

## THE ROMANCE OF AUSTRALIAN EXPLORING

He raised the lower sash of the tall double-hung window and slipped quietly into the dark kitchen. Because the window served also as an emergency exit, it wasn't set above a counter, and ingress was easy. Celestina was amazed by her own courage in combat and by the steady calm that served her so well now. She wasn't shaken by the thought of what might have happened to her, and to her daughter, because her mind and her heart were with Wally—and because, having been watered with hope all of her life, she had a deep reservoir on which to draw in a time of drought. Olive complexion, no less smooth than the skin of a calamata. Eyes as lustrous as pools shimmering with a reflection of eternity and stars. CELESTINA RETURNED TO Room 724 to collect Phimie's belongings from the tiny closet and from the nightstand. The young man raised his voice to be heard above the gobbling of the art turkeys. "No, sir. He just asked where the men's room was." No one seemed to realize that predicting the future might not be a suitable entertainment in this house, at this time, considering that Agnes had so recently and horribly been blindsided by fate. For breakfast, he avoided sugar. He ate cold roast beef and drank milk laced with a double shot of brandy. Because Harrison, with the best of intentions, had not wanted to open wounds, Cain could walk up to Celestina anywhere, anytime, and she wouldn't know that he might have been her sister's rapist. To her, his face was that of any stranger. "proud," she said, smiling as she quoted one of their father's most familiar sermons, "nor powerful—" "As she comes closer to full term," said Dairies, "she's at great risk of preeclampsia developing into full eclampsia." She lived with her parents then. They had converted the dining room to a bedroom for her. He was a pretty good detective, but as regarded the minutiae of daily life, he wasn't as organized as he would like to be. He never remembered to set aside his holey socks for darning; and once he had worn a hat with a bullet hole in it for nearly a year before he'd at last thought to buy a new one. "Well, maybe you're right," Bellini said somewhat acerbically, before departing, "but then you've had the advantage of an illegal search, while I'm hampered by such niceties as warrants." Aware that his tension was building intolerably, Junior decided that he needed Scamp more than he dreaded her. He spent the remainder of Wednesday, until dawn Thursday, with the indefatigable redhead, whose bedroom contained a vast collection of scented massage oils in sufficient volume to fragrantly lubricate half the rolling stock of every railroad company doing business west of the Mississippi. Now he shuffled the first of the four decks precisely as he had shuffled the first deck on Friday evening, and he set it aside. He moved from a crib to a bed of his own, with guardrails, months ahead of the average toddler. Within a week, he requested that the rails be left down. Inexplicably, each repetition of Bartholomew heightened Junior's anxiety. The name resonated not just in his ear, but in his blood and bones, in body and mind, as if he were a great bronze bell and Bartholomew the clapper. "I ALWAYS EAT CAV-EE-JAR FOR BREAKFAST," said Velveeta Cheese in her stuffed-bear voice. Wally's help, not just with the apartment, but with his time and love, had made an incalculable difference. She sat on the end of the table, where Barty had sat, now at eye level with the standing physician. This colored person's grave, however, was uphill of Naomi's. Over time, as the body decomposed up there, its juices would mix with the soil. When rain saturated the ground, subsurface drainage would carry those juices steadily downslope, until they seeped into Naomi's grave 'let mingled with her remains. This seemed highly inappropriate to Junior. He was unconscious, wired to a heart monitor, pierced by an intravenous-drip line. Clipped to his septum, an oxygen feed hissed faintly, and from his open mouth rose the barely audible wheeze of his breathing. Evidently, either Frank Sinatra was an enthusiasm that Victoria and the detective shared, or the nurse purchased some of the crooner's records expressly for their dinner engagement. If the detective believed that Seraphim had been raped, his natural desire to exact vengeance for his friend's daughter might motivate him to commit the relentless harassment that Junior had endured now for four days. Certain the caller was the police operator, Junior screamed as though in agony, wondering if his cries sounded genuine, since he'd had no opportunity to rehearse. Then, in spite of the painkiller, his cries suddenly were genuine. She heard the door, and when she opened her eyes, the bay had already slid out of the car, into the downpour again. She called him back, but he kept going. When the ophthalmologist saw her misery, his kind face softened further, and his pity became palpable. By invoking the word emergency, Celestina was able quickly to reach her own physician in San Francisco. He agreed to treat Phimie and to have her admitted to St. Mary's upon her arrival from Oregon. Although only half the stools at the counter were occupied, and none of those close to Junior, customers were seated in most of the booths. Some had their backs to him, and three were about Vanadium's size. On December 18, as the Beatles' "Hello Goodbye" rocketed up the charts, Junior boiled over with frustration at his inability to find either love or Seraphim's baby, so he drove across the Golden Gate Bridge, to Marin County and all the way to the town of Terra Linda, where he killed Bartholomew Prosser. "I'm sure you would be, yes, but I'm afraid I don't have the patience to teach, I'm a performer, not an instructor. I suppose I could give you the name of a good teacher." Junior took two steps toward him, sighting the gun on his face. "Why should I be afraid of a stumbling blind boy no bigger than a midget?" Before setting out from home, Joey had buckled his lap belt, but because of Agnes's condition, she hadn't engaged her own. She rammed against the door, pain shot through her right shoulder, and she thought, Oh, Lord, the baby! If magic explained the jacks on Friday evening, maybe it was the dark variety of magic. Maybe he shouldn't be endeavoring to summon, once more, whatever spirit was responsible for the four knaves. "That's the roaster tower," said Licky. "Where they cook the cinnabar to get the metal from it. Roasters die in a year or two. Where to, dowser?" Although to Paul this was no more than childish chatter, Tom knew at once that the girl referred to his explanation for why he wasn't sad about his damaged face: the salt and pepper shakers representing two Toms, the hit-and-run rhinoceros, the different worlds all in one place. "Yes, Angel. That's something like what I was talking about." Rudy's blue suit, as

usual, pinched and shorted his shambling frame. Here in a boneyard, he appeared to be not just a man with a bad tailor, but a grave robber who looted the dead for his wardrobe..Now the hole was revealed. Damp earthen walls. In the shadow of the casket, the bottom of the grave was dark and hidden from view..Professing befuddlement, the galerieur led the way through three rooms to the front windows, gliding across the polished maple floors as though he were on wheels..Regrettably, at 2:00 A.M., February 28, waking alone in Tammy's bed, Junior sought her out and found her snacking in the kitchen. Forsaking a fork in favor of her fingers, she was eating a..Spacious, the living room was furnished for two purposes: as a parlor in which to receive visiting friends, but also with two beds, because here Paul and Perri slept every night..For a moment, Junior drew a blank on Renee. Reluctantly, he trolled the past and fished up the painful memory: the gorgeous transvestite in the Chanel suit, heir or heiress to an industrial-valve fortune..By Thursday, the eruption passed from him. Because he'd had the self-control not to claw his face or hands, he was presentable enough to venture out into the city; although if people in the streets could have seen the weeping scabs and inflamed scratches that tattooed his body and limbs, they would have fled with the grim certainty that the black..He was no longer hopeful that they could have a future together. After sampling the Junior Cain thrill machine, Celestina would want more, as women always did, but the time for a meaningful romance had now passed. For all the anguish he'd been put through, however, he deserved the consolation of her sweet body at least once. A little compensation. Payback..When she left Our Lady of Sorrows a few minutes later, she was convinced that the knave of spades--whether a human monster or the devil himself--would never cross paths with Barty Lampion..Kitchen to dining room, dining room to hallway, keeping his back to the wall, easing quickly along, then into the foyer. Wait here, listening..Jolene started to refill his coffee mug--then thought better of it. "Maybe you don't need more caffeine, Edom." "Most tornadoes stay on the ground twenty miles or less," Edom explained, "but this one kept its funnel to the earth for two hundred nineteen miles! And it was one mile wide. Everything in its path--torn, smashed to bits. Houses, factories, churches, schools--all pulverized. Murphysboro, Illinois, was wiped off the map, erased, hundreds killed in that one town."..Neither hesitantly nor recklessly, the boy set off across the lawn toward the porch steps. He maintained a far straighter line than Agnes would have been able to keep with her eyes closed.. "There's a fine George and Ira Gershwin song called 'Someone to Watch Over Me.'..Hound smiled. "They haven't undone what you did yet, either," he said. "Old Whiteface was crawling all over her yesterday, growling and muttering. Ordered the helm replaced." He meant Losen's chief mage, a pale man from the North named Gelluk, who was much feared in Havnor.. "If they always go there, smooch--smooch, then you're going to wind up with one really fat finger." \*..She was not going to be as forthright with Barty as she had insisted that Joshua Nunn be with her, in part because she was too shaken to risk forthrightness..An authoritative note came into Parkhurst's voice, that emperor-of- tone that probably was taught in a special medical-school course on intimidation, though he was striking this attitude a little too late to be entirely effective. "My patient is in a fragile state. He mustn't be agitated, Detective. I really don't want you questioning him until tomorrow at the earliest."..Almost as an afterthought, as he was leaving, he tucked the brochure for "This Momentous Day" into a jacket pocket. There would be amusement value in hearing a group of cutting-edge young artists analyze Celestina's greeting-card images. Besides, as the Academy of Art College was the premier school of its type on the West Coast, a few of the partygoers might actually know her and be able to give him some valuable background. The party raged in a cavernous loft on the third--and top--floor of a converted industrial building, the communal residence and studio of a group of artists who believed that art, sex, and politics were the three hammers of violent revolution, or something like that..He remembered standing in the cemetery, downhill from Seraphim's grave--although at the time he'd known only that it was a Negro being buried, not that it was his former lover--and thinking that the rains would over time carry the juices of the decomposing Negro corpse into the lower grave that contained Naomi's remains. Had that been a half-psychic moment on his part, a dim awareness that another and far more dangerous connection between dead Naomi and dead Seraphim had already been formed?..Neither customers nor staff could be found in the first of the three large rooms. Only cheaper galleries were crowded with browsers and unctuous sales personnel. In an establishment as upscale as Coquin, the hoi polloi were discouraged from gawking, while the high value and extreme desirability of the art were made evident by the staff's almost pathological aversion to promoting the merchandise..Champagne, then, and two shopping bags packed full of Armenian takeout. Sou beurek, mujadereh, chicken-and-rice biryani, stuffed grape leaves, artichokes with lamb and rice, orouk, manti, and more. Following a Baptist grace (said by Grace), Wally and the three White women, a fourth present in spirit, sat around the Formica-topped table, feasting, laughing, talking about art and healing and baby care and the past and tomorrow, while up on Nob Hill, Neddy Gnathic sat tuxedoed at a lacquered black piano, sprinkling diamond-bright notes through an elegant room..Barty's release from Hoag Presbyterian had been delayed by an infection, and thereafter he had spent three days in a Newport-area rehabilitation hospital. Rehab consisted largely of orientation to his new dark world, since his lost function could not be recovered by either diligent exercise or therapy..He had not yet disposed of her personal effects. In the dark, he went to the dresser, opened a drawer, and found a cotton sweater that she had worn recently..When Junior cut open a grapefruit for breakfast, he didn't find a quarter in it..But she knew. Barty, buoyant as ever, seemed not to be much worried about the problem with his vision. He appeared to expect that it would pass like any sneezing fit or cold..In his room, he settled on the bed with his constipating snacks and the county telephone book. Because he had packed the directory with the Zedd collection, the thief hadn't gotten it..I have trusted in thy mercy, she thought desperately, reaching for comfort to Psalms 13:5..Barefoot, in midnight-blue silk pajamas, he walked through his rooms turning on lights in a considered pattern, which he had settled upon after much thought and planning..During the walk home: slow and deep, breathing slow and deep, moving not at a brisk clip, but strolling, trying to let the tension slide away, striving to focus on good things like his full

exemption from military service and his purchase of the Sklent painting..Junior had almost fumbled his fork when he recognized the tune. His heart raced. His hands were suddenly clammy.."If you don't, your feeling gland isn't working. Want me to read you to sleep?"..Junior glimpsed Vanadium first in profile-and then, as the cop rode down and away, only the back of his head. He hadn't seen this man in almost three years, yet he was instantly certain that this was no coincidental look-alike. Here went the filthy-scabby-monkey spirit itself..Struggling to keep a grip on consciousness, Junior told himself to focus on the future, to live in the future, free of the useless past and the difficult present, but he could not get into the future far enough to be in a time when the pain was no longer with him..Gore made him sick. He refused to attend movies that dwelt on the consequences of violence, and he had even less of a stomach for blood in real life..Angel liked to perch sideways with a drawing tablet in the window seat in Barty's room, look out at the oak tree from the upper floor, and draw pictures inspired by things she heard in whatever book he was currently listening to. Everyone said she was a pretty good artist for a three-year-old, and Barty wished he could see how good she was. He wished he could see Angel, too, just once..Nolly's gums were in great shape, too: firm, pink, no sign of recession, snug to the neck of each tooth..He had nothing against Negroes. He didn't wish them ill. He wasn't prejudiced. Live and let live. He believed that as long as they stayed with their own kind and abided by the rules of a polite society, like everyone else, they had a right to live in peace..Rudy Hackachak--Big Rude to his friends--was six feet four, as rough-hewn as a log sculpture carved with a woodsman's ax. In a green polyester suit with sleeves an inch too short, an unfortunate urine yellow shirt, and a tie that might have been the national flag of a third world country famous for nothing but a lack of design sense, he looked like Dr. Frankenstein's beast gussied up for an evening of barhopping in Transylvania..Between new women and needlepoint pillows, he participated in s?ances, attended lectures given by ghost hunters, visited haunted houses, and read more strange books. He even sat for the camera of a famous medium whose photographs sometimes revealed the auras of benign or malevolent presences hovering in the vicinity of her subject, though in his case she could discern no telltale sign of a spirit.."Nick," he suggested, as though any reason existed for her to be on a first-name basis with the man who killed her husband. "I wasn't drinking. ".The subtle distortions in his vision, which caused lines of type to twist, didn't appear to trouble Barty much otherwise. He moved as quickly and as surely as ever, with his special grace..". . . then how come you couldn't walk where your eyes were healthy and leave the tumors there," she remembered..He left by the back door, to avoid the aftermath seeping across the foyer floor. Fog enveloped him, cool and refreshing..The night that followed might as well have been a night in Hell, though a hell in which Satan provided an electrolytically balanced beverage..The following April, when he proposed to her, she wouldn't have him. "You're sweet, Paul, but I can't let you throw your life away on me. You're this ... this beautiful ship that will sail a long way, to fascinating places, and I'd only be your anchor."..Junior hadn't paid attention to everyone who visited the pianist though surely he'd have noticed a certain stump in a cheap suit..Celestina was unable to talk reason to him, and even her mother, Grace, who was living here for the interim and who was always oil on the stormiest of waters, couldn't bring a moment's calm to the velvet squall that was Neddy Gnathic in full blow. He had learned about the baby five days ago, and he had been building force ever since, like a tropical depression aspiring to hurricane status..A surprising number of the women who had been his lovers were recreational drug users, and over the past couple years, he had met several dealers who supplied them. From the least savory of these, he purchased five thousand dollars' worth of cocaine and LSD to establish his credibility, after which he inquired about forged documents..The various flavors of canned soda were always racked in the same order, allowing Barty to select what he wanted without error. He got orange for Angel, root beer for himself, and closed the refrigerator..Although Zedd counsels living in the future, he recognizes the need to have full recollection of the past when absolutely needed. One of his favorite techniques for jolting memories loose when the subconsciously.They came to the house in Boatwright Street after dark. They kicked the door in, and Hound, standing among the armed and armored men, said, "Him. Let the others be." And to Otter he said, "Don't move," in a low, amicable voice. He sensed great power in the young man, enough that he was a little afraid of him. But Otter's distress was too great and his training too slight for him to think of using magic to free himself or stop the men's brutality. He flung himself at them and fought them like an animal till they knocked him on the head. They broke Otter's father's jaw and beat his aunt and mother senseless to teach them not to bring up crafty men. Then they carried Otter away..A MOMENTOUS DAY for Celestina, a night of nights, and a new dawn in the forecast: Here began the life about which she'd dreamed since she was a young girl..While the doctor proceeded with his evening rounds, the nurse remained with Junior until it was clear that the tranquilizer had calmed him and that he was no longer in danger of succumbing to another bout of hemorrhagic vomiting..Edom observed, amazed, as Agnes chatted up their host, going from Mr. Sepharad to Obadiah, from the doorstep to the living room, the pie delivered and accepted, coffee offered and served, the two of them pleased and easy with each other, all in the time that it would have taken Edom himself to get up the nerve to cross the threshold and to think of something interesting to say about the Galveston hurricane of 1900, in which six thousand had died..A great boom. Concussion rocked the floor and shuddered the walls and made the roof timbers squeal as though unsuspected colonies of bats had taken flight by the thousands all in the same instant..trees also revealed Barty, and no radiance from another world shone spectrally through him, as it had shone through Joey--dead-and-risen..He met her eyes, but at once shifted his gaze to the porch floor again. "I've come to say ... how sorry I am, how miserably sorry."..As though stirred by static electricity, the fine hairs on the backs of Tom's hands quivered, and a current of expectation coursed through him..Coughing, spitting saliva that was bitter with toxic chemicals, Paul followed her, slapping frantically at his clothes when fire singed his shirt..This was different earthquake weather from that of ten days ago, when he'd made the pie deliveries alone. Then: blue sky, unseasonable warmth, low humidity. Now: low gray

clouds, cool air, high humidity..Drawn by voices on the second floor, Tom took the stairs two at a time. A man and a boy. Barty and Cain. To the left in the hallway, and then to a room on the right..Edom would have judged this a perfect day-except for the earthquake weather. He was convinced that the Big One would bring the coastal cities to ruin before twilight..Tom Vanadium's uninflected but curiously hypnotic voice, his pensive manner, his gray eyes so beautiful in that fractured face, his air of measured melancholy, and his evident intelligence gave him a presence that was simultaneously as solid as a great mass of granite and yet otherworldly.. "Nah. Every secret society has a secret handshake. We'll have this instead." Her face was still close to his, and she rubbed noses with him..Words eluded him again, and he surveyed the coffee shop, as if someone might step forward to speak for him. He realized people were staring, and embarrassment drew a tighter knot in his tongue..Nolly adored her laugh, so musical and girlish. He would have made all sorts of a fool out of himself, anytime, just to hear it..Vanadium's vehicle, obviously not an official police sedan, was a blue 1961 Studebaker Lark Regal. A dumpy and inelegant car, it looked as though it had been designed specifically to complement the stocky detective's physique.. "You'll be out of ICU tomorrow, I bet. You'll have a phone, I'll call. And I'll come soon as I can."..When she discovered she was pregnant, Phimie dealt with this new trauma as other naive fifteen-year-olds had done before her: She sought to avoid the scorn and the reproach that she imagined would be heaped upon her for having failed to reveal the rape at the time it occurred. With no serious thought to long-term consequences, focused solely on the looming moment, in a state of denial, she made plans to conceal her condition as long as possible.. "There's a valuable lesson in that," Agnes said. "Others can learn from it if you care to share. But if you want to record your life only up to the card cheating, that's okay, too. Even that far, it's a fascinating journey, a story that shouldn't be lost with you when you pass on. Libraries are packed with biographies of movie stars and politicians' most of them not capable of as much meaningful self-analysis as you'd get from a toad. We don't need to know more about celebrities' lives, Obadiah. What might help us, what might even save us, is knowing more about the lives of real people who've never made it even medium but who know where they came from and why."..He bolted up from the sofa, saying too loudly, "Canned hams," but at once he realized this made no sense, none, zip, so he searched desperately for something coherent to say--"Potatoes, corn chips"--which was equally ridiculous. Now Obadiah was staring at him with that concerned alarm you saw on the faces of people watching an epileptic in an uncontrolled fit, so Edom plunged across the living room as though he were falling off a ladder, toward the front door, struggling to explain himself as he went: "We've brought some, there are some, I'll get some..The friendship, the work, and not least of all the sense of home and belonging that everyone felt within minutes of crossing Agnes's threshold-these things appealed to Celestina and Grace. But they didn't want Paul to feel that his hospitality was unappreciated..No scent of gasoline fouled the air. Apparently, the tank had not burst. Sudden immolation seemed unlikely-but only an hour ago so had Joey's untimely death..Every nerve in Junior's body was a tautly strung trigger wire. If something set him off, he might explode so violently that he'd blow himself into a psychiatric ward..If the sight of his daughter almost drove him to his knees, the sight of his wife, also his first in seven years, lifted him until he was virtually floating across the grass..Jabbing his forefinger at each of the remaining treats, Barty said, "Pie, pie."..On the other hand, one needed to believe in something. Junior didn't clutter his mind with superstitious nonsense or allow himself to be constrained by the views of bourgeois society or by its smug concepts of right and wrong, good and evil. From Zedd, he'd learned that he was the sole master of his universe. Self-realization through self-esteem was his doctrine; total freedom and guiltless pleasure were the rewards of faithful adherence to his principles. What he believed in-the only thing he believed in-was Junior Cain, and in this he was a fiercely passionate believer, devout unto himself Consequently, as Caesar Zedd explained, when any man was clearheaded enough to cast off all the false..Tom didn't know what to make of this bit of information, so he said, "That's a lot."..In the refrigerator, he found a stick of butter in a container with clear plastic lid. He took the container to the cutting board beside the sink, to the left of the cooktop, and opened it..In the six weeks since conception, she must have missed at least one menstrual period. She hadn't complained of morning sickness, but surely she'd experienced it. It was highly unlikely that she'd been unaware of her condition..The Book of the Dark, written late in the time it tells of, is a compilation of self-contradictory histories, partial biographies, and garbled legends. But it's the best of the records that survived the dark years. Wanting praise, not history, the warlords burnt the books in which the poor and powerless might learn what power is.. "Periodic violent emesis without an apparent cause can be one indication of locomotor ataxia, but you've no other symptoms of it. I wouldn't worry about that unless this happens again."..Both angry and mortified, yet still fearful, a walking multimedia collage of emotions, Junior left the gallery..A trickster, this detective. Full of taunts and feints and sly stratagems. Psychological-warfare artist.

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