared from Paul's face.

Later, Joseph sat on the steps of the tavern with his head moving in jerks and his eyes blinking. The crew was inside yelling and the sky was getting dark. The road and buildings turned grey as the sunlight faded, and looked bleached and dirty. Two dogs loped in the dust like reprimanded scavengers with their muzzles on. One had a leather harness strapped around its snout and the other wore a small cage muzzle that it licked as it went along. Joseph's skin crawled in the cold afternoon and he looked at his big hands, with his head shaking around. The weird birdcalls and eucalypts were still alien to him.

A few children stood in shirtsleeves, staring at him from the doorway of a house. He lifted a hand and waved.

An argument inside the tavern got his attention and he stood up and put a hand on a post of the awning so he wouldn't fall. He stood swaying like a malfunctioned automaton as the daylight failed. There was a moment in which he stopped to think and to feel the damp air. He knew the silence and the lull that preceded irreversibles, as though the air itself waited particulate. He aimed for the open door and stumbled into the room with a hollow lurching in his guts.

A table lay on its side, with the floorboards wet and sprinkled in broken glass. A group of men stood yelling around it with Paul in the middle, his eyes huge and red and a hand pushing at his collarbone. Joseph marched across the floor and chopped at the hand's owner, striking him in the back. The man fell into Paul, and they all began dragging each other around and waving fists that would be dodged easily by anyone fighting sober. Someone was trying to get on Joseph's back, and he braced himself before heaving the man, who crashed against the bar and went over it.

The melee died off and everyone stopped yelling at once. There was a group of men in the doorway in long coats. They watched the fighters, who stood holding each other by the throats and clothing. Joseph reeled and then stamped his feet to stay in one place. He looked down at his legs and at the moving floorboards.

'McCullough? Everything alright?' one of the men in the doorway said.

The bartender came from behind the bar and crossed the room. He righted a table and said he wanted everyone out.

'You heard him lads. Time to go home.'

Every one of them looked directly at Joseph, swaying and behemoth above them.

Joseph looked to his brother, who was staring like some manifest of warfare totally unprepared to cease. Paul breathed through his mouth and his eyes were watering.

And Joseph saw this chance to validate himself with Paul. He would force his brother to behold his dominion. Sad day for those who play the role of sacrifice, he thought. Before he broke this armistice and further betrayed the desire for nonviolence he said to himself that he was drunk, and that was an excuse to allow himself to appease like some drugged acolyte. He winked at Paul and swung his huge arm, and caught the bartender across the chest. Instantly there was more shouting and crashing wood furniture, and men yelping. The fight was resumed and Joseph lurched toward the men in the doorway to include them, as fists landed on his back and against his ears.

His glasses shifted and his vision went skewed as he put a hand over the glasses to protect them. A chair came spinning against his legs and he kicked at it. Just as he reached to grab the first of the men in the doorway Paul was there, pushing him back.

'Stop you God damned fool,' Paul yelled in his face.

Joseph didn't realize that his brother had thrown the chair at his legs.

'Ha. What, afraid?' Joseph said.

He pushed past him and raised an arm to strike at the men in their long coats, they gazing at him and unmoving, with hat brims shadowing their eyes. Again Paul stepped in front of him, and again Joseph pushed him away. He grinned for he thought this was how to have his brother's respect finally. Paul brought an arm back and punched Joseph high on the cheekbone, and numbness spread across his face as his glasses went spinning off.

He looked at Paul in animal bewilderment and staggered back, already with tears in his eyes. Paul swept up the glasses from the floor and pressed them into Joseph's huge palm, then he turned to the men in the doorway.

They were fading from the tavern light away into the dim street in silence, and everyone now stood in the room as if supernumeraries on stage without speaking roles.

Joseph said, 'Why did you hit me?'

Paul followed the silent group and one of them turned and shook his head. Their horses were tied at the rail. The faded roads lay along buildings with their doors closed and shopfronts devoid of light. There was a fog sitting all around the distant trees. The men mounted swiftly and turned to ride out of town.

Paul called for them to wait, but they didn't, and he realized he had nothing to offer at this moment other than his own greed. He stood in the hard dirt and saw horse faeces lying around like coal.

Joseph came out of the tavern with his glasses bent on his face, squinting about and trying to navigate distance.

'Who were they, that you actually care about?' he asked.

Paul said nothing because he was embarrassed, and Joseph took it for unwillingness to deign him answer. He glared at Paul and went to his horse. He climbed onto it and set off in the direction those strange men had gone, following the low dust.

Paul called, 'Don't.'

But Joseph didn't listen. He clomped along and turned the corner of the tavern squinting in the twilight.

Paul stood with men talking behind him. He looked up and down the empty street for a horse to steal, and shook his head.

Joseph rode up between the trees into the hilly region behind Glenrowan. Huge boulders rose half out of the earth. He could smell and hear invisible creeks in the long grass.

They were ahead riding unhurried between the rocks and they were aware he followed. He trailed their illumined coats, bluish in beacon as if covered in a snow

meant only for them. He knew who Edward Kelly was, but he didn't know the man was loved by an army of advocates and distant relatives all over the Murray district and beyond. He'd seen Ned's face on posters, sketches of a werewolf with eyebrows that met between small and empty eyes, and a grainy photograph showing an angry face and a strangely flat torso with a nimbus of the original hairline above the head.

Joseph didn't know how close the man was, or that he was now following a group of his friends to a hideout, or that he was the second outsider to be graced this way. He only reasoned that if his brother was so cautious about these silent men, he could find leverage through them.

They rode up until they crested and drifted along the ridge of a hill with the moon just now above the distant bushland, a white clean shape sitting artificial and electric against the indigo of space. He followed their faded clothing and the rattle of riding tackle, and leaned back as the Percheron began a descent over the slope of the hill.

Joseph caught up to them at a clearing with a fenced paddock and a basic house glowing two warm eyes at the night. Smoke blushed from the chimney and vanished into the luminous trees. They filed the horses past the house to a small barn and workshop obscured behind bush and the long stumps of gum trees.

He stopped and watched them dismount and hobble their horses, which were wary of his great black animal. The horses sniffed and one chomped the air next to the Percheron's ear and was ignored. Joseph watched the men enter this shed with lamps wavering out at the night.

A small fire just behind the shed cast a yellow radius that showed how close the bush was. He slid off his horse and rubbed its face. He walked into the little barn to meet his hosts, and he bumped around following the dim lanternlight.

Joseph loomed and seemed to fill the shed, clothed in black and hunching away from the close ceiling. He told Kelly that he owned a book about him, and had read it many times. This brought wild laughter and some clapping, and Joseph pushed his glasses up his face, embarrassed.

Someone passed him a green bottle and he coughed and wiped his mouth after drinking from it. He shook his head quickly and coughed again, and sat listening to their conversation.

'Your mother is in gaol?' Joseph tried again to bend his glasses back so that they weren't sitting up off one ear.

Ned turned to him. 'She is. And your brother of all people says he has information about her, but he wants money. He wants something.'

Joseph put his glasses on and glanced around. He closed his eyes.

'Paul is hard to understand,' he said.

'I don't care. You,' and he poked a finger into Joseph's sternum, 'get him to talk.'

'He doesn't talk to me.'

'You're his brother.'

'He hates me,' Joseph said, and he looked into Kelly's face with his eyes amplified and nebulous.

Some of the others looked up, and they sat watching him, as if unable to understand hating one's brother. They were all young and deeply saddened somehow, their faces pulled in the orange light. They would laugh at some joke and then sit looking at their hands, slowly twisting their fingers and nodding at nothing. They drank heavily and he with them, so that his heart pounded sickly and he watched the doorframe looping when he tried to study it.

The lanterns cast greasy smoke up into the shack's ceilings, and the small fire outside wavered. Breezes came through the bush in the freezing night and sparks blew against the wall of the shack.

They were hiding out on the property of a hapless farmer, a friend or uncle, a second cousin. They had moved from the shelter where Paul had his counsel with them, wary and shifting nomads in their own domain. Joseph tried to keep his wits and keep track of things said and threats made, and he tried to listen so he could tell Paul, but he was dizzy and purblind as their bodies slid past in catalogue.

The next day woke him with vomit in his throat, as the birds and insects cracked and whirled the air.

'I am supposed to be working,' he said to no one.

He leaned against a rough wood bench inside the clustered shack, hunched and drooling like an ogre sent to ransack a storybook cottage, and he watched them count bullets and shots of whiskey. Girls and more friends came by as the day turned orange and there was fiddle music that shook the floor and walls. They ate and then stars bloomed above them, all across the darkening sky.

He slumped in wet hay and tried to hide from the liquor. When he stood up his hands were numb and tingling, and he fumbled at his trousers in a few seconds of panic before pissing against a tree with steam climbing the bark.

They stomped and cheered as he charged into the lamplight to lift a young fellow overhead and spin his thrashing body. Someone caught a boot in the face and fell over a chair.

Joseph receded to the antechamber of a feed-trough and dilapidated coop. The fiddle whined like rusted machinery.

Outside in the white moonlight there was a pump and bucket. He scooped water into his face and wiped his neck. The water tasted sweet and he sucked at it like a horse. He went in the moonshadow of a huge eucalypt to be sick, and saw the black shape of the landowner coming fast toward the shack. His beard fizzed almost to his waist and a scrawny woman held a lantern in the doorway of the distant house.

Joseph stood behind the tree.

‘Ned, I had enough of this noise,’ he screamed with a shaking rifle, and everybody poured out into the glowing night. The tiny shack emitted so many people that Joseph scoffed and shook his head.

‘But we’re celebrating the dawn of the Republic,’ someone said, stepping in from the side and jabbing the chin of the poor man so that he lay instantly on the ground, grabbing at his face.

‘Hope this didn’t cost you much,’ the pugilist said, and the rifle disappeared into the little crowd.

‘Hey, hey! Give him his gun,’ Kelly roared as he appeared from the black doorway.

Frenzied, he swatted at everyone until he had the rifle, which he passed to the bent figure while muttering, ‘Sir, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.’

Kelly took the man’s elbow and walked him back to his house, long black shapes sailing across the speckled yard. Joseph stepped from behind the tree when none were looking.

During the next day they howled at the worst target shooting they’d ever done in their short lives. Joseph saw the armour they had made. He saw a helmet fashioned from thick iron with an eyeslit he would never be able to see out of. He looked around him at slackened drunk faces with sober eyes as the sun bled out across the trees and night winds came up from the wide valley.

That night he twisted his ankle on the stoop and landed in urine. He crawled in the grey grass to find a spot to sleep, to lessen the blur of his mind. A very loud dawn woke him, cranked against a stump with the side of his head bleeding and itchy. Kelly cantered toward him with suspenders down and his bare chest clawed red. He sat beside



Joseph and leaned his head against the massive stump. They watched the white sun emerge from between the trees.

‘What are mornings like in Canada?’ Ned asked.

He swallowed a few times with a sour and aching throat and then whispered, ‘They are exactly the same as here.’

Joseph rode up to the ridge with his guides, who pointed him an invisible path while he nodded. He rode back down through the trees and the stacked boulders, lookouts for small animals and sunning places for serpents in those flat benches. The valley dimmed to complete unfocus and spread so far below him that he was worried he would wander until he starved or come off the horse and break his neck. Clouds morphed and bellowed across a sky impossible to distance. He did not know what day it was.

The trees thickened and the grade diminished until he drifted through a forest of thin gums and smaller trees that clawed whitely at him. The Percheron huffed and trampled with Joseph patting its neck. They came out in view of the train tracks. He swung down from the horse and stood in the tracks, looking both directions and guessing which way would be Glenrowan. He got up into the saddle and shook the reins. After half an hour the town appeared ahead and he could see the empty railway station, and the stained tents of the grading crew. Joseph rode along the track with his mind fluttering like a muscle in spasm.

The empty camp bore signs of their breakfast; smoke coiled and dissipated from the coals and the billy can steamed where it hung on its swivel just off the fire pit. He scoped the town and the squeaking trees, birds calling sharply through the morning. Clouds deadened the southern air and sifted down with rain showing in their bellies. He got back on his horse and rode to the bakery for he was contorted in hunger.

The woman behind the counter smiled up in his face, called him darling. He asked for a beef pie and she produced two. He rummaged in his coat pocket and produced not much.

‘I only asked for one,’ he began.

‘Oh this one’s a bit ruined. Can’t sell it so ye may as well have at it.’

He inspected the pie and she broke off some of the crust with her bulbous fingers.

‘See? Nobody would pay for that,’ she said.

He thanked her and she winked.

‘Friend of the lads is a friend of mine.’

Joseph pushed his glasses up and thanked her again. He lumbered outside shoving pie into his maw.

He found them half a mile north budging the rail over and packing ballast.

‘Back from the tomb,’ said Oslo.

He and Gibson started with questions but Joseph waved them off.

‘I’d rather just put in some work,’ he said.

‘You been with them? The gang,’ said Gibson.

‘Just want to work,’ he said again.

Paul was looking at him, and he turned back to his pike when Joseph approached.

‘Hey brother,’ said Joseph, then hushed, ‘I have some good information for you.’

Paul coughed and hawked, spat in the gravel. Then turned completely away from him.

‘Paul.’

He clenched his fists.

‘Paul. I just want to help.’

‘Grab a Jesus Christing shovel then,’ his brother said.

Paul, always looking away, negative in compass from his faceless demon.

Joseph slept that night as if near death. He gulped from their waterbucket until he was belching liquid and he wiped his face and saw the moon going up. He slept submerged in dreamless ink washed finally of the crudely distilled spirits and for the first time in months not haunted by the presence of his victim. Early the next day he woke almost smiling in the glowing tent white, thinking – *it was an accident. I am not a killer*. And he also thought – *no more violence*. Though this was more in hope than in decision.

He flopped his numb hand and reached into the old leather bag for the bible or penny dreadful he was reading, whichever book came to his fingers first. A crow was screeching, echoed instant by another. Someone snored in the tent next to his.

Joseph yawned and then realized the small service derringer was missing. He blinked at the canvas ceiling and dragged his hand back and forth. Then he leaned up and put his glasses on to look through his property for the gun. It was not there. He felt a cold rush and pounded his hand against the thin layers aboveground. Always, always something to cause grief.

He dressed in the nightdamp clothing and laced his boots. He pushed the tentflap aside and rose out into the early day, the fog low and blending back through the trees as if to retreat from the morning world of man and his schemes.

He pushed at the coals and brought up flames invisible until some bark shavings curled and blackened, and he fed in small sticks and blew at it. Once the fire began to crack and split the kindling he put a split piece of dry gum on and sat back to watch and coax.

The crew emerged singular and in twos and he nodded in solemnity around him, with his heart pumping low and heavy. Joseph had tea ready and the men squatted or sat on the upturned crates around the fire to have their cups filled, murmuring their thanks. He poured himself a mug of tea and it bellowed steam in the winter air. When Paul stood out of his tent, lank and tall and scarred in his grimy pants, Joseph looked up.

‘Where is my gun?’ he asked for everyone to hear. The men turned to watch the interviewer and the respondent. Paul gazed on him with complete void of meaning in his eyes. He shrugged.

‘Where the hell is my gun?’ Joseph asked with his voice shaking just enough to betray the emotions behind his static face.

Paul snorted phlegm and looked around him then back down at Joseph. ‘Maybe you lost it in your little adventure.’

Joseph stood and said, ‘I will search you if I have to.’ His voice went whispered over the last words. He swallowed and said, ‘It is my duty to carry that sidearm as your foreman.’

‘Search me,’ Paul said, with his arms out and his clothes very black against the tent canvas.

The crew waited intent as scavengers over the last flops of a beast alone in the sand. Each man there had a loyalty to one or the other of the Richard brothers, and each man would swear he did not, if necessary.

Joseph walked to him and looked down into his face, and knelt to enter the tent. It stunk even in the frost, and he patted around half-heartedly through their folded satchels and what clothes there were. Paul’s bag was there, and Joseph stuck his hand in, pulled out a reward notice offering £8,000 for the Kelly gang, and a few torn newspaper articles. He felt the pistol and pulled it out. It wasn’t his derringer but a ramshackle hammerless contraption. He stuffed everything back in the leather bag and backed out of the tent.

‘I’m not searching you. Don’t you have any shame?’ he said as Paul stood with his arms out, smirking behind his moustaches.

The crew shifted around them making breakfast while the brothers stood in stalemate above them. Joseph, starving and depressed, stepped back and fumbled with the pots around the fire pit.

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Joseph watched them work with their breath like plumage over their heads, and he felt ill. The shift of loyalty was in glances and muttered comments. A circumference set in around him, and they stayed outside of it.

He wrote in his ledger seated on the flatcar and to his surprise Paul approached.

‘Look, I’m sorry,’ Paul said, facing the southern turn of the rail.

Joseph watched him and nodded a bit but said nothing.

Paul squinted. ‘Can’t give the little gun back just yet.’

‘Then I don’t know what you want.’

‘Sure. You do. Where are they? Where’s their camp?’

Joseph rubbed his leg and flipped a couple pages. ‘Come on. I don’t want to see you get hurt, Paul.’

‘Just tell me.’ Paul looked up at him, into his face.

Joseph said, ‘How would you get up there anyway?’

‘Hire a damned horse at the livery,’ said Paul. ‘Or steal a police mount.’

Joseph looked at his brother who smiled with all the mirth of a ghoul.

‘Something is going to happen here,’ Joseph sighed. ‘Please listen to me. It’s going to be bad.’

The crew were out of earshot but Joseph’s voice was low and husky and he leaned forward with his neck strained.

‘I’m going to leave Saturday night for Wangaratta. I don’t want to be here. Please,’ he looked at Paul, ‘as my brother, come with me. I can pay for your room at the hotel.’

Paul smiled. ‘Too late for all that,’ he said.

Joseph was scared and he knew this was one chance blown to get through to him.

‘Tell you what. Tell me where they’re camped out and I’ll come along Saturday.’

‘I am not stupid.’

‘Whoa. No one said you was that. Just want a look, that’s all.’

‘Why do you have my gun?’

Paul’s face pulled in slightly and his eyes drifted.

‘Protection. You can’t see to shoot your foot anyway.’

‘That’s not the point.’ He blew air and shook his head. ‘It’s the principle of my job here.’ He waved his hand toward the men working. ‘You think they’ll listen knowing you can just steal my possessions?’

Paul puckered his face further and turned his chin as if from a slow punch.

‘Steal is a strong word.’

‘For Christ’s sake,’ said Joseph.

‘Where are they camped out? I promise I won’t get into any trouble, Joseph,’ he said, unable or unwilling even to keep the condescension from his voice. ‘You want your gun? You want me to go out there unarmed?’

‘I don’t want you to go out there.’

Paul tapped his finger rapidly on the deck of the flatcar, staring hard. He kept doing it as Joseph squirmed at the mania in the action.

‘Where are they?’ he hissed. ‘I’ll come with you to God damned Wangaratta. Saturday night. I do believe the train comes through here at nine sharp.’

His finger thudded next to Joseph’s leg, and Joseph scratched his forehead.

‘Paul.’ he closed his eyes. ‘Fine. I’ll tell you.’

Paul stopped immediately and stood grinning up at him.

After work they walked back to their camp in the rapidly chilling air. The sky faded away above the black tree silhouettes. Joseph and Paul wordlessly left the tents and walked past the rail station yard. The station’s lamps hung, haloed a soft yellow against the darkening.

They crossed the tracks and climbed a fence, stood in front of the tavern.

‘I rode around here, followed them off the Greta road, straight up for some time into the hill. I couldn’t see all that clearly where we were.’

He pointed with his arm like a windvane as he turned.

‘We came over the hill and moved west, I suppose, about a hundred paces along the ridge. Then straight down the other side to a lot. Fenced, little house.’

Paul studied his face, looked along his arm.

‘In the house?’

‘No. There’s a shed.’

‘Does it look like a hodgepodge shelter? An armoured hut?’

Joseph turned to him. ‘No. It’s a little barn with a workshop. Small farm set-up.’ He was going to say, *like mother and father have*. But he didn’t. Maybe that would have been enough to change things, to stop his brother.

He shrugged.

‘They’re up there,’ Paul said, but not to Joseph. He wasn’t speaking to him.

They went into McDonnell’s tavern for a beer, and Joseph was greeted warmly. Paul considered him with absolute venom as Joseph leaned on the bar smiling.

The bartender glanced at Paul but said nothing to him as he poured their glasses full.

They walked back to the camp and Joseph almost told him about his misadventures, but he didn’t. He was so relieved to have his brother with him; he knew enough about Paul not to push the boundary of that grace.

They drifted past the station platform, link to the townships, to sprawling Melbourne at the coast.

Joseph sat on a crate in front of the fire pit; men crowded with their arms folded on their knees. Gibson lay on a blanket on the ground, propped on his elbow and smoking a pipe. His boots were crossed at the ankle and he gazed into the fire. Bob watched Paul like a serf pensive for direction.

Joseph looked around, yawned. He took off his glasses and rubbed at his eyes and the bridge of his nose with the glasses hanging from a fist, casting eclipsed firelights.

Paul said, ‘Oslo, where the hell is supper?’

He sat down and fed a stick into the fire, brought the tip with a singular yellow flame to the bowl of his pipe and sucked the fire down into it, and the flame waved in and out of the bowl until his mouth leaked smoke up around his eyes. He tossed the stick into the fire and again looked directly at Joseph, who nodded once to him and smiled even though he tried to keep it off his face.

They turned in, with the fire down to a nest of hearts glowing up at the gelid world. The moon was full and the landscape bore its silhouette in harsh outline on the ground. In that thin winter atmosphere, the tents glowed vibrant. Joseph’s Percheron had a blanket over it, and it stood with its mane glistening as if wet. The moon stared down in the freezing night and there was a safety in its exposure.

Joseph sat shuddering as he pulled his heavy coat off. He got under the cold blankets and yawned, and fell asleep almost immediately, one darkness for another.

Paul lay waiting until there were snores all around him, and then he crouched up and emerged from his tent in silence. He moved behind the tents and grabbed the bridle again from its branch, and picked up the saddle. He walked the quiet horse away from the camp before saddling it. He jammed his boot in the stirrup and swung way up onto the huge animal. Paul stuffed the bit in its mouth and worked the bridle onto its head, and kicked at it with the heedless treatment shown most things. He rode into the spotlight night with his shadow beneath him on the ground.

Oslo woke Joseph in the early light, shaking his foot in the blankets and moaning about his horse and his brother both disappeared. Joseph sat up cursing and bare-chested and already comprehending all answers. He put his boots on and came out of the tent, his enormous back and shoulders acutely white and the others staring at his unnatural muscles. Joseph strode to the tree, the empty branch. He went and yanked the flap open on Paul's tent.

'When?' he asked.

'I have no idea,' said Oslo. 'I drank a bit last night. I don't know if he was in the tent or not.'

'He could have left last night,' Joseph said. He cursed and picked up the crate he used as a seat and demolished it against the tree next to his tent.

The men absently opened tentflaps, gazed around the clearing, into the bushland. Joseph stood with his skin going marble in the cold and he ground his teeth. He was angry and terrified.

Eventually they got to work and halfheartedly they did their task. Joseph stood next to the tracks and looked at nothing. When they broke for lunch he told the men to eat at the tavern, and he promised not to notice if they had a beer or two.

Oslo began to protest and was howled down. They filed off to the pub and Joseph sat by a small fire, looking across the track into the scrub. A few birds nestled in the branches and he put his head in his hands.

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A few days of cold, a threat of snow that Joseph could feel. The grass sparkled under a weak moon. They watched the skies blending away above the hills. Gibson reported that there was some talk of gang activity coming up; the different factors had been meeting. The district had a current going through it and the sky sat dead and featureless above as if unwilling to participate.

The sun was behind a gloomy mantle in the grey depths over the little town. Joseph sorted through his paperwork, his contract. His obligations. He felt dizzy and the trees looked stark and white.

On Saturday night he went to McDonnell's tavern before he had to be at the train station. He loomed into the barroom with some of the crew and was nodded to, no other warmth granted. Joseph went to the bar and asked for a whiskey. The barkeep poured his glass, studying the task in silence.

'Anything going on?' Joseph asked.

The man shook his head, pursed his lips with his eyes in unfocus on Joseph's chest.

'Not that I know of,' he said.

'I hear there may be some activity,' said Joseph. *Is my brother alive?* he asked in his mind.

'Seems fairly quiet,' said the barkeep. Joseph turned and noticed they were the only customers at all.

He ordered beer for the fellows and carried what he could to their table, and the barkeep brought over the rest.

'To a quiet Saturday night,' said Bob.

They touched glasses and drank.

Joseph stood on the train platform at five after nine with the steward shrugging at him and holding his pocketwatch aloft. The train lay alongside, hissing and sending coalsmoke to the night. Massive machine of black iron that breathed and dripped onto the gravel. Joseph stepped down once more from the glare of the station and peered out into the dark.

'Come on, sir,' said the steward.

Joseph shook his head and climbed the steps, and with gravity he boarded the train. It was under steam and almost immediately pulled out from the station, illuminated and lone against the cold and darkness.

He'd left the crew leaderless and drinking around the fire, asking after him, asking what if Paul came back.

Joseph sat in the traincar watching the glowing land under a full moon as it wandered past. The thin trees were black marks against a sea of luminous grass. The moon with its shadowed gulleys and depths shone out like a dead sun over that night land.



He stepped off the train in Wangaratta and wandered toward the warm lights of the hotel. Lamps glowed along the street and a group of men walked in his direction laughing about something. They hushed when they spotted Joseph in his black vestment moving along like a proponent of some apocalypse, turning his enlarged eyes upon them as he passed between.

He asked at the hotel desk and was given a key by a staring and decrepit innkeeper with a beard hanging in disarray off his jaw. Joseph ignored his attempts to talk. He crossed the tavern floor and climbed the stairs to the room given him. He laid his heavy coat on the bed and left the room to go back downstairs to get drunk.

A few men and women watched him in sidelong admiration as they wandered out. He leaned on the bar breathing heavily through his nose and pushing a glass around. Two police officers entered the tavern after half an hour of his being there and stood at the bar near him.

‘Almost time to call it a night,’ one said. He nodded when Joseph turned to look at him, and repeated himself.

‘You telling me that?’ Joseph asked.

‘Just saying.’

Joseph emptied his glass and tapped in on the bar as the publican emerged with a tray of clean glasses.

‘Let’s have another.’

‘Yes, sir,’ the man said.

Joseph rubbed his face and yawned. The two officers stood closer to him and watched.

‘Can I help you?’ he asked.

‘Just making sure you get on your way. Smith here usually starts closing up about now.’

‘I’m staying upstairs,’ he replied, pulling the key from his pants and slapping it on the bar.

The officer who’d spoken turned to watch a man drift out into the night. Joseph leaned on the bar and drank with urgency. His mouth hung open.

‘My brother stole my horse,’ he said and laughed.

‘Oh? You want to make a report?’

Joseph shook his head. ‘Stole my damned horse.’

He closed his eyes and tapped the empty glass on the bar, and turned to the officers to stare down at them with his bulging eyes.

They both stepped away and looked to the publican, then back at him. Joseph took his hat off the bar and slewed across the floor to the stairs with the officers talking behind him, and the lamps being extinguished one after another. He reached the top of the stairs and moved down the shadowed hall to his room.

Someone snored deep and slow behind one of the doors. Joseph unlocked his room and entered. The four walls and bed were a luxury on this frozen night, and he lowered himself with crippled exhaustion, the springs whining out in the blue moonlit room. He moved into the light from the window and sat looking out at the night with his head spinning.

‘Where are you Paul?’ he asked, and put a hand on the cold glass.

In the morning he woke from such depths that he lay for some time unable to move or comprehend his location. He patted around on the side table for his glasses and wiped them on the weathered sheet. He snorted and pulled out the chamber-pot and spat into it. He put his glasses on and looked out the window at the neat town. A phaeton went past under the window and he watched women cross the street through the wavering windowglass.

He realized how much he missed sleeping in a building, on a bed without wind pouring in upon him or damp canvas overhead. He was only here because of Paul, and Paul had turned from him long ago. He could think of nothing his brother had done for anyone except intimidate and deceive and hurt through morose silence. And he knew he was telling himself this by way of armouring his heart.

Joseph took his glasses off and lay back on the bed with his hands over his face. He stayed in the warm little bed until a rattle came at the door just before noon.

‘Just a minute,’ he called.

‘Sorry, sir. Just trying to tidy the rooms,’ said the innkeeper’s voice, thinned behind the door. ‘Unless ye want it for another night.’

Joseph looked out at the blurred room. He lay with his mind turmoiling.

‘Yes, I’ll take it for another night,’ he said.

‘Fine, sir, fine.’ And the host shuffled off.

Joseph finally rose and attended to his toilet. He went into the pub to have lunch and sat alone with Sunday parishioners and labourers looking on, some discreet and some not.

There was a livery down the main street, and Joseph stepped in with the cold wind trying to lift his hat.

‘Have a horse large enough?’ he asked.

The farrier emerged from a stable and considered him.

‘Lord’s sake. Look at ye,’ he said. ‘Poor horses.’

Joseph smiled with what he could attempt, and waited.

‘May have one. She’s old, mind you.’

‘Meaning slow.’

‘She’s patient.’

Joseph shrugged and looked around at the harnesses and cracked leather, the dusty chains hanging.

The farrier went back through his stalls and led out a tall mare.

‘I should have her back tonight.’

‘Should?’ His eyes flashed up and down the huge body in black wool garb.

‘I will. Just going to Glenrowan for a while.’

‘Don’t know why you’d bother,’ the farrier said, and spat through his teeth onto the floor, dusty with old hay and oats. ‘Wangaratta is a gem. You a traveller or something?’

‘No,’ Joseph said.

He rode along the gravel next to the rails, noting sections that could use work, where the ballast was given way to mud or dirt, or where the sleepers were rotten. The horse sighed and shunted him side to side along the winter blandness of the quiet afternoon.

Up ahead the tracks were damaged. The clean lines of rail disappeared in one spot that he could see with his unpredictable vision. He rode up to the spot where a length of rail had been torn up, with the sleepers attached, and thrown into the bush beside the track.

Joseph slid off the horse and looked around at the tools left lying on the ground. He went down the slope and grabbed one of the rails and heaved at it. Nothing moved and he renewed his grip on the iron, strained at it with his legs sliding in the dirt. The rails wouldn’t budge. He wiped his hands on his pants and looked around, suddenly spooked and feeling observed.

Joseph squinted into the bush. The trees waited with their silver green leaves flickering. He moved his glasses around and blinked, and nothing revealed itself to him. The horse shifted its weight and he looked at it. A wind moved among the branches, carrying the smell of stale water, of earth. Silence loomed out at him. He walked back up to the track and took up a spanner, held it up in defence as he peered out.

He climbed back onto the old horse and tried to force a gallop toward Glenrowan, and she bared her teeth and walked.

At the railway station no one was about. He rode to McDonnell's hotel and got off the horse. The place was closed. Joseph cupped his face against a window and saw nothing therein.

Two men on horses were watching him from down the road.

'Hey,' he called as they turned and rode off.

Joseph mounted and rode shivering to his camp by the railway station. He could see from the road that there were no men, there was no fire, at the camp. He called out gently. No one was there, and the fire was a black core of ash and deceased wood. No smoke sifted up from it at all.

He looked into the tents and found nothing changed. Smoke rose from the chimneys of Jones' inn, a small and somewhat ramshackle establishment outskirting the town. He could hear some people talking, calling out and some laughter from the inn, but could see no one. His Percheron was not among the smaller horses outside the inn. He stood in the empty camp looking at the building and feeling in the cold afternoon a pensive sadness, in the way the tents sagged and the leaves lay about on the ground.

He got back on the horse and rode away from the inn, away from the camp. He went across the tracks, past McDonnell's hotel again, and took the Greta road for a ways trying to picture the night version of the landscape.

It was coming on full evening when he returned to Wangaratta. Lights bloomed out of the murk, orange squares giving away the positions of life. The early moonlight cast the land exaggerated in relief as a stageplay town where nocturnal scenes are acted. He brought the mare to the stables. The farrier emerged with a broom tapping on the floor, disinclined to sweep anything.

'She's reliable. I told ye.'

'Can I hire the horse for one more day?' Joseph shook the coins in his pocket, glancing into the empty stalls.

'Sure, sure,' the man said, looking up into his eyes and wanting to ask something, dropping his mouth open and shut like a turtle. 'Leave her here, I'm usually up all hours.'

Joseph thanked him and crossed to the hotel, as birds slid across the darkening. He ate with his head down and shoulders up, shovelling. He glanced at the men at the next table and they turned back to their food.

He stood at the bar turning a glass in its puddle and feeling heaviness in his chest, lifting itself slowly as he breathed.

He climbed to his room, a shadow spreading above the upturned eyes in the tavern. Joseph closed the door and dropped his coat over a chair, took his hat off and looked at it, remembered standing in the newly built outfitter in Yale with his early fighting money. He stripped to his long underwear and pulled the warm blankets over himself, turning in the blue diffusion of moonlight.

He dreamed of gunfire and men galloping along winding paths through the hills. Men riding over moonlit rails and tearing the steel from the ground, bending it up and hurtling rail ties overhead. He dreamed of men's faces blackened by powder and by flames, falling open under his slow fists as if rotten. Among the faces there was Paul, his eyes grey and his body sprawled across ruptured floorboards, across a railroad that disappeared beneath the earth.

Voices below the window and a train's whistle woke him in the dark. Through the wavering glass, a troupe of police on horses could be seen milling on the still dark street.

He rose from the bed and dressed in a morose fog that sat against his chest. He gulped the pitcher of water on the nightstand, and could hear very faintly the punch of gunshots or thunder on some distant ridge. He put on his coat and hat before opening the door of his room. The pub was dark with some grey light coming through the windows, yellow light off the lamps outside.

Joseph went down the steps and out into the cold. He crossed the road and walked towards the livery among murmuring locals and the yells of policemen turning their horses in the street.

The farrier stood in the doorway, rubbing his hands and blowing on them, watching the torchlit spectacle in the black morning. When he noticed Joseph he turned, grinning.

'Bit of excitement,' the man said.

Joseph gazed at him in depletion with his heavy face wavering in the stable's lamplight. 'Too early to ask for that horse?'

The farrier opened a stall and led the mare out.

‘I, ah, haven’t looked at her shoes yet. Can’t seem to lift her feet. Ha, she’s a stubborn one.’

‘That’s fine,’ Joseph said and grabbed the reins. ‘Didn’t get far yesterday.’

‘Just a half crown then,’ said the man.

Joseph dug in his pocket and dropped a coin in the dry palm, and took the horse out without answering the man further.

‘Something is most certainly up,’ the farrier said, holding the doorframe and looking out at the marbled dark of the sky mixed through with locomotive smoke, and the police rushing here and there.

The train was being loaded with police horses, and officers stood on the platform checking their rifles and hollering to each other as they waited to board.

Joseph swung up onto the thin old mare, tall like a driftwood effigy of a horse for burning. With a great blooming of coalsmoke, lit yellow from the station lanterns and the passenger car, the train howled and pulled away, bearing its load of horses and bristling constables on toward Glenrowan.

Joseph fell in behind a group of police who were galloping along the road for Glenrowan. He followed them, and could see their white faces when they turned to look at him riding some distance behind. They kept ahead of him, glancing back now and again. An officer broke off and slowed. When Joseph came abreast, the man pulled a revolver from somewhere inside his coat and held it up.

‘What’s your business,’ the officer said.

Joseph looked over at him. They rode along facing each other until Joseph shrugged.

‘Going to Glenrowan. I work there.’

‘Oh you do? Maybe working with the Kellys, then?’ The policeman pointed the gun at him. ‘You’re a large target, friend.’

Joseph blinked slowly and turned to look ahead down the road, shaking the reins while the workhorse thudded underneath him.

The officer came closer and rode right next to him, staring at Joseph’s face as his confederates glanced back at them out of the dust. He spurred the horse and rode ahead, again waving the pistol at Joseph before turning away.

Joseph followed their dark mass with one hand over his mouth for the dust, and eventually the road came parallel to the railway. The train was below, stopped at the gap in the line which he had seen the day before. He could hear men yelling as he rode past. The mounted police galloped on in their low cloud, and Joseph slowed his horse.

He had to coerce the old mare off the road and into the brush, and she pulled constantly at the reins with him whispering and scratching her neck. He rode up through the eucalypt trees and boulders darkened with rain, air whistling around him and the grey sky distanceless and uniform. Birds clawed up through the bushes and took off when he came near, little black specks like ash against the sky. He came to the ridge and he looked along it for any mark of human trespass and cursed his eyes yet again. He led the horse over the ridge in some familiarity with his path, and soon spotted the trail down among the rocks.

Joseph guided the reluctant horse down the rough path and she rolled her eyes. Her teeth were bared and she pulled at the reins with vigour but he forced her on. They came eventually to the clearing of the little house with its outshack and feed-troughs.

The horse made straight for the trough as Joseph looked around them. The house was quiet with no smoke coming from the chimney.

He saw his Percheron standing beside the house at the same time the mare stopped and began huffing at the smell of the half-burnt shed.

Joseph sat looking at his horse. He was cold and he felt his body wash over with an ill crawling. He swung down from the mare and stood for a moment before hobbling her and walking to the shack. He went around the side and could see that the whole back was gone with ribs of char poking out in all directions and the roof hanging down like a black curtain caught in stage rigging.

‘Why this, Paul?’ he said to himself with his throat catching on the words. ‘You are so stupid. Stupid.’

There was Paul, lying face up. His eyes turned completely empty from whatever heat had reached his face. His moustaches were half burnt and smudged against his lip.

He lay with all his strong limbs splayed as if trying to hold the floor of the shack from heaving him off.

The little derringer was clutched in his right hand with the hammer down. Paul’s black pants and the pointed riding boots, which were seen by their co-workers as flashy. Joseph knelt, afraid Paul would sit up or turn away from him. He pushed the eyelids down and they felt gelatinous under his fingers, and he was angry at himself for almost pulling his hand away. He took the pistol from the tight fingers and dropped it into his coat pocket.

He reached out to support himself as his legs went soft, and he sat in the charred room next to his sprawled brother, as the sky moved above them. He tried to lift Paul by

the wrists, but the arms felt too loose and malleable when he held them, and he could not.

He invaded the house to find some blankets for Paul, and rolled him carefully in the shroud. Joseph lifted his brother and laid him over the saddle of the mare. He secured the body with rope, intent on the task, while the horses bumped against one another. He took the hobbles off the mare and rode out again on his Percheron, leading the mare by the reins.

Man and workhorse looked like an oversized void, towing the old rental horse with her deflated rider. When he came to the ridge he looked out over the valley but could discern nothing save the great heavy wash of the sky and the green reaches of land emerging in dull light. He moved the horse and jerked the mare's reins, and they crossed the ridge. He rode inebriate and thoughtless along that spine and found the trail down from the ranges without attempt.

His horse worked its way among the boulders and the mare resigned to being led. A small creek clambered along next to the trail and it smelled of rain. They came to flat ground, denser trees and again that presence of some watcher out there beyond his vision. Joseph rode out onto the road and headed for Glenrowan. He reached the town as daylight washed through the trees and sat along the buildings, and fog pulsed all around with horsemen riding in and out of it.

When he passed McDonnell's hotel, he turned to look at the group there. He rode past them expressionless and staring, and they watched him go by. The men stood with their faces dark while a few women could be heard shrieking in sorrow from inside.

At the railway station there was a crowd. Joseph sat looking on, unable to wake up. He could function and logic but he felt muffled as if under a blanket. He rode up to the station and climbed down from his horse. He hobbled it along with the mare because there was a cacophony of gunshots and screaming, and men ran past close to the animal, and horses were let loose and rearing up in confusion and fear. He looked over his bundle to see if any hands or boots were visible. Joseph stared out at the scene in front of him. He couldn't see how many people were crowded at the train station, but he could see police or their allies running back and forth in groups among the trees, shooting in the direction of Jones' hotel. He stood with the crowd and watched smoke roll up whenever a barrage of shots came from the police.

'What is happening here?' he asked.



Two men turned to him and spoke at the same time, then one of them flopped his hands at the other and turned back to watch the police.

‘The Kelly gang are holed up in Jones’ inn with hostages, and they tore up the railway. Police been shooting it out with them since all hours.’

‘It hasn’t even been three hours,’ said the other man.

‘Anyway, the traps are shooting the place up. The Kellys are stuck in there, and who knows how many with em.’

A woman was screeching from the hotel and the police blasted away at her, yelling at each other until the firing stopped. Joseph looked over the hats of the crowd but couldn’t see much with the bluish fog and the dim morning light. Two men ran through his camp and some of the tents were down. He wondered where the railway crew were. He knew where one of them was.

Joseph moved toward the front of the crowd, shouldering through the heavy bodies.

‘Get back,’ said an officer with a rash under his jaw, orchestrating his baton near Joseph’s face.

Joseph shied away from the baton, and put his hands up. He was still dull as though he couldn’t wake up completely. He felt a raw volatility and his eyes hurt.

‘Ha, put that stick away or he’ll break it over your helmet,’ someone said from the crowd behind him.

The officer’s eyes widened and he came down with the baton on Joseph’s shoulder. Joseph hunched and turned away, and pressed back into the crowd with the officer baring his teeth and hollering for someone else to challenge him.

An officer was yelling about the Kellys trying to escape the hotel on horseback, and the crowd watched as the police levelled their rifles at the horse paddock and annihilated each animal standing there.

Joseph tried to get out of the press of bodies, as more people came to stand on the platform. The train station walls were smacked with bullets and everyone screamed involuntarily and then laughed.

Joseph started pushing men out of his way, restricted and frightened as he was. He stepped down from the platform and went toward his horse.

A train came up from the direction of Benalla, its whistle howling and the black smoke spreading darkness against the sky. It pulled into the station and more police officers came out, yelling and forcing through the crowd, and trying to get the horses off the train.

There was such noise that his ears began ringing and he lumbered against his Percheron, trying to unhobble it. He led the horses, one docile and ignorant and the other skittering under its charred bundle, toward the tents of their camp.

Joseph dug his boot into the ashes and spread them. He went into his tent, and packed his small amount of possessions: the bible, the few penny dreadfuls, his paperwork and the photographs of himself. Joseph put everything into his suitcase and took the good blanket that was company property.

He left the tent and looked over at Paul's own tent and sobbed once like a strange bark. He lifted the tentflap and hunched his huge body through. He collected Paul's things into the suitcase, and then lay on his brother's bedding with all his clothes and boots on. He put his face against the pillow, clammy with cold and grease from Paul's unwashed hair.

He moved his glasses off his face and lay in untold misery, as guns clapped throughout the trees. He pulled the derringer and shot pouch from his coat, and loaded it. He put the little pistol against his ear and lay shuddering, and lowered the hammer with his thumb.

And then there was a faint yelling in the trees up beyond the inn. A deep voice roared out amidst a barrage of gunfire. In the lull, the voice kept calling. Then another round of shooting. The crowd fell silent. Joseph could hear that voice booming, and others yelling in panic. He lay listening, studying the tent fabric above him, white-blue and cold in early light. He sat up and opened the tentflap, looked about his camp.

He gazed into the scrubland in the direction of that noise, and could see the police running and crouching, firing, running again. Beyond them, a man plodded through the trees directly into the gunfire and he kept walking.

Joseph stood up and stared out at the spectacle. The man moved through the mists, a tall and pale figure with what looked to be an enormous head, firing a pistol as he marched toward the police. Joseph saw someone shoot the man with a rifle, and his oversized head jerked before he came forward again.

'It's Lucifer hisself,' someone said.

More shots came from Jones' inn and the crowd ducked bodily, and got back behind the railway station. Joseph stood numb and watching the figures' march, the lurching white shape amid the trees.

The tall man bellowed, 'You bloody dogs, you can't shoot me.'

The police were now screaming about a bunyip, a demon, a ghost. Their bullets rang out like bells against his armour as he kept walking slowly among them,

occasionally shooting at them and beating the pistol against his own helmet, which was shaped like a can and covered his head entirely.

He roared at them as they unloaded round after round, and then he dropped to the ground with bullets resounding off his helmet. He sprawled against a fallen eucalypt, his arms out. Officers ran from cover and grabbed at him, struggling in a mass, sliding to the earth. A solitary pistol shot banged into the air, and then he was covered over by bodies.

Behind Joseph, the railway station uproared with police and armed citizens yelling at the crowd to stay where they were. Joseph turned dully to watch the antics surrounding him. His horses jerked and shuffled on the collapsed tents.

‘They’ve captured Ned Kelly,’ someone yelled. There was silence, and then a few cheers.

Joseph took the reins of his horse, and wondered where to go. Photographers were setting up their tripods around the train station, and asking people to turn and have their picture taken.

Joseph watched as police officers and railway managers straightened their coats and peered out at the cameras, with occasional gunshots booming out in the trees. A fight broke out in the middle of the crowd and the officials had to break their pose or be pushed off the platform onto the tracks below.

Someone screamed in fury from Jones’ inn and shots kicked dirt all around the officers as they wrestled with Kelly in his armour.

‘Keep watch, keep watch,’ a voice called out.

The group of police came out of the trees with Kelly hobbling in the middle of them, and the shooter at the inn trying to finish him off before the police could drag him to safety. Joseph followed their progress across the muddy trampled ground, as did all in attendance.

The police returned a cover fire at the inn and brought Kelly to the last car of the train. They disappeared inside and the train windows began exploding, so they moved him again, bleeding and crowded by the hundreds who were there by this time, into the protection of the train station. The doors closed and officers stood in front, rifles across their chests.

Then the morning fell silent as all present waited and turned whenever a photographer was ready for another picture. Joseph walked to the horses, touched the blanket Paul was wrapped in. He opened the tool crib and pulled out a shovel and pick.

Gibson ran toward him from the station and grabbed his arm.

‘Joseph, where the hell have you been?’

Joseph turned and looked down into his eyes, and Gibson started.

‘What the hell happened to you, mate?’ he asked. ‘All the crew was up at Jones’ hotel getting blasted to shit by the police!’

Gibson shook his arm, staring at him. Joseph shrugged and turned back to attend to his horse.

‘What’s the matter with you?’ Gibson yelled as gunshots erupted from the bushes somewhere up near the inn.

They both watched as a horse ran past bleeding from its chest. Gibson turned to the crowd, panting and holding onto Joseph’s arm.

‘I’m leaving,’ said Joseph.

‘What about—’ Gibson began, and looked around at their trampled quarters. He gazed off down the tracks as if to imagine them starting work in the morning, and he dropped his hand.

‘My brother is shot,’ Joseph said to him, and then he began sobbing and buried his face against the black shoulder of his horse, with his glasses bent up off one ear. He gestured at the shovel and pick on the ground. Gibson nodded at the tools and rubbed his hands on his trouser legs, and then bent to pick them up.

They walked the Percheron and mare away from the camp and Joseph climbed up into the saddle, and rode slowly with Gibson leading the mare. They moved off into the trees for a ways until the cacophony faded behind, and followed a sparse assortment of eucalypts on the edge of a field. They could hear lonely gunshots coming from the trees around Jones’ inn, like a distant storm playing itself out.

Beneath the stark and clawing shape of an ironbark they began to pick and dig. They worked in silence and Gibson watched Joseph’s face in sidelong interpretation. The earth gave up a hole large enough for Paul’s body, an oblong yaw of red rocky dirt. Joseph smashed the pick into the hole in a restrained frenzy and threw it aside for the shovel, and sent sprays of dirt up behind him until his torso alone protruded from the earth, and Gibson helped him lower the wrapped body into the hole.

They spread the dirt back into the pit and listened to the abrupt claps of riflefire through the trees.

Joseph found two twisted sticks and took a strip of leather from the mare’s tack, and fashioned a cross, as the overcast sky hung above them and birds called out from the trees. The raised length of dirt like a scar on the ground with a derelict cross stuck in

the middle of it. Joseph's chest heaved and he wondered what corruption of life had been the cause of such an end, and where his brother had become derailed from their mutual history. He looked at the dirt on his hands for a long time with Gibson frowning at his back yet saying nothing.

'Thank you,' Joseph said to him.

Gibson adjusted the stirrup straps on the old mare. They mounted and rode away from the little plot shrouded by the ironbark and forgotten in the great swath of land, each with his head down and lost in his own clamour, amid the clack of dead branches underhoof.

They could see a wash of smoke pouring up from the inn. Gibson rode in front and they looked in profile like a solitary rider followed by his own black shadow, some lone man and the weight of his guilt riding personified behind.

They could hear the crowd before they came into view, and the swarm once visible was vast. At the train station and all around the scene of the battle there must have been a thousand people. Joseph and Gibson turned to each other as they rode slowly along, both of them slackjawed and mute.

Jones' inn was roaring and it spewed great reaches of smoke. The crowd was cheering something that he couldn't see even from horseback. Photographers were still taking pictures of the crowd, of the flaming inn.

Joseph tied his horse to a post and swung down, a distance from the crowd in case he needed to escape or in case the police were still shooting horses.

'That mare needs to go back to Wangaratta,' he said to Gibson. 'Or keep it. I don't care.'

They walked into the mass of people.

A priest materialized out of the burning hotel, waving his arms at the nearest police officers. They rushed over with guns raised. Some in the crowd cheered but most of them looked miserable, and there was much shoving and yelling.

The railway crew spotted Joseph and forced their way through the crowd, and they all hollered and gripped each other's arms.

'I was a God damned hostage,' said Oslo.

Bob said, 'Everyone was a God damned hostage.'

'Kept us there since Saturday night,' Oslo said, as a group of police made their way through the crowd. 'Kellys aren't a bad group of blokes, really.'

An officer came raging out of the group, yelling.

‘You there! You just shut your mouth,’ he screamed at Oslo, and struck him in the face with the grip of his pistol.

Oslo dropped to his knees and the crew dragged him off through the audience. Joseph followed them and helped push people back so they could get clear. The police were broiled in the crowd behind them, shoving and arguing with a group of men. Someone fired a pistol in the air and there was a scream.

Men were jostling at the windows of the railway station, pressing their faces to the glass and calling out to Ned to look up. The police shoved them away and they were replaced by more men instantly.

Joseph picked Oslo up like a child and carried him clear of the swarm. The crew stood down from the railway platform and walked to their camp, the tents trampled and smeared with muddy footprints. They watched the inn as it buckled and fell in upon itself, and a black belch of ash and smoke rolled up from it.

Some of the police gathered to pose with their rifles crossed, the front row of them kneeling or propped on an elbow, laughing and then glaring in sobriety into the lens when the cameraman raised his hand.

There was a crowd hauling something clear of the ruin, and a photographer rushed to set up his gear. Joseph walked with the others, an automaton, toward the crowd. They saw a small torso laid out on a slab of bark, a black husk of some boy limbless from the severity of the inferno, the skull cracked and destroyed by the heat.

Men stood about the deformed corpse while the photographer hissed at them to stand back. Joseph wanted to strike down each one of them. He longed with a writhing deep in his strong body to hurt someone. He fought against it and tears stood in his eyes.

The cameraman said, ‘You there. Large fellow. Turn this way.’

Joseph turned slowly toward the camera box, his face empty and his fingers twitching as he held his pose. The photographer removed the lens cap and Joseph stared into the vacant black eye of the machine. He would not want this photograph for his small collection.

The photographer looked up from the camera and thanked him, turned his attention back to the charred deformity.

Burned bodies from the inn were carried back to the railway platform with hundreds of people pushing to see them.

Their families began to howl in misery, young women shrieking at the police who still stood holding their rifles among the crowd. Men came forward and gathered about the corpses. Here was the whole of the gang lying and surrounded by their kin and

supporters, one of them still alive and listening to his sisters' wailing outside the station walls.

Joseph had seen enough. He shook with a nausea of heart. The railroad crew were among the crowd, somewhere distant from him.

He moved along the multitude's fringe. He walked away from the camp and the railway, and buttoned his heavy wool coat at the neck, although it was tight. Joseph put his hand on the Percheron's face and rubbed the bony nose. He checked the straps around his suitcase and put a boot in the stirrup, and swung up onto the muscular beast.

He was watched by those at the crowd's edge, those who couldn't see the spectacle they thronged and waited so patiently to witness.

They saw an enormous man on a giant horse, dressed in good quality black clothing and shaking his head at them.

Joseph rode out of the little town and headed south. He rocked back and forth and watched birds move silently over the trees. Once he was away from town he pulled the derringer from his coat and hurled it into the bush, where it crackled and disappeared among the dry branches.

He rode the whole way to Melbourne, sleeping in the saddle and waking with his mouth congealed and his back muscles screaming, phantoms shushing away from him across the green expanses of farmland.

He was halloosed from passing carts and owl-eyed townspeople, folks desperate for further news from Glenrowan, or desperate to be the first to impart it on the ignorant.

Joseph plodded along the road with the world faded and its distances marred outside of his lens. The sky and earth rolled away either side. His sorrow came in a few dry sobs, or a wetness that he blinked away, and he would struggle to fill his lungs.

Huge solitary gum trees pointed their arms down the road, pointed back the way he'd come, gestured at the layers of sky. A raven sat barking and cawing meaninglessly but he took its omen upon his shoulders as he passed beneath it.

Melbourne came into view as a thickening of the land, layered in dull smoke. Eventually the sprawling town loomed across his entire vision and he rode into its centre, its incredible noise. At the docks, he read the shipping posters until he saw North America: San Francisco, Seattle, Victoria. Sailing in two days' time. All those two days he heard nothing but Glenrowan. The news had reached London by telegraph in only five hours after Kelly was captured. Crowds stood in the cold in front of newspaper

offices, and watched him walk the streets alone, staring back at them with his magnified eyes.

He observed the Percheron as it was led up the gangplank onto the mammoth steamship. The ship rose up out of Joseph's focus. Its smokestacks painted the harbour in eclipse.

The ship's steward held his pen above the logbook, gazing along the queue with a moustache hiding his mouth. He looked up at Joseph and his eyes widened before settling again into deadpan.

'Name?' he said.

Joseph looked down at the meticulous writing.

'You speak English?' the steward asked.

'Yes.'

'Name?'

He pushed his glasses up because the bridge of his nose was throbbing.

'Joseph Richard,' he said.

'Joseph Richard. One piece luggage. One Percheron workhorse. Correct?'

'Correct,' he said.

The steward scratched and Joseph watched ink spray in tiny explosion as the tip of the quill caught on the paper.

'*Bon voyage*, sir,' said the steward.

THE END.