# THE LUST OF HATE

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# INTRODUCTION. MY CHANCE IN LIFE.

LET me begin by explaining that I have set myself the task of telling this story for two sufficient reasons. The first, because I consider that it presents as good a warning to a young fellow as he could anywhere find, against allowing himself to be deluded by a false hatred into committing a sin that at any other time he would consider in every way contemptible and cowardly; and the second, because I think it just possible that it may serve to set others on their guard against one of the most unscrupulous men, if man he is—of which I begin to have my doubts—who ever wore shoe leather. If the first should prove of no avail, I can console myself with the reflection that I have at least done my best, and, at any rate, can have wrought no harm; if the second is not required, well, in that case, I think I shall have satisfactorily proved to my reader, whoever he may be, what a truly lucky man he may consider himself never to have fallen into Dr. Nikola's clutches. What stroke of ill fortune brought me into this fiend's power I suppose I shall never be able to discover. One thing, however, is very certain, that is that I have no sort of desire ever to see or hear of him again. Sometimes when *I* lie in bed at night, and my dear wife—the truest and noblest woman, I verily believe, who ever came into this world for a man's comfort and consolation—is sleeping by my side, I think of all the curious adventures I have passed through in the last two years, and then fall to wondering how on earth I managed to come out of them alive, to say nothing of doing so with so much happiness as is now my portion. This sort of moralising, however, is not telling my tale; so if you will

excuse me, kind reader, I will bring myself to my bearings and plunge into my narrative forthwith.

By way of commencement I must tell you something of myself and my antecedents. My name is Gilbert Pennethorne; my mother was a Tregenna. and if you remember the old adage—"By Tre—, Pol— and Pen— You may know the Cornishmen," you will see that I may claim to be Cornish to the backbone.

My father, as far back as I can recollect him, was a highly respectable, but decidedly choleric, gentleman of the old school, who clung to his black silk stock and high-rolled collar long after both had ceased to be the fashion, and for a like reason had for modern innovations much the same hatred as the stagecoachman was supposed to entertain for railway engines. Many were the absurd situations this animosity led him into. Of his six children—two boys and four girls—I was perhaps the least fortunate in his favour. For some reason or another—perhaps because I was the youngest, and my advent into the world had cost my mother her life—he could scarcely bring himself at any time to treat me with ordinary civility. In consequence I never ventured near him unless I was absolutely compelled to do so. I went my way, he went his—and as a result we knew but little of each other, and liked what we saw still less. Looking back upon it now, I can see that mine must have been an extraordinary childhood.

To outsiders my disposition was friendly almost to the borders of demonstrativeness; in my own home, where an equivalent temperament might surely have been looked for, I was morose, quick to take offence, and at times sullen even to brutishness. This my father, to whom opposition of any kind was as hateful as the Reform Bill, met with an equal spirit. Ridicule and carping criticism, for which he had an extraordinary aptitude, became my daily portion, and when these failed to effect their purpose, corporal punishment followed sure and sharp. As a result I detested

my home as cordially as I loathed my parent, and was never so happy as when at school—an unnatural feeling, as you will admit, in one so young. From Eton I went up to Oxford, where my former ill luck pursued me. Owing to a misunderstanding I had the misfortune to incur the enmity of my college authorities during my first term, and, in company with two others, was ignominiously "sent down" at the outset of my second year. This was the opportunity my family had been looking for from the moment I was breeched, and they were quick to take advantage of it. My debts were heavy, for I had never felt the obligation to stint myself, and in consequence my father's anger rose in proportion to the swiftness with which the bills arrived. As the result of half an hour's one-sided conversation in the library, with a thunder-shower pattering a melancholy accompaniment upon the window panes, I received a cheque for five thousand pounds with which to meet my University liabilities, an uncomplimentary review of my life, past and present, and a curt announcement that I need never trouble the parental roof with my society in the future. I took him at his word, pocketed the cheque, expressed a hypocritical regret that I had caused him so much anxiety; went up to my room and collected my belongings; then, having bidden my sisters farewell in icy state in the drawing-room, took my seat in the dog-cart, and was driven to the station to catch the express to town. A month later I was on my way to Australia with a draft for two thousand pounds in my pocket, and the smallest possible notion of what I was going to do with myself when I reached the Antipodes.

In its customary fashion ill luck pursued me from the very moment I set foot on Australian soil. I landed in Melbourne at a particularly unfortunate time, and within a month had lost half my capital in a plausible, but ultimately unprofitable, mining venture. The balance I took with me into the bush, only to lose it there as easily as I had done

the first in town. The aspect of affairs then changed completely. The so-called friends I had hitherto made deserted me with but one exception. That one, however, curiously enough the least respectable of the lot, exerted himself on my behalf to such good purpose that he obtained for me the position of storekeeper on a Murrumbidgee sheep station. I embraced the opportunity with alacrity, and for eighteen months continued in the same employment, working with a certain amount of pleasure to myself, and, I believe, some satisfaction to my employers. How long I should have remained there I cannot say, but when the Banyah Creek gold-field was proclaimed, I caught the fever, abandoned my employment, and started off, with my swag upon my back, to try my fortune. This turned out so poorly that less than seven weeks found me desperate, my savings departed, and my claim,—which I must in honesty confess showed but small prospects of success—seized for a debt by a rascally Jew storekeeper upon the Field. A month later a new rush swept away the inhabitants, and Banyah Creek was deserted. Not wishing to be left behind I followed the general inclination, and in something under a fortnight was prostrated at death's door by an attack of fever, to which I should probably have succumbed had it not been for the kindness of a misanthrope of the field, an old miner, Ben Garman by name. This extraordinary individual, who had tried his luck on every gold-field of importance in the five colonies and was as yet as far off making his fortune as when he had first taken a shovel in his hand, found me lying unconscious alongside the creek. He carried me to his tent, and, neglecting his claim, set to work to nurse me back to life again. It was not until I had turned the corner and was convalescent that I discovered the curiosity my benefactor really was. His personal appearance was as peculiar as his mode of life. He was very short, very broad, very red faced, wore a long grey beard, had bristling, white eye-brows, enormous ears, and the largest hands and

feet *I* have ever seen on a human being. Where he had hailed from originally he was unable himself to say. His earliest recollection was playing with another small boy upon the beach of one of the innumerable bays of Sydney harbour; but how he had got there, whether his parents had just emigrated, or whether they had been out long enough for him to have been born in the colony were points of which he pronounced himself entirely ignorant. He detested women, though he could not explain the reason of his antipathy, and there were not two other men upon the field with whom he was on even the barest speaking terms. How it came about that he took such a fancy to me puzzled me then and has continued to do so ever since, for, as far as I could see, save a certain leaning towards the solitary in life, we had not a single bond in common. As it was, however, we were friends without being intimate, and companions by day and night without knowing more than the merest outside rind of each other's lives.

As soon as I was able to get about again I began to wonder what on earth I should do with myself next. I had not a halfpenny in the world, and even on a goldfield it is necessary to eat if one desires to live, and to have the wherewithal to pay if one desires to eat. I therefore placed the matter before my companion and ask his advice. He gave it with his usual candour, and in doing so solved my difficulty for me once and for all.

"Stay with me, lad," he said, "and help me to work the claim. What with the rheumatiz and the lumbago I'm none so spry as I used to be, and there's gold enough in the old shaft yonder to make the fortunes of both of us when once we can get at it."

Naturally I lost no time in closing with his offer, and the following morning found me in the bowels of the earth as hard at work with pick and shovel as my weakness would permit. Unfortunately, however, for our dream of wealth, the mine did not prove as brilliant an investment as its

owner had predicted for it, and six week's labour showed us the futility of proceeding further. Accordingly we abandoned it, packed our swags, and set off for a mountain range away to the southward, on prospecting thoughts intent. Finding nothing to suit us there, we migrated into the west, where we tried our hands at a variety of employments for another eighteen months or thereabouts. At length, on the Diamintina River, in Western Queensland, we parted company, myself to take a position of storekeeper on Markapurlie station in the same neighbourhood, and Ben to try his luck on a new field that had just come into existence near the New South Wales border.

For something like three years we neither saw nor heard anything of each other. Whether Ben had succeeded on the field to which he had proceeded when he had said "good-bye" to me, or whether, as usual, he had been left stranded, I could only guess. My own life, on the other hand, was uneventful in the extreme.

From morning till night I kept the station books, served out rations to boundary riders and other station hands, and, in the intervals, thought of my old life, and wondered whether it would ever be my lot to set foot in England again. So far I had been one of Fate's failures, but though I did not know it, I was nearer fortune's money bag then than I had ever been in my life before.

The manager of Markapurlie was a man named Bartrand, an upstart and a bully of the first water. He had never taken kindly to me nor I to him. Every possible means that fell in his way of annoying me he employed; and, if the truth must be told, I paid his tyranny back with interest. He seldom spoke save to find fault; I never addressed him except in a tone of contempt which must have been infinitely galling to a man of his suspicious antecedents. That he was only waiting his chance to rid himself of me was as plain as the nose upon his face, and for this very

reason I took especial care so to arrange my work that it should always fail to give him the opportunity he desired. The crash, however, was not to be averted, and it came even sooner than I expected.

One hot day, towards the end of summer, I had been out to one of the boundary rider's huts with the month's supply of rations, and, for the reason that I had a long distance to travel, did not reach the station till late in the afternoon. As I drove up to the little cluster of buildings beside the lagoon I noticed a small crowd collected round the store door. Among those present I could distinguish the manager, one of the overseers (a man of Bartrand's own kidney, and therefore his especial crony), two or three of the hands, and as the reason of their presence there, what looked like the body of a man lying upon the ground at their feet. Having handed my horses over to the black boy at the stockyard, I strode across to see what might be going forward. Something in my heart told me I was vitally concerned in it, and bade me be prepared for any emergency.

Reaching the group I glanced at the man upon the ground, and then almost shouted my surprise aloud. He was none other then Ben Garman, but oh, how changed! His once stalwart frame shrunk to half its former size, his face was pinched and haggard to a degree that frightened me, and, as I looked, I knew there could be no doubt about one thing, the man was as ill as a man could well be and yet be called alive.

Pushing the crowd unceremoniously aside, I knelt down and spoke to him. He was mumbling something to himself and evidently did not recognise me.

"Ben," I cried, "Ben, old man, don't you remember Gilbert Pennethorne? Tell me what's wrong with you, old fellow."

But he only rolled his head and muttered something about *"five hundred paces north-west from the creek and just in a line with the blasted gum."*

Realizing that it was quite useless talking to him, and that if I wished to prolong his life I must get him to bed as soon as possible, I requested one of the men standing by to lend a hand and help me to carry him into my hut. This was evidently the chance Bartrand wanted.

"To the devil with such foolery," he cried. "You, Johnstone, stand back and let the man alone. I'll not have him malingering here, I tell you. I know his little game, and yours too, Pennethorne, and I warn you, if you take him into your hut I'll give you the sack that instant, and so you remember what *I* say."

"But you surely don't want the man to die?" I cried, astonished almost beyond the reach of words at his barbarity. "Can't you see how ill he is? Examine him for yourself. He is delirious now, and if he's not looked to he'll be dead in a few hours."

"And a good job too," said the manager brutally. "For my part, I believe he's only shamming. Any way I'm not going to have him doctored here. If he's as ill as you say I'll send him up to the Mail Change, and they can doctor him there. He looks as if he had enough money about him to pay Gibbs his footing."

As Garman was in rags and his condition evidenced the keenest poverty, this sally was treated as a fine joke by the overseer and the understrappers, who roared with laughter, and swore that they had never heard anything better in their lives. It roused my blood, however, to boiling pitch, and I resolved that, come what might, I would not desert my friend.

"If you send him away to the Mail Change," I cried, looking Bartrand square in the eye, "where you hope they won't take him in—and, even if they do, you know they'll not take the trouble to nurse him—you'll be as much a murderer as the man who stabs another to the heart, and so I tell you to your face."

Bartrand came a step closer to me, with his fists clenched and his face showing as white with passion as his tanned skin would permit.
"You call me a murderer, you dog?" he hissed. "Then, by God, I'll act up to what I've been threatening to do these months past and clear you off the place at once. Pack up your traps and make yourself scarce within an hour, or, by the Lord Harry, I'll forget myself and take my boot to you. I've had enough of your fine gentleman airs, my dandy, and I tell you the place will smell sweeter when you're out of it."
I saw his dodge, and understood why he had behaved towards Ben in such a scurvy fashion. But not wanting to let him see that I was upset by his behaviour, I looked him straight in the face as coolly as I knew how and said—
"So you're going to get rid of me because I'm man enough to want to save the life of an old friend, Mr. Bartrand, are you? Well, then, let me tell you that you're a meaner hound than even I took you for, and that is saying a great deal. However, since you wish me to be off I'll go."
"If you don't want to be pitched into the creek yonder you'll go without giving me any more of your lip," he answered. "I tell you I'm standing just about all I can carry now. If we weren't in Australia, but across the water in some countries I've known, you'd have been dangling from that gum tree over yonder by this time."
I paid no attention to this threat, but, still keeping as calm as I possibly could, requested him to inform me if I was to consider myself discharged.
"You bet you are," said he, "and I'll not be happy till I've seen your back on the sand ridge yonder."
"Then," said I, "I'll go without more words. But I'll trouble you for my cheque before I do so. Also for a month's wages in lieu of notice."
Without answering he stepped over Ben's prostrate form and proceeded into the store. I went to my hut and rolled

up my swag. This done, I returned to the office, to find them hoisting Ben into the tray buggy which was to take him to the Mail Change, twenty miles distant. The manager stood in the verandah with a cheque in his hand. When I approached he handed it to me with an ill-concealed grin of satisfaction on his face.

"There is your money, and I'll have your receipt," he said. Then, pointing to a heap of harness beyond the verandah rails, he continued, "Your riding saddle is yonder, and also your pack saddles and bridles. I've sent a black boy down for your horses. When they come up you can clear out as fast as you please. If I catch you on the run again look out, that's all."

"I'll not trouble you, never fear," I answered. "I have no desire to see you or Markapurlie again as long as I live. But before I go I've got something to say to you, and I want these men to hear it. I want them to know that I consider you a mean, lying, contemptible murderer. And, what's more, I'm going to let them see me cowhide you within an inch of your rascally life."

I held a long green-hide *quirt* in my hand, and as I spoke I advanced upon him, making it whistle in the air. But surprised as he was at my audacity he was sufficiently quick to frustrate my intention. Rushing in at me he attempted to seize the hand that held the whip, but he did not affect his purpose until I had given him a smart cut with it across the face. Then, seeing that he meant fighting, for I will do him the justice to say that he was no coward, I threw the thong away and gave him battle with my fists. He was not the sort of foe to be taken lightly. The man had a peculiar knack of his own, and, what was more, he was as hard as whalebone and almost as pliable. However he had not the advantage of the training I had had, nor was he as powerful a man. I let him have it straight from the shoulder as often and as hard as he would take it, and three times he measured his full length in the dust. Each time he came up

with a fresh mark upon his face, and I can tell you the sight did me good. My blood was thoroughly afire by this time, and the only thing that could cool it was the touch of his face against my fist. At last I caught him on the point of the jaw and he went down all of a heap and lay like a log, just as he had fallen, breathing heavily. The overseer went across to him, and kneeling by his side, lifted his head.

"I believe you've killed him," said he, turning to me with an evil look upon his face.

"Don't you believe it," I answered. "It would have saved the hangman a job if I had, for, you take my word for it, he'll live to be hung yet."

I was right in my first assertion, for in a few moments the manager opened his eyes and looked about him in a dazed fashion. Seeing this I went off to the stock yard and saddled my horses, then, with a last look at the station and my late antagonist, who at that moment was being escorted by the overseer to his own residence, I climbed into my saddle, and, taking the leading rein of the pack horse from the black boy's hand, set off over the sand hills in the direction taken by the cart containing poor Ben.

Reaching the Mail Change—a miserable iron building of four rooms, standing in the centre of a stretch of the dreariest plain a man could well imagine—I interviewed the proprietor and engaged a room in which to nurse my sick friend back to life. Having done this I put Ben to bed and endeavoured to discover what on earth was the matter with him. At that moment I verily believe I would have given anything I possessed, or should have been likely to possess, for five minutes' conversation with a doctor. I had never seen a case of the kind before, and was hopelessly fogged as to what course I should pursue in treating it. To my thinking it looked like typhoid, and having heard that in such cases milk should be the only diet, I bespoke a goat from the landlord's herd and relegated her to Ben's exclusive use.

My chief prayer for the next month was that it might never be necessary for me to pass through such an awful time again. For three weeks I fought with the disease night and day, one moment cheered by a gleam of hope, the next despairing entirely of success. All the time I was quite aware that I was being spied upon, and that all my sayings and doings were reported to the manager by my landlord when he took over the weekly mail bag. But as I had no desire to hide anything, and nothing, save Ben's progress, to tell, this gave me but the smallest concern. Being no longer in his employ, Bartrand could do me no further mischief, and so long as I paid the extortionate charge demanded by the proprietor of the shanty for board and residence, I knew he would have no fault to find with my presence there.

Somewhere or another I remembered to have read that, in the malady from which I believed my old friend was suffering, on or about the twenty-first day the crisis is reached, and afterwards a change should be observable. My suspicions proved correct, for on that very day Ben became conscious, and after that his condition began perceptibly to improve. For nearly a week, though still as feeble as a month-old child, he mended rapidly. Then, for some mysterious reason he suffered a relapse, lost ground as fast as he had gained it, and on the twelfth day, counting from the one mentioned above, I saw that his case was hopeless, and realised that all my endeavours had been in vain.

How well I remember that miserable afternoon! It had been scorchingly hot ever since sunrise, and the little room in which I watched beside the sick man's bed was like a furnace. From my window I could see the stretch of sunbaked plain rising and falling away towards the horizon in endless monotony. In the adjoining bar I could hear the voices of the landlord and three bushmen who, according to custom, had come over to drink themselves into delirium

on their hard-earned savings, and were facilitating the business with all possible despatch. On the bed poor Ben tumbled and tossed, talking wildly to himself and repeating over and over again the same words I had heard him utter that afternoon at Markapurlie—*"five hundred paces north-west from the creek, and just in a line with the blasted gum."* What he meant by it was more than I could tell, but I was soon to discover, and that discovery was destined to bring me as near the pit of damnation as it is possible for a man to get without actually falling into it.

A little before sundown I left the bedroom and went out into the verandah. The heat and the closeness of the sick room had not had a good effect upon me, and I felt wretchedly sick and ill. I sat down on a bench and took in the hopeless view. A quarter of a mile away across the plain a couple of wild turkeys were feeding, at the same time keeping a sharp look-out about them, and on the very edge of the north-eastern horizon a small cloud of dust proclaimed the coming of the mail coach, which I knew had been expected since sunrise that morning. I watched it as it loomed larger and larger, and did not return to my patient until the clumsy, lumbering concern, drawn by five panting horses, had pulled up before the hostelry. It was the driver's custom to pass the night at the Change, and to go on again at daylight the following morning.

When I had seen the horses unharnessed and had spoken to the driver, who was an old friend, I made my way back to Ben's room. To my delight I found him conscious once more. I sat down beside the bed and told him how glad I was to see that his senses had returned to him.

"Ay, old lad," he answered feebly, "I know ye. But I shan't do so for long. I'm done for now, and I know it. This time to-morrow old Ben will know for hisself what truth there is in the yarns the sky-pilots spin us about heaven and hell."

"Don't you believe it, Ben," I answered, feeling that although I agreed with him it was my duty to endeavour to

cheer him up. "You're worth a good many dead men yet. You're not going out this trip by a great deal. We shall have you packing your swag for a new rush before you can look round. I'll be helping sink a good shaft inside a month."
"Never again," he answered; "the only shaft I shall ever have anything to do with now will be six by two, and when I'm once down in it I'll never see daylight again."
"Well you're not going to talk any more now. Try and have a nap if you can. Sleep's what you want to bring your strength back."
"I shall have enough and to spare of that directly," he answered. "No, lad, I want to talk to you. I've got something on my mind that I must say while I've the strength to do it."
But I wouldn't hear him.
"If you don't try to get to sleep," I said, "I shall clear out and leave you. I'll hear what you've got to say later on. There will be plenty of time for that by and bye."
"As you please," he replied resignedly. "It's for you to choose. If you'd only listen, I could tell you what will make you the richest man on earth. If I die without telling you, you'll only have yourself to thank for it. Now do you want me to go to sleep?"
"Yes, I do!" I said, thinking the poor fellow was growing delirious again. "I want you to try more than ever. When you wake up again I'll promise to listen as long as you like."
He did not argue the point any further, but laid his head down on his pillow again, and in a few moments was dozing quietly.
When he woke again the lamp on the ricketty deal table near the bed had been lit some time. I had been reading a Sydney paper which I had picked up in the bar, and was quite unprepared for the choking cry with which he attracted my attention. Throwing down the paper I went across to the bed and asked him how he felt.

"Mortal bad," was his answer. "It won't be long now afore I'm gone. Laddie, I must say what I've got to say quickly, and you must listen with all your ears."
"I'll listen, never fear," I replied, hoping that my acquiescence might soothe him. "What is it you have upon your mind? You know I'll do anything I can to help you."
"I know that, laddie. You've been a good friend to me, an' now, please God, I'm going to do a good stroke for you. Help me to sit up a bit."
I lifted him up by placing my arm under his shoulders, and, when I had propped the pillows behind him, took my seat again.
"You remember the time I left you to go and try my luck on that new field down south, don't you?"
I nodded.
"Well, I went down there and worked like a galley slave for three months, only to come off the field a poorer man than I went on to it. It was never any good, and the whole rush was a fraud. Having found this out I set off by myself from Kalaman Township into the west, thinking I would prospect round a bit before I tackled another place. Leaving the Darling behind me I struck out for the Boolga Ranges, always having had a sort of notion that there was gold in that part of the country if only folk could get at it."
He panted, and for a few moments I thought he would be unable to finish his story. Large beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead, and he gasped for breath, as a fish does when first taken from the water. Then he pulled himself together and continued:
"Well, for three months I lived among those lonely hills, for all the world like a black fellow, never seeing a soul for the whole of that time. You must remember that for what's to come. Gully after gully, and hill after hill I tried, but all in vain. In some places there were prospects, but when I worked at them they never came to anything. But one day, just as I was thinking of turning back, just by chance I

struck the right spot. When I sampled it I could hardly believe my eyes. I tell you this, laddie," here his voice sunk to a whisper as he said impressively, "there's gold enough there to set us both up as millionaires a dozen times over."

I looked at him in amazement. Was this delirium? or had he really found what he had averred? I was going to question him, but he held up his hand to me to be silent.

"Don't talk," he said; "I haven't much time left. See that there's nobody at the door."

I crossed and opened the door leading into the main passage of the dwelling. Was it only fancy, or did I really hear someone tip-toeing away? At any rate whether anybody had been eavesdropping or not, the passage was empty enough when I looked into it. Having taken my seat at the bedside again, Ben placed his clammy hand upon my arm and said—

"As soon as I found what I'd got, I covered up all traces of my work and cut across country to find you. I sent you a letter from Thargomindah telling you to chuck up your billet and meet me on the road, but I suppose you never received it?"

I shook my head. If only I had done so what a vast difference it might have made in both our lives.

"Well," continued Ben, with increased difficulty, "as no letter came I made my way west as best I could, to find you. On Cooper's Creek I was taken ill, and a precious hard time I had of it. Every day I was getting worse, and by the time I reached Markapurlie I was done for, as you know."

"But what did you want with me?" *I* asked, surprised that he should have taken so much trouble to find me when Fortune was staring him in the face.

"I wanted you to stand in with me, lad. I wanted a little capital to start work on, and I reckoned as you'd been so long in one place, you'd probably have saved a bit. Now it's all done for as far as I'm concerned. It seems a bit rough, don't it, that after hunting for the right spot all my life long,

I should have found it just when it's no use to me? Howsoever, it's there for you, laddie, and I don't know but what you'll make better use of it than I should have done. Now listen here."

He drew me still closer to him and whispered in my ear—

"As soon as I'm gone make tracks for the Booiga Ranges. Don't waste a minute. You ought to do it in three weeks, travelling across country with good horses. Find the head of the creek, and follow it down till you reach the point where it branches off to the east and leaves the hills. There are three big rocks at the bend, and half a mile or so due south from them there's a big dead gum, struck by lightning, maybe. Step five hundred paces from the rocks up the hillside fair north-west, and that should bring you level with the blasted gum. Here's a bit of paper with it all planned out so that you can't make a mistake."

He pulled out half a sheet of greasy note-paper from his bosom and gave it to me.

"It don't look much there; but you mark my words, it will prove to be the biggest gold-mine on earth, and that's saying a deal! Peg out your claim as soon as you get there, and then apply to Government in the usual way for the Discoverer's Eight. And may you make your fortune out of it for your kindness to a poor old man."

He laid his head back, exhausted with so much talking, and closed his eyes. Nearly half-an-hour went by before he spoke again. Then he said wearily,—

"Laddie, I won't be sorry when it's all over. But still I can't help thinking I would like to have seen that mine."

He died almost on the stroke of midnight, and we buried him next day on the little sandhill at the back of the grog shanty. That I was much affected by the poor old man's decease it would be idle to deny, even if I desired to do so. The old fellow had been a good mate to me, and, as far as I knew, I was the only friend he had in the world. In leaving me his secret, I inherited all he died possessed of. But if

that turned out as he had led me to expect it would do, *I* should, indeed, be a made man. In order, however, to prevent a disappointment that would be too crushing, I determined to place no faith in it. My luck had hitherto been so bad that it seemed impossible it could ever change. To tell the truth, I was feeling far too ill by this time to think much about anything outside myself. During the last few days my appetite had completely vanished, my head ached almost to distraction, and my condition generally betokened the approach of a high fever.

As we left the grave and prepared to return to the house, I reeled. Gibbs, the landlord, put his arm round me to steady me.

"Come, hold up," he said, not unkindly. "Bite on the bullet, my lad. We shall have to doctor you next if this is the way you are going on."

I felt too ill to reply, so I held my tongue and concentrated all my energies on the difficult task of walking home. When I reached the house I was put to bed, and Gibbs and his slatternly wife took it in turns to wait upon me. That night I lost consciousness, and remember nothing further of what happened until I came to my senses, in the same room and bed which had been occupied by Ben, some three weeks later. I was so weak then that I felt more of a desire to die and be done with it, than to continue the fight for existence. But my constitution was an extraordinary one, I suppose, for little by little I regained my strength, until, at the end of six weeks, I was able to leave my bed and hobble into the verandah. All this time the story of Ben's mine had been simmering in my brain. The chart he had given me lay where I had placed it before I was taken ill, namely, in my shirt pocket, and one morning I took it out and studied it carefully. What was it worth? Millions or nothing? But that was a question for the future to decide.

Before putting it back into its hiding place I turned it over and glanced at the back. To my surprise there was a large

blot there that I felt prepared to swear had not been upon it when Ben had given it to me. The idea disquieted me exceedingly. I cudgelled my brains to find some explanation for it, but in vain. One thought made me gasp with fright. Had it been abstracted from my pocket during my illness? If this were so I might be forestalled. I consoled myself, however, with the reflection that, even if it had been examined by strangers, no harm would be done, for beyond the bare points of the compass it contained no description of the place, or where it was situated; only the plan of a creek, a dotted line running five hundred paces north-west and a black spot indicating a blasted gum tree. As Ben had given me my directions in a whisper, I was convinced in my own mind that it was quite impossible for anyone else to share my secret.

A week later I settled my account with Gibbs, and having purchased sufficient stores from him to carry me on my way, saddled my horses and set off across country for the Boolga Ranges. I was still weak, but my strength was daily coming back to me. By the time I reached my destination I felt I should be fit for anything. It was a long and wearisome journey, and it was not until I had been a month on the road that I sighted the range some fifty miles or so ahead of me. The day following I camped about ten miles due north of it, and had the satisfaction of knowing that next morning, all being well, I should be at my destination. By this time the idea of the mine, and the possibility of the riches that awaited me, had grown upon me to such an extent that I could think of nothing else. It occupied my waking thoughts, and was the continual subject of my dreams by night. A thousand times or more, as I made my way south, I planned what I would do with my vast wealth when I should have obtained it, and to such a pitch did this notion at last bring me that the vaguest thought that my journey might after all be fruitless hurt me like positive pain.

That night's camp, so short a distance from my Eldorado, was an extraordinary one. My anxiety was so great that I could not sleep, but spent the greater part of the night tramping about near my fire, watching the eastern heavens and wishing for day. As soon as the first sign of light was in the sky I ran up my horses, saddled them, and without waiting to cook a breakfast, set off for the hills which I could see rising like a faint blue cloud above the tree tops to the south. Little more than half-an-hour's ride from my camp brought me to the creek, which I followed to the spot indicated on the chart. My horses would not travel fast enough to keep pace with my impatience. My heart beat so furiously that I felt as if I should choke, and when I found the course of the stream trending off in a south-easterly direction, I felt as if another hour's suspense must inevitably terminate my existence.

Ahead of me I could see the top of the range rising quite distinctly above the timber, and every moment I expected to burst upon the plain which Ben had described to me. When I did, I almost fell from my saddle in sheer terror. The plain was certainly there, the trend of the river, the rocks and the hillside were just as they had been described to me, but there was one vital difference—the whole place was covered with tents, and alive with men. *The field had been discovered, and now, in all human probability, my claim was gone.* The very thought shook me like the ague. Like a madman I pressed my heels into my horse's sides, crossed the creek and began to climb the hill. Pegged-out claims and a thousand miners, busy as ants in an ant heap, surrounded me on every side. I estimated my five hundred paces from the rocks on the creek bank, and pushed on until I had the blasted gum, mentioned on the chart, bearing due south. Hereabouts, to my despair, the claims were even thicker than before—not an inch of ground was left unoccupied.

Suddenly, straight before me, from a shaft head on the exact spot described by Ben, appeared the face of a man I should have known anywhere in the world—it was the face of my old enemy Bartrand. Directly I saw it the whole miserable truth dawned upon me, and I understood as clearly as daylight how I had been duped.

Springing from my saddle and leaving my animals to stray where they would, I dashed across the intervening space and caught him just as he emerged from the shaft. He recognised me instantly, and turned as pale as death. In my rage I could have strangled him where he stood, as easily as I would have done a chicken.

"Thief and murderer," I cried, beside myself with rage and not heeding who might be standing by. "Give up the mine you have stolen from me. Give up the mine, or, as I live, I'll kill you."

He could not answer, for the reason that my grip upon his throat was throttling him. But the noise he made brought his men to his assistance. By main force they dragged me off, almost foaming at the mouth. For the time being I was a maniac, unconscious of everything save that I wanted to kill the man who had stolen from me the one great chance of my life.

"Come, come, young fellow, easy does it," cried an old miner, who had come up with, the crowd to enquire the reason of the excitement. "What's all this about? What has he done to you?"

Without a second's thought I sprang upon a barrel and addressed them. Speaking with all the eloquence at my command, I first asked them if there was anyone present who remembered me. There was a dead silence for nearly a minute, then a burly miner standing at the back of the crowd shouted that he did. He had worked a claim next door to mine at Banyan Creek, he said, and was prepared to swear to my identity whenever I might wish him to do so. I asked him if he could tell me the name of my partner on