



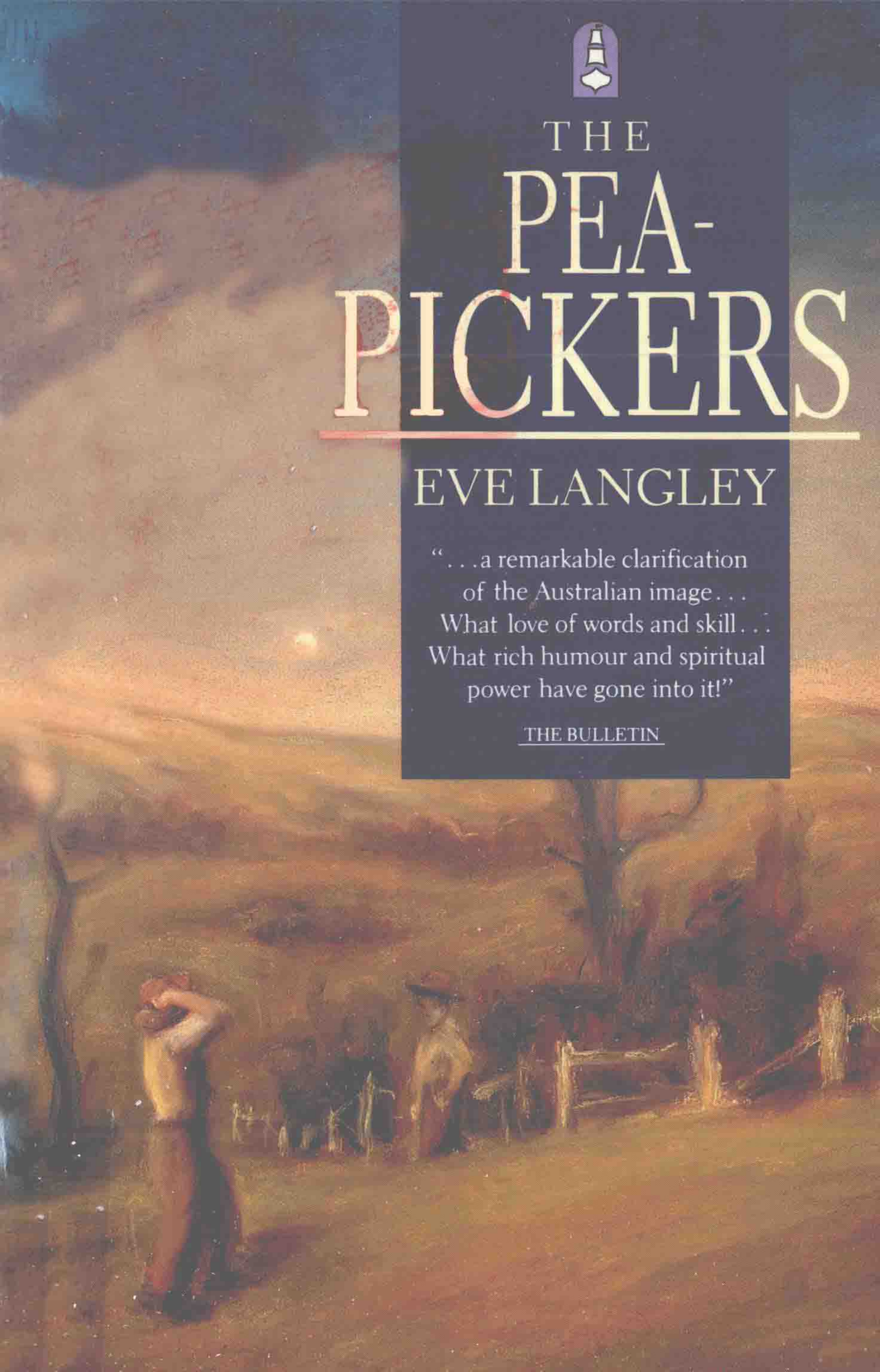
# THE PEA- PICKERS

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EVE LANGLEY

“...a remarkable clarification  
of the Australian image...  
What love of words and skill...  
What rich humour and spiritual  
power have gone into it!”

THE BULLETIN





# THE PEA-PICKERS

EVE LANGLEY



*All characters in this book are  
entirely fictitious, and no reference  
is intended to any living person.*

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*AH, PRIMAVERA!*

## FIRST PART

# *FOR THE BEST! FOR THE BEST!*

### I

And reports from Bairnsdale, in the Gippsland district, indicate that Mr Nils Desperandum, of Sarsfield, will have the largest crop of apples, this year, for miles around.—INTERSTATE WEEKLY.

ON a hot Australian morning I read the above advertisement out to June as we sat in the low-roofed kitchen of our old home in Dandenong.

"Well," said I, sitting back in the poet's corner, as my end of the table was called, "here's a chance to get into Gippsland, at last. I wonder if Mia has ever heard of Mr Nils Desperandum? Mia, little woman, do you know this name . . . Desperandum of Sarsfield?"

"Back in the airy days," said Mia, putting down the load of groceries that was needed to feed us when we were loafing around at home, between jobs, "I've heard my father speak of them. Why?"

"It says here, that he's got a great crop of apples this year, at Sarsfield. I suppose you know the place, Mia?"

"Many's the time I've ridden through it, down from Tambo Crossing, before you two were ever thought of."

"Well, it doesn't say here that he wants apple-pickers, but I thought I might write on the off-chance and get a job in Gippsland. You've made us love that country, Mia, little woman, and we must see it before we die."

"Ah," sighed Mia, sitting down among the parcels, "there's no place like it. Wouldn't it be wonderful if you two girls could get a job up there and see the old places I used to ride through when I was your age?"

Mia, our mother, was a Gippslander, first generation. She was a short, rugged little woman, as swarthy as a gipsy, with a crooked nose which she had broken into the grotesque soon after it was given to her, by crawling under a house and hitting it on a block there. Her eyebrows were enormous and her laugh was windy, coming from somewhere down a chimney.

Although she was a widow, we had found a lover for her in the



person of an elderly man with grey, stormy whiskers and an appetite for strong tea and the rings and locket out of Christmas puddings. His name was Bob Priestly and he carried on a thriving business in dried tea leaves from which he manufactured reconditioned tea. The work was done by night, and the tea leaves, to get the full flavour, had to be turned one by one on a moonlight night when a slow fine drizzle was sweeping across the swamps in which he lived, with his assistants, "The Twenty Trained", otherwise known as "The Twenty Trained Ferry-frogs". For the admirable man had mated the frogs and ferrets around him and produced a breed half-way between a ferret and a frog. Bob Priestly, and his ferry-frogs, or V-frogs, was an inexhaustible joke among us. He kept fowls, too; therefore, any ambiguous advertisement for a broody hen was considered to contain a proposal to "the woman", as we called Mia.

Our house, from the street, looked like a pile of rotten chips, and often as we lay in our beds, the remarks of casual passers-by whipped the blood up in our bodies with a short lash which struck home . . . literally.

"Time this place was in the hands of the wreckers," they said contemptuously.

Threats like this led us to practise harmless deceits against the town's health inspector, whereby, with many variegated roses, lilacs, ivies and grape-vines, we concealed from his unkindly eye the fact that our "kipsie", as Mia called it, was falling down.

But the house proper was thirteen giant plum-trees which held the soil in their hands and brought up snow out of its blackness every spring. It is lost to us now, but yet, how mysteriously satisfying it is to know that in the minds of my mother, my sister and myself the old house is embalmed, so that one may render to a forgetful other a fine correction of some intricate detail that has escaped her memory. It is a thought as sweet as heaven to know that in the minds of each of us the may by the fence still blooms in an eternal springtime; that the snowdrop has in our hearts a triple birth, and blooms in three separate minds, faultlessly. The river-weed by the tap may not, in the season of dehiscence, split the purse that holds its seeds and fling them far and wide, but the ghosts of its ripeness spring up seasonably in our minds and sow a ghostly seed. So that if all the flowers and grasses and hollows and hills of the old house were razed and mutilated—as they are now, I suppose—we keep them intact in three minds, each depending on the other to supply it with the delicate minutiae of remembrance.



It was on the kitchen walls, however, our peculiar fantastic minds showed in verse and drawing that the time had come for our strongest migration from home. My sister covered these walls with her imaginative drawings, which even now no one ever sees, for no one will bother to buy them. Well, who wants a fragment of ancient stone tinted with Hungarian rains, Chinese lichen and Russian sunshine?

Always her drawings troubled me.

"To where," I asked her, as I stood before the naked figure of an old man who stood alone in a desert, bearing a veiled woman in his arms, "does that sad withered hermit bear the veiled woman . . . she, who is veiled like those insects that set their tents in the tea-tree in springtime? I should like such a man to carry our youth, so veiled, into the ovens of the desert, and there burn it, that the escaping flame, our true selves, might vanish into heaven."

The poems I had written were delicately printed by my sister and set on the walls beside her drawings. Often we sat staring at these symbols of our coming years, while under our feet were the uneven wide red and white flagstones, and through the broken black fireplace a golden ivy crawled, etiolated and frail, putting its arms around tea tins and biscuit jars. In summer ripe plums dropped down the chimney into the pans from the branch above the house.

The corner of the table nearest the fire was mine, and here I sat, arms folded, breathing deeply, and made songs that to my mind were as rich as wine. All the timber in Australia couldn't give that wine enough bush now, as far as I am concerned.

My first illness was that one most common to the children of the poor . . . a bad education and, like the bite of the goanna, it was incurable and ran for years. My early arnicas of Matthew Arnold, small balsams of Wilde, Rabelaisian cauterizers, Shavian fomentations and Shakespearian liniments have only added to it and spread the offence.

At that time I theorized regarding my brain. It had four points of consciousness which I clad with scraps of art and literature.

I knew that I was a woman, but I thought I should have been a man.

I knew that I was comical but I thought I was serious and beautiful, as well. It was tragic to be only a comical woman when I longed above all things to be a serious and handsome man.

The third point of my consciousness was a desire for freedom, that is, never to work.

The fourth was a desire, amounting to obsession, to be loved. I



suffered from it, as others suffer from a chronic delicacy of health. It haunted my sleep and impeded my waking hours.

I was short and sturdy, having twisted flexible legs like a ballet dancer, narrow hips, broad breast, very large arms and a tiny head with a freckled face containing a dram of green eyes, long-lashed, heavy with melancholy and dreams, a thin red mouth, crooked teeth, a long thin nose with dilated nostrils, fine black eyebrows and black-bronze hair.

June was taller and broader, having sinewy brown legs, big at the thighs like a grasshopper's, and the body and breast of an Indian wrestler. Her small sharp hands were yellow in hue, and held all things crookedly, while her head, large and out of proportion to the rest of her body, was covered with black hair that had streaks of copper in it. When she sat in the sunlight, these streaks appeared like subterranean streams of metal rising into a dark plain. The eyelids fell back cleanly from her alert brown eyes and she stared clearly and fearlessly at everything. Her full lips were cut well in the flesh with much red showing below a short straight nose; the chin was firm, strong and white, and her brow, snowy, wide and shining, was dominated by splendid black eyebrows. The white in her eyeballs was echoed by the animal beauty of her even teeth, and her carmine cheeks were an overflow on her golden face from the red fullness of her lips.

She had not long arrived home from a job in the Goulburn Valley, where she had worked on a farm and, disguised as a boy, had fed pigs and cut star thistles. But the lonely bush girls had become importunate in their misguided affections and she had fled to save her manhood.

Mia had encouraged us to wander; made restless by long hard years of gipsying through the Australian States, she found peace in urging us out to follow the echo of the aboriginal names of towns that had tempted her when she was young. And of all the provinces, Gippsland, she said, was the most tradition-haunted. She speculated on the conditions of those whom she had known in youth, and filled us, too, with a desire to know what had become of them. Mia knew and loved her Gippsland, and our childhood lullabies had been the names of towns there—Sale, Briagalong, Maffra, Redbank, Fernbank, Bairnsdale, Haunted Stream, Omeo, Tostaree, Tambo, Monaro and Double Bridges.

We had gone to sleep to the cry of, "Who killed Baulch's bullocks?" "Riverina Bob, are you coming out tonight?" and "Where's Jack the Packer?"



For years she had been saying, "You girls would love Gippsland . . . the Monaro . . . the Stream . . . the Tambo and the Lakes." For years she had laid the powder trail and the Gippsland apples were to be the crimson flames that would set us alight.

"Yes, back in the airy days, I've heard my father speak of the Nils Desperandums of Sarsfield. Ah," cried Mia, "I mind the days when there were forty hotels in Haunted Stream, and when the So-and-Sos of Such-and-Such, big social people now in Melbourne, used to gallop past in the double-seated buggy and people used to talk about their daughters because they painted their faces. You never saw paint used in those days. There were a lot of sons in this family, and they married the daughters of an Irish family that had rented a grog shanty from your grandfather, and they're rich and well known now. Or at least, their children would be. But the best people were the old bushmen."

Mia looked like an old bushman herself when she spoke of them. She went into a maternal trance for a few moments, saying as she stared into the sad distance, "M-m-m-mm!" and worked on the bushmen. Then she brought them forth into startling life with voice and gesture. They became men of genius and profound sorrow to us, men who had been let down in life and wandered into the easy-going bush, but had never forsaken their courtesy and their love of songs and sentimental feeling. And Mia, as she spoke, lamented her youth, the passing of time and the dreadful change worked by it among those she had known.

"All gone, now," said Mia. "All gone. Ah, it's sad. What days we had. I've told you about them for years. I think I can see old Blind George now with his fiddle in the green bag. I see the Wilson boys and the Svensons coming down from Monaro with remounts for India. Sometimes," cried Mia with the desperate energy of one faced with the death of her time, "I can't believe it. . . . I just can't believe that they're dead and gone. I wonder, if you girls go up there, will you meet any of the people I used to know. 'By-by', Alec used to say, 'By-by, I'm off to the Doubles.' He meant the Double Ridges, but it got to be a byword in time among us along the Tambo. What names," said Mia, "the Thorburns, the McDougals, the McAlisters, Wilsons and Svensons."

She was not merely a colonial historian then, but Gippsland incarnate. Her people held and were still holding large tracts of land there.

"If I'd stayed at home and not married your father and gone off into New South Wales," she mourned, "your grandfather might



have left me some of the land, too, and you girls would have had property there. But after all my years of hard work . . . what have I got? Nothing! And what future have you two girls got? No father, no property. Of course you're young and you don't understand. It's for the best."

"But Mia, you were happy with our father, wandering all over New South Wales, weren't you?"

"Oh, yes, in a way," Mia replied, fingering her chin dreamily and sadly, "but Gippsland's always been our home. I left a cow and calf there when I went away," said she, waking up, "and when I went back for a visit, brother Charlie said to me, 'See that herd over there, Mia? They came from your cow and your calf.' Yes, I should have stayed in Gippsland, and thought that one day I would have children and that I should make some provision for them. You'll go to Gippsland as workers, poor and unknown. Don't go near any of my people, girls. Just look around and talk about the old days. But don't let any of the family know that you're working on an orchard."

"Ah, but we haven't got the work yet, Mia. And we don't care about relatives. The poetry of Gippsland is lost to them. It's the names of the towns that is taking us to Gippsland. And after that we are going to follow the glorious aboriginal names of Australian townships to their sources and feel all that there is to feel there."

My sister and I, being of coarse and fertile earth, were more sensitive to the etymon than to anything else in the world. At night we sat down and wrote out columns of Australian place-names, glorying in their ancient autochthonousness. English names, in Australia, we despised. "Effete," we said. "Unimaginative. But . . . ah, Pinaroo . . . Wahgunyah . . . Eudarina . . . Tallygaroopna . . . Monaro . . . Tumbarumba . . . Bumberrah, and thousands of others! How fine they are! We must be in the towns and speak their names."

But the etymon, like art and literature, was obscured for me by my passion to be loved.

In a torn newspaper under the portrait of a pale fat man I had once read these words, "Lauré, Lauré! I am young and my plate is empty! When will my two great desires, to be loved and to be famous, be satisfied?" And I cried this out at every opportunity. I wrote it everywhere and chanted it to every tune.

The very letter I wrote to Mr Nils Desperandum, whose crop expectations were going to free us and take us to Gippsland, was



here and there shadowed by a pretentious and romantic softness. After I had posted that letter I grew alarmed thinking that he might shy off it, so I wrote another purporting to come from the town where I had been working. This one was in a wilder, freer tone, and I decided to act, when I met him, according to his choice of writer.

One week afterwards, he told us, on note-paper printed with apples and pears, that he had decided to take us on as packers for the season from February until May, and hoped that we should prove satisfactory.

"Ah, won't we just!" we cried. Nothing mattered to us except the fact that we were going to Gippsland. At last we should see it through adult eyes. We were eighteen and nineteen years of age at the time. Now that we're going to Gippsland, we said, we must put off our feminine names for ever. As we sat that night around the fire, myself in the poet's corner, little Mia opposite and my sister sitting on a low box between us, playing on her sonorous violin all the Gippsland tunes and old dance melodies that our father had played on the plains of New South Wales, we considered the question of names, and at last. . . .

It was decided that my name should be Steve, because the comic literature of the Australian bush has always had a Steve in it and, of course, we had always loved Steve Hart in that bushranging song that Mia sang to us now and again.

Now, come all you young fellows, and listen to me.  
If you're wise you will keep out of bad company!  
Remember the fate of brothers and friends . . .  
Ned and Dan Kelly, Steve Hart and Joe Byrne.

In the corner of the kitchen hung a glistening picture of a hold-up in the early days. Ah, what grand colour in it! Against the silver and blue trunks of the eucalyptus-trees the bushranger's chestnut mare strained, as her rider levelled his revolver, his face hidden by his hat and a brilliant red handkerchief around his neck. The blue and sultry Australian sky seemed to ring with the words we had heard as children, while the elders talked at evening in the bush. Out from their quiet conversation, the brazen-sounding words had come suddenly and fiercely, "'Bail-up!' said Kelly." Or at other times it was Ben Hall, or 'Thunderbolt or Morgan.

So I am Steve. We spoke of this new person as a long, crooked-moustached fellow who didn't care much for women and was sure to end up living alone, a hatter, in the scrub, through which



he would ride wildly and with passionate sorrow on mournful wet nights.

By at the gallop he goes and then,  
By at the gallop comes back again.  
Late in the night when the fires are out,  
Why does he gallop and gallop about?

They said to me, "That'll be you, Steve."

"But cripes," I answered, "I can't ride."

"Well, now we know why you gallop and gallop about. You can't ride; you don't know how to stop the horse, you see."

"But what about a name for you?" I said to my sister, staring at her short handsome figure clothed in old fawn riding breeches, with a khaki shirt over her breast and a red handkerchief around her neck.

She crossed her legs and said she didn't care what she was called.

"What about Jim?" I suggested. "You know how Lawson says that 'There are a lot of good old mates named Jim, working around in the bush.' But I've always had a feeling that we might pick up a mate named Jim, so I won't take the right of priority from him."

And we had just agreed on that when there was a hollow tumbril-like sound from up the street and a deep uncanny rumble rang through the black night.

"Whoa, there!" howled an agonized voice and heavy hooves scuffled on the rough country road.

Then someone burst in through our back gate, stumbled over the drain and, falling across the clothes line, was flung by it head-first into the wire-netting around the wood shed and, with his head in a mass of snails and nasturtiums, we heard him gasp despairingly, "Where the — hell am I?"

A voice yelled encouragingly from the cart, "To your left, Blue. . . . Back-trapdoor!"

Stepping bravely forward now with his burden, he found his object. There was a heavy scraping sound. One was removed, and one inserted, then the laden Blue thumped heavily but contentedly over our onions, on his way out to the tumbril. As it rolled hollowly with a clanking accompaniment down the road in the late hours of the night, I said, "I think the name is Blue."

"Yes," replied Blue, putting the violin under her soft white chin. "That'll do me, Steve." And she broke into the reeling strains of the "Monaro", a bushman's waltz, upon which I solemnly rose and, tying a bit of black rabbit skin under my nose, putting a size



eighteen collar around my neck with a crooked made tie in front of it, and holding a concertina in my hand, I advanced to Mia and, bowing, asked for "the pleasure of the next".

She rose and, in various clasps copied from old Gippslanders she had known, we revolved in the little six by four to the pealing strains of the "Monaro".

The first hold was the "pump-handle" in which the hand and arm of the partner were energetically raised up and down.

"Water very scarce now," I remarked as I worked for it, "Only two rims left."

I next adopted the "vase", which is characterized by the grace of the couple's arms stuck out from the gent's side like the handles of a vase.

Then followed the "dried fish", in which, without perceptible style, but with frozen eyes and set face and stiff carriage, the couple revolve in silence.

Last of all, came the "indifferent", where gent negligently holds the concertina behind his partner's neck and plays as he dances with her.

Steve and Blue were busy for the next few days, thumping the tailored trousers we were to wear in Gippsland, pressing silk shirts and ties and tearing the tickets off new khaki overalls for packing-shed wear.

Everything was spread out on the old dark green rug that our father used to take with him on droving trips; on top of that was a bluey, and the monstrous sandwich was neatly rolled up and bound with luggage straps.

Our new names delighted us, and we roared them out to each other as we worked.

"Wonder what we'll find up in Gippsland, Blue, eh? Old-timers . . . old music . . . strong horses and the memories of old days, I suppose."

"But, Steve, it might be all changed now. We think we're going up into a district that's a mixture of Mia and Henry Lawson. But a new generation's come since then."

"Yes, Blue . . . that's true, all right. We'll be two generations removed from Mia's old-timers. It's the sons and daughters of the young people of her generation that we'll be meeting, and I wonder what they'll be like? When Mia talks about the old days, you get a strong sense of a hiatus that was widening even then, between her generation and the bushmen that she loved. The young people



of that day seemed to me to be hard, sorrowful and wild. I think as they grew older they'd scorn tradition, as Mia does sometimes now. They seemed to have a sense of being fooled by the long aeons of existence, at last. And their children, I wonder what they'll be like? What change will the deliberate years have worked on them? Time's a terrible thing, Blue."

"Yes, Steve . . . only got two days to go, now, before we set out," said Blue.

At night we sat around the fire listening to Blue playing the old Gippsland tunes, while I shouted to a phantom ballroom at Haunted Stream, "Change partners! First and second couple advance; swing in centre!"

"By-by, we're off to the Doubles," we cried and sang an old song of Alec Cain's (he was the saddest bushman of them all) . . .

"What more is a man than a leaf on a tree?"

And . . .

"Love, dear love, be true.  
This heart is always thine.  
When the war is o'er,  
We'll part no more . . .  
For Erin's on the Rhine. . . ."

Also, "Rorie O'Moore", and "My Father was a Frenchman".

Feverishly we made ready for Gippsland, that she might welcome us by turning back old times, and letting us see the days of which our mother had spoken.

## II

THE day came, "*Der tag*", we said, airing one of our four German phrases. "Well, Mia, we're off. By-by, we're off to the Doubles! Look after Priestly and the Twenty Trained V-Frawgs while we're away . . ." and in our wide-legged trousers, silk shirts and sweaters, we made off down the dusty Australian road to the dingy station and the palpitating train.

Our chief glory was our sweaters. Not that you need sweaters in Australia, which is a sweater itself, manufactured by the sun. . . . But the fine cardinal, gold and royal blue of those sweaters against our tawny faces (with our imaginary black whiskers of the eighties, which we stroked as we waited for the train to come) gave us the air which seemed to be necessary to enter Gippsland.



Our grandfather had come to it by bullock dray from Ballarat, wearing a scarlet and gold cummerbund, a bright Spanish hat, yellow moleskins, an embroidered vest with brilliant buttons, and rings of pure gold from his own mine hot on his fingers.

We looked at each other and felt that we hadn't let him down.

Under the dark interest of the travellers around us, we got aboard the train.

"Dandenong! . . . Gippsland line train . . . stopping at all stations!" the porter cried musically.

Outward it shuffled, deeply sighing and, picking up speed, fled grinding through the short green grass, and in its singing, lilting, grumbling, bumbling, knocking, rocking theatre we flew forth to Gippsland.

At some part of the journey, my hereditary Gippsland mind awoke. It was a totally different apparatus to my Dandenongian mind. A sweet shower had fallen in the country through which we were travelling in the fair morning, and I saw on my left a hillside divided into fields of such depth and colour . . . such blue earths, mauve earths, brown soils (to change my tune), red grounds, yellow clays, black malm and grey clods that I felt disappointed because the ploughman standing on the edge of his boots and ploughing therein, did not, with his horse, change into a chameleon.

I looked at Blue who sat on the end of the rocking seat playing her violin, from which not a sound came, because we were passing through hills that roared as wildly as the train. But I was comforted by the look of her, and if, as I believe, every fine memory petrifies into immortality that part of the brain into which it was entered, then there is a millionth part of an inch of mine that will never die . . . for Blue's big handsome head looked, that morning, just like the head of our father.

At every station men and women got into the train. The women carrying big bunches of pink, white and red heath, and the men carrying their coats over their shoulders, with the air of men come from the hills. This is the indisputable sign of the true Gippslander, especially those around the shire of Warragul, the country of the Wild Dog. This shire, through which we rushed, was like miles of patched quilts left out in the weather, and wherever the quilt had been torn a beautiful body showed through, silver and rapid in its movements. This was the rain. It was the rain married and settled down into rivers; willows round about attempted a few repairs with their green threads, where the fences were broken down.

The sight of the wild dogs (warrigals) flying across this country,



is given only to children and poets. What a swarming of tails and males, of teeth and tongues, black and brindle, white and red, yellow and sallow, as the wild dogs of all time follow the train to the refreshment rooms at Warragul. They looked up, showing the whites of their eyes, as they rushed along with the train. Sometimes, they turned into tall men leaning on shovels, yelling, "Pape . . . pape!"

"Whee!" they turned into white gates.

"Whoosh!" into the first houses outside the town; and then, with a million snarls and clashes of teeth and frizzling, steaming and puffing of their whiskers, they became the station and the rattle of cups in the refreshment rooms—in which was secreted a most potent drug which was dropped into the tea and coffee.

We went into the railway refreshment rooms and were intoxicated. But then, how little it takes to intoxicate those who travel through Gippsland. How could we help ourselves, landing as we did on the Warragul platform, exalted by the effluvia coming from the celebrated blue clay, the streaked yellowish and red clay, the red ferruginous earth and gravel, quartz pebbles of moderate size, large quartz pebbles and boulders, blue and white clay, and pipe-clay?

Exalted, I repeat, by these exhaltations, we added to it a pinch of that opiate which dwelt in clashing white cups, the individual coffee, the flying spoons and the starch in the caps of the waitresses, and staggered out to catch the train again, drugged into joviality.

The guard with the bell in his hand, the whistle in his mouth and the flag in his eye, sent us sighing and panting farther still into the country of Gippsland.

At last, in the dry afternoon, we came to the town of Moe, which is Gippsland's outermost door. Ah, now we near our Promised Land, that country which we saw lying like a bubble on the hills one morning as we went down into the red and purple paddocks of Wandin Yallock.

Up from the dust rose the station and on the coppery gravel platform stood an old Gippslander, tall, thin and long whiskered; around his hat was a snake-skin, the small metallic scales gleaming and the snake's eyes staring towards the low hills far in the distance.

Near the gate stood a beautiful woman with bare arms and much black hair which appeared to have been lying for miles on the road, but had been abruptly chopped off just as we came along. She looked at everything but the train. This meeting of trains and



looking beyond them is a custom of Gippsland females, religious in its punctuality and intensity. It is a form of worship among the young and unmarried, and consists of exposing the body to glances that exalt it, while the eyes are veiled from what is known to be there.

At Moe many passengers alighted and others joined us. These were wept over by women in black net veils which had thick furry insects lying on nose and cheek, and when the mourners had gone these new travellers sat in the hottest parts of the carriage, staring at their new dusty boots and disturbed and alarmed by the look of their wild hands against the new cloth in their trousers.

The fire buckets along the station wall turned into a man lying naked in a crimson coffin, as the great bell of the border of Gippsland walked along the train, ringing itself and crying. . . .

"O, go to the country of Gippsland then! For it is all ended, and your youth is over. O, be crushed utterly in the country of Gippsland, for love is not there. Labour is not sweet there, nor is time to be recaptured. Nor shall any die there. Yet, all is ended!"

The whistle ran about with the whiskers of the stationmaster hanging to it like a sporran and piped the song of the country of Gippsland, and the flag dripped blood and flew about on shoulders like a harpy, crying that we should never return as flesh from the country of Gippsland.

Mysteriously then, the train moved backward along the route we had come. It slid aside from that route and was raised and winged, and began to run with us swiftly into Gippsland. The angry sun of the late afternoon filtered in tiger shadows through the wooden slats of the window shades. Sliding apart the doors edged with green velvet, we walked along until we came to a part of the train that rushed back and forth like a concertina. Over it lay a mat of twisted fibre to hide the instrument from our sight, but yet we heard the song which made us hold to each other's hands and laugh and weep.

The strong sob of the chafing stream  
That seaward fights its way  
Down crags of glitter, dells of gleam,  
Is in the hills today.

Listening to this song, we saw hanging in a frame on the trembling wall of the train a map of Gippsland drawn on the hide of a still-born native bear and, largely on it, "Bairnsdale".