

# *Miles Off Course*

*Book 3 in the Rowland Sinclair Series*

SULARI GENTILL





First published in 2012 by Pantera Press Pty Limited  
www.PanteraPress.com

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A Cataloguing-in-Publication entry for this book is available from the National Library of Australia.

ISBN 978-0-9870685-2-1

Cover and internal design: Luke Causby, Blue Cork

Front cover images: © Kirn Vintage Stock/Corbis [42-28578080] and © Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales [hood\_03806]

Back cover image: © Sulari Gentill

Printed and bound in Australia by Griffin Press

Author Photo by J.C. Henry, Lime Photography

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*To those with the courage to stay on course,  
and those with the imagination to wander.*

# Prologue

## **WAVE OF ABDUCTIONS TERRORISES SYDNEY'S WEALTHY**

The grisly discovery of the remains of the Lindbergh baby in May last year, some months after the child had been kidnapped from its nursery, caused shock and outrage in the United States and across the world.

There is not a person in the civilised world who cannot feel for the anguish of Colonel and Mrs. Lindbergh, nor be repulsed by the brutality of the act.

The abduction of rich men's sons is not a new crime, and our part of the world is not immune from those who seek to extort money from the well-to-do with this sort of menace.

Sydney has in the past weeks fallen victim to a wave of suspected abductions.

In January, William Ainsworth of Ainsworth Textiles disappeared, as did Edward Carmichael of Carmichael and Sons Pty Ltd. Most recently Charles Wentworth—son of the industrialist, Sir Alfred Wentworth, and a prominent businessman in his own right—was seized in broad daylight by persons unknown.

Despite the best efforts of Superintendent Bill Mackay and his Criminal Investigation Bureau, not one of these gentlemen has been recovered. Police remain baffled and grave concerns are held for the lives of all three victims.

It is a stark reminder of the tyranny of the criminal that even the founding families of our fair city cannot feel safe in her streets. One can only wonder which family will be next to have a son snatched away.

*The Sydney Morning Herald, 1933*

# 1

“Norman Lindsay is a complete and utter bastard!”  
Rowland Sinclair sat down and buried both hands in his dark hair as he vented his frustration. It had been a long day. He fell back and loosened his tie.

Milton Isaacs closed his book and rose from the comfort of his armchair to pour his friend a drink. He charged two glasses from the crystal decanters. The poet was nothing if not empathetic.

“What’s old Norman done now?”

Rowland took the sherry and drained it in a single swig. He felt a little better. Perhaps intoxication was the answer. “Rosalina Martinelli.”

“The model?”

Rowland simply groaned in reply, his temper exhausted by the trials of the day. The invitation to contribute a piece to the impending exhibition of classical figures at the Art Gallery of New South Wales had been an unexpected recognition of his work. A portrait artist, Rowland had acquired a quiet but growing reputation for his paintings of the female form. He was considered, by some, a protégé of Lindsay, though there were many who would say Sinclair had a lighter touch with oils, a greater finesse with the medium of paint. Rowland’s nudes

were somehow different, his work moved those it did not offend. He was a young man, and so he painted women as a young man would—with a kind of wondrous excitement that came out in the stroke of his brush. There was, however, nothing wondrous or exciting about the last few hours.

“What’s the problem with Miss Martinelli?” Milton asked, refilling his glass. “She looked pretty enough to me.”

Rowland’s dark blue eyes flashed.

“Let’s just say there’s a reason why Lindsay was so damned happy to lend her to me... and it had nothing to do with being magnanimous. I swear I’m going to deck the old blighter when I see him next.”

Milton smiled, intrigued. Rowland was most definitely put out. What on earth was wrong with the girl? Outwardly, Rosalina Martinelli was a very attractive young woman: blonde and fair-skinned despite her Mediterranean heritage, with the kind of gentle rounded figure that Rowland preferred. Of course she’d been dressed when Milton had seen her leave. Perhaps there was some hideous deformity hidden beneath the modest dress. How unfortunate.

“All right,” he said. “Out with it. Is she missing a body part or does she have an extra one?”

Rowland choked on his sherry.

“God no... she’s beautiful. She just can’t model.”

“Come on, Rowly.” Milton sat down. “All she’s got to do is take her jolly clothes off.”

Rowland sighed. “No, she’s also got to keep still—something of which Miss Martinelli is apparently incapable.”

“Oh... fidgets, does she?” Milton looked more closely at Rowland. His hair was damp with perspiration, but the day was not that warm. “What on earth have you been doing, Rowly?”

“Miss Martinelli feels the cold,” Rowland replied tersely. “Insisted I have no fewer than two kerosene heaters going full bore as well as the fire.”

Milton laughed softly. He swirled his glass, apparently searching for inspiration in the movement of the amber liquid. “Her radiant shape upon its verge did shiver, aloft her flowing hair like strings of flame did quiver.”

“Shelley.” Rowland was neither soothed nor impressed by the recitation.

Milton owed his reputation as a poet to his ability to quote the works of the great bards at will, and without acknowledgement. It was unlikely that he had ever penned a line of original verse. It had become a tradition of sorts for Rowland to make the attributions that Milton blithely omitted.

“I’ve just wasted the whole sodding day,” Rowland muttered.

“Chin up, old mate... there’ll be something worthwhile in all the preliminary sketches—you couldn’t have spent all your time stoking the fire.”

Rowland shook his head. “Aside from the fact that Miss Martinelli was constantly moving and complaining about the cold in English, and somewhat more stridently in Italian, the room was so hot that the paint dried too quickly. I’ll have to toss the entire canvas... there’s nothing worth salvaging.”

Milton was amused now. Rowland had studied languages at Oxford and had a reasonable understanding of spoken Italian, but Rosalina Martinelli had probably not known that. Still, Milton tried to be helpful. “Perhaps the studio is a touch draughty... why don’t you try painting her here?” He glanced about the sun-drenched sitting room of the Grand Majestic suite. It looked out upon the lawns and gardenesque grounds of the Hydro Majestic Hotel,

Medlow Bath, in which they had taken up temporary residence for most of the summer. The suite was lavish and well lit, and the sitting room had a most agreeable outlook. Milton supposed that it would appeal to both Rowland and his model.

Rowland grunted. “I’m afraid Miss Martinelli is shy. She’ll only pose with the curtains drawn in case the gardeners should peer in.”

Milton chuckled. This was just getting better. “You could always let her go,” he suggested. It was the obvious solution, but he doubted Rowland would take it. His friend was incapacitatingly civil, and it was difficult to sack a person politely.

Rowland looked pained. “Every time I broach the subject, she wails like a banshee. Apparently, she needs the income.”

“So pay her.” The cost of a model would mean nothing to Rowland, whose family fortune was vast enough to support his natural and determined generosity.

“I tried.” Rowland’s mouth twitched. He was starting to see humour in his predicament. “She’s proud... refuses to take charity.”

“Well you can’t insult people, Rowly.” Milton grinned. The poet, of course, had no misgivings about being the beneficiary of Rowland Sinclair’s significant patronage. It was something they had both come to accept.

Rowland smiled now. He folded his hands behind his head and lay back in the couch. “I’m going to deck Lindsay.”

“What are you going to do about the exhibition?”

“Lord knows. I’ll have to paint her I suppose.” Rowland was resigned.

“You can’t use Ed?”

The young sculptress, Edna Higgins, had regularly modelled for Rowland in the past. His reputation owed much to the way he painted her.

Rowland shook his head. “She’s not well enough yet, Milt.”

Milton didn’t argue. Edna was almost completely recovered, but Rowland was particularly protective of her.

“Ed’s too thin at the moment anyway,” Rowland added. “It won’t paint well.”

The dose of strychnine, which had nearly killed the sculptress just a few weeks before, had lingered in its effect upon her appetite. She had lost weight. Rowland still thought her beautiful, but the current slimness of her figure did not suit the style or subject of the impending exhibition.

Their current sojourn at Medlow Bath had allowed Edna to receive treatment. The Hydro Majestic offered guests the most modern hydropathic therapies. Rowland remained sceptical about the value of the various baths, wraps and douches, but his Aunt Mildred had been insistent that it would help Edna recuperate. It seemed Mark Foy, who had built the sanatorium, had been a friend of Rowland’s father—apparently that settled the matter for Mildred, who revered her late brother. In the end Rowland had given in. It had been, at the very least, an opportunity to escape the worst of the Sydney summer.

“Where’s Clyde?” Milton asked, reopening his book.

“He went out this morning looking for trees to paint.” Rowland had never shared Clyde’s interest in landscapes—he had neither the patience nor the talent for trees.

Clyde Watson Jones had, like Milton and Edna, lived as a guest of Rowland Sinclair for a number of years. A fellow artist, he and Rowland shared a love of paint and canvas, though they had come to their craft by way of vastly different circumstances. All the years that Rowland had spent at Oxford, Clyde had survived on the wallaby, moving from town to town, getting what work he could and sleeping wherever it was dry.

It was a quirk of fate, that while Rowland had been born into the most lofty social circles, he had little interest in the right sort of people. Indeed, the youngest son of the late pastoralist, Henry Sinclair, seemed determined to fraternise with scandal.

“Old Foy dropped off a few bottles of mineral water while you were working,” Milton informed him, thumbing through the text for his place.

“Good Lord... you didn't try to drink it did you?”

Mark Foy was convinced that the mineral water he imported from Germany was some kind of miracle elixir and he encouraged all his guests to drink it regularly. He claimed the bitterness was proof of its medicinal potency. Rowland maintained that the water had been spoiled in transport.

“It's all right if you mix it with scotch,” Milton advised. “Don't want to offend the old boy. He wanted to talk to you about those drawings, by the way.”

Rowland sighed.

He'd been trying not to think about Mark Foy's drawings. Rowland had made the promise in return for the suite. The three superlative suites of the therapeutic resort, with their valets and personal cooks, had all been previously booked. Mark Foy had used his influence to ensure the Grand Majestic fell suddenly vacant. But he had wanted something from Rowland in return.

“Who does he want you to draw?” Milton enquired, smiling. It was not the first time that some respectable gentleman had requested a picture of his mistress to secrete beneath the marital bed. If it was drawn rather than photographed it could apparently be considered art, should it ever be discovered. Rowland usually declined such requests on artistic rather than moral grounds. Unlike most artists, he had the economic freedom to choose his subjects.

“Not who—what.” Rowland shook his head. “Foy wants me to draw up plans for his tomb.”

“His what?”

“His tomb. He wants to make sure that when the time comes, he’s interred in a manner befitting.”

“Is he ill?”

“No, just eccentric.”

“What kind of tomb?”

“Well, Foy’s rather taken with the pyramids.”

Milton started to laugh. “You’re not serious.”

“I’m afraid I am. He’s had an acre on the grounds marked out for it.”

Milton sipped his scotch and mineral water and put his feet up on the upholstered footstool. “You know, Rowly, I think being idle has driven the upper classes completely bonkers.”

Rowland nodded. “Yes, dangerous thing being idle.”

There was a brief knock at the door, a perfunctory announcement of impending entry rather than a request to be admitted. Edna Higgins breezed in, pausing briefly to look through the open door of Rowland’s makeshift studio. Her skin was rosy, her copper tresses still damp. She was noticeably thin, but otherwise she looked well and in good spirits.

“Hello, Ed,” Rowland murmured, as she perched on the rolled arm of the couch. “How was your morning with Dr. Lindbeck?”

Lindbeck, the Hydro Majestic’s resident physician, was a specialist in the hydropathic therapies offered at the resort. A small, wiry man who had a fondness for spats, he barked accented orders at the uniformed matrons as he supervised the treatments.

“Lovely, thank you. A hot immersion, a cold douche, a compression wrap and then another hot bath—I must say I’ve never before felt so extraordinarily clean.”

“Are you hungry?” Rowland asked. “Shall I have Mrs. Murray cook something for you?”

Milton chuckled. “Rowly’s trying to fatten you up for his own purposes.”

Edna smiled. “Really? What purposes, Rowly?”

“He needs a model,” Milton replied for him. “Miss Martinelli isn’t working out,” he added, in an exaggerated stage whisper.

“Oh that.” Edna laughed. “I saw your painting when I came in—you can’t blame the poor girl for that, Rowly. It’s your palette. You’ve got far too much crimson in your flesh tones.”

“I know how to mix paint, Ed. It’s jolly impossible to get a reasonable skin tone when your model won’t stop blushing,” Rowland replied brusquely. “I could have painted her with undiluted scarlet.”

“Oh dear, the poor thing. Whatever did you say to make her so uncomfortable, Rowly?” She poked the artist playfully.

“I think it was ‘good morning’.”

“I’m sure she’ll settle down once she gets used to you. Modelling is not as easy as it looks you know,” Edna was firm. “And you could be quite intimidating, I imagine.”

“Me? How?” Rowland was genuinely surprised.

Edna thought back to all the times she had modelled for Rowland Sinclair. She remembered the clear intensity of his gaze, the blue eyes that seemed to leave her more than naked.

“It’s the way you pose your models to look straight at you,” she replied finally. “It’s hard to hide any part of yourself from someone looking directly into your eyes. It takes a little getting used to.”

Rowland snorted. “I have no idea what Miss Martinelli’s eyes look like. She all but covered her face.”

Edna smiled. “Come on, Rowly, be a sport.” She put her hand on his arm. “I was very nervous on my first jobs too. I’ll talk to her if you like—help her relax.”

Rowland sighed. It didn’t appear he had a choice.

Milton glanced at him and shrugged. It seemed Edna was adopting the hapless model as a personal crusade. It was better that Rowland give in now.

Rowland smiled faintly. Edna had not as yet met Rosalina Martinelli. It was very easy to be compassionate when you weren’t standing in an overheated room with someone who complained about everything and couldn’t sit still.

He waited till Edna had gone to tell the valet that they were ready for tea, before he muttered to Milton, “I’m going to deck bloody Norman Lindsay.”

**KIDNAPPED****LINDBERGH'S BABY  
STOLEN FROM NURSERY**

**NEW YORK, Tuesday**

The 19 months old son of Colonel Lindbergh and Mrs. Lindbergh was kidnapped from his home at Hopewell, New Jersey, on Tuesday night.

The baby was put to bed at the usual hour. Two and a half hours later somebody looked in the nursery and he was gone, clad in his sleeping suit. A wide search is being conducted by the police.

Mrs. Lindbergh discovered that the child was missing about 10 p.m. The nursery window was open and a frantic search of the house and grounds failed to reveal the infant, whereupon the police were notified, and the search immediately extended to New York and Pennsylvania, and will undoubtedly extend throughout the Eastern United States unless he is found by the morning.

It is assumed that the kidnapers, if they escape detection, will demand an enormous ransom.

*The Canberra Times, March 1932*

“Clyde, over here!” Rowland hailed his friend as Edna lined up her shot in the fading light.

Clyde Watson Jones approached with his easel folded over his broad shoulder. He carried a paintbox under his other arm. The wide-brimmed hat he wore when working outdoors cast a shadow on gentle eyes that had seen a different side of life. At thirty, Clyde was only a couple of years older than Rowland, but his face was etched with experience in a way that aged him. Of course Rowland Sinclair had seen his own trials—just not the kind that left a physical mark. Now, however, on the lush croquet lawns of the Hydro Majestic, hardship of any sort seemed very distant indeed.

Edna knocked Milton's ball away with her own and squealed in triumph.

Milton protested vehemently, calling the sculptress all manner of cheat.

Rowland glanced at Clyde. Edna notoriously and shamelessly bent the rules of croquet when it suited her. The artists had always let it go—it was just croquet after all—but Milton had known Edna since childhood. A kind of sibling familiarity prevented him from exercising any gracious tolerance in her favour.

"Any luck today, Clyde?" Rowland asked, as the other two proceeded to bicker.

Clyde put down the easel and handed over a large folder containing the sheets of cartridge paper on which he had been working. Rowland pulled out the series of watercolours. Clyde didn't often work with watercolours but they were convenient when one was lugging equipment any distance. He had wandered down to paint the Megalong Valley from the edge of the clifftops on which the Hydro Majestic stood.

Rowland studied the vistas that Clyde had created with muted washes of undersaturated colour. The effect was subtle, almost ethereal. His low whistle was wistful.

“This is smashing, Clyde... I’d forgotten how still and quiet trees were.”

Clyde smiled. “Still and quiet? I take it Miss Martinelli was not the best model.”

“A tree, she is not.” Rowland glanced at Edna, who was still arguing with Milton. “I’ll give you a hand taking this back to the suite,” he said, replacing the paintings and grabbing the easel. He turned back to the warring croquet players. “We’ll meet you at the restaurant for dinner.”

They waved him away without pause.

As they walked back to the Grand Majestic suite, Rowland told Clyde of Rosalina Martinelli and his troubles. Clyde was sympathetic. Rowland worked intensely but he was not unreasonable.

“Ed’s right though,” he said. “She might get better. When is she sitting for you again?”

“Tomorrow,” Rowland replied gloomily.

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At the suite, Rowland stowed the easel, while Clyde took a minute to wash up, collect his jacket and put on a tie. They were dining casually this night. Rowland waited in the darkened sitting room, wondering vaguely why Jarvis, the fastidious valet, had drawn all the curtains.

He stepped towards the window to remedy the lack of light. Even as he did so, he sensed it: the movement from behind him, another from the corner of the room.

There was no time to react—an arm locked about his neck. Rowland twisted, lashing out instinctively.

A hood was dragged over his head and pulled tight. He could see nothing, his breathing stifled by the sack. His arm was twisted painfully behind his back.

“Come quietly, Sinclair, and we won’t have to break your arm.”

Rowland’s response was muffled by the hood, but it was less than co-operative. He swore again as his arm was wrenched further back. And then someone else joined the fray: Clyde.

Mayhem ensued amidst the crack of impacting blows and a great deal of profanity. The scuffle was fierce, confused. Rowland wrested free and pulled off the hood just in time to duck a swinging fist.

There were three intruders, hefty men in cheap suits. The settee crashed over as Clyde was thrown into it. Two men turned on Rowland again, striking without restraint and pinning him to the floor.

“Give over, you stupid toff!”

Rowland gasped as a heavy boot ploughed into his back. And then a second kick to the ribs.

“Enough already! I’m not carrying the bastard out of ’ere.”

Clyde roared, launching himself at the closest intruder. Rowland struggled to help him.

The door to the suite flew open and Milton stood in the doorway—but only for a moment. The poet barely missed a beat—he knew a fight when he saw one—and launched himself enthusiastically into the scuffle.

The numbers were now even and the intruders seemed to be startled into retreat. They pushed past the bewildered staff at the door who had come to investigate this disruption to the sanatorium’s advertised serenity.

“Mr. Sinclair, we heard... oh my Lord!” Once again, confusion seemed to reign.

In the ruins of the sitting room, Rowland helped Clyde upright. “You all right?”

“Fine.” Clyde mopped his bloody nose with a paint-stained handkerchief. “You’re going to have one helluva shiner though,

mate.” He looked critically at the bruise forming over Rowland’s left eye. “Who the hell were those blokes? Bit game, burgling the place in broad daylight.”

Rowland shook his head. “I don’t think they were common burglars... they knew who I was for one thing.”

Milton moved closer to him. “You don’t owe money do you, Rowly? Those fellas looked like debt collectors, if you know what I’m saying.”

“Don’t be a flaming idiot,” Clyde muttered.

Rowland understood what Milton meant. He had frequented enough of Sydney’s gambling dens and sly-grogeries in his time to recognise the kind of men who inhabited Sydney’s underworld. He shook his head.

“I don’t owe anything,” he said, as he rubbed his arm. “But they did want me to go with them.”

By this time, there were other people pushing into the room, and Rowland was compelled to explain to the management what had happened to raise such a din and leave the suite in utter disarray. Edna also arrived to investigate why all the men in her party had left her waiting alone in the restaurant. Jarvis was found locked in a broom cupboard. It appeared he had been bound and gagged by the three intruders prior to Rowland’s return to the suite. Inevitably the authorities attended to ask questions and take statements. And so, it was well into the evening when the battered men of Rowland Sinclair’s party found themselves finally alone in the Grand Majestic suite with Edna.

Rowland loosened his tie and removed his jacket thankfully. He felt a little damaged and he was hungry. Milton handed him a glass of sherry. It would have to do. The dining room was closed now and Jarvis had retired early after his ordeal in the broom cupboard.

“So what’s going on, Rowly?” Edna asked, perching as usual on the arm of the now righted couch. She looked from his bruised face to Clyde’s swollen nose. “You were nearly abducted.”

“Now let’s not get carried away,” Rowland said. Abduction sounded a bit hysterical.

“What else would you call it?” Edna challenged.

“Well, yes... I suppose... technically...”

“It’s not beyond the realms of possibility that Rowly would be a target for abduction,” Clyde said, frowning. “They could demand a whopping great ransom.”

“From whom?”

“Your brother for one.”

Rowland smiled. “I don’t know that Wilfred would pay anything to get me back.”

“Perhaps you should telephone him,” Edna suggested. “Let him know what’s happened. He might be able to...”

Rowland’s eyes darkened. “I don’t need Wilfred to rescue me quite yet, Ed.”

“Oh don’t be silly, Rowly.” Edna reached over and patted his hand fondly. Rowland’s relationship with Wilfred was invariably adversarial and Rowland instinctively resisted the control and interference of his elder brother. There were fourteen years between the two and the gap exacerbated the natural differences in their dispositions. Still, Wilfred Sinclair was an influential man and he would not tolerate any threat against his brother.

“Rowly can look after himself, Ed.” Clyde spoke up with perhaps a little more understanding of Rowland’s reluctance to seek his brother’s help, unless absolutely necessary. Wilfred Sinclair cast a formidable shadow.

“So what do you propose to do?” Edna persisted.

They looked at her blankly. It had not occurred to any of them that they should do anything.

“The police have been called, Ed,” Milton said finally.

“And if they come back?”

“What—the police?”

“No—the men who did this.” Edna lifted her hand gently to the darkening bruise on Rowland’s brow.

“We’ll try to hang on to one—probably the best way to find out what they want with Rowly.”

“But...”

“I’ll be careful, Ed,” Rowland assured her. He was touched by the sculptress’ concern for his safety. He was not entirely nonchalant about the incident himself, but he didn’t see what he could possibly do about it. There had been a spate of kidnappings in Sydney over the past couple of months. It seemed abduction had become fashionable among the criminal elements and the Sinclair fortune was not a secret.

And then something occurred to him. He dragged a hand through his hair. “I will call Wilfred,” he said.

“Really?” Clyde was surprised.

“I’m not the only Sinclair... Wil needs to make sure Kate and the boys are safe.”

Clyde nodded. He had not thought of Wilfred Sinclair’s young family. The abduction and murder of the Lindbergh baby the year before had received worldwide coverage. The tragedy had made people like the Sinclairs understandably protective of their children.

Rowland stood to use the telephone. He dialled the exchange and had a call booked through to *Oaklea* near Yass, the family estate on which his brother resided. It was several minutes before he returned the receiver to its cradle.

“Wil’s in Sydney on some kind of business,” he informed them. “I told Kate to be particularly careful until he gets back... They’ll be all right at *Oaklea*.”

The Sinclair estate had long been well protected. Wilfred was both politically and commercially powerful—with that came enemies. Rowland had always believed his brother to be somewhat paranoid about security, but, in light of what had happened, perhaps it was fortunate.

He resumed his seat beside Edna. She still looked troubled. Her unease was a little contagious. Rowland rubbed his shoulder absently where his arm had nearly been wrenched from its socket. “I’ll get hold of Wil tomorrow,” he promised.

# STUDY OF CIVILISED NATIVES

## SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM

*By Daisy Bates*

The natives coming out of the wilds will be an increasing menace as the years go by. The civilised native knows the power of the white man's law, but anything may happen with these wild creatures.

But there will be no solution of the native question, no cessation of exploitation or of broadcast misstatements to the detriment of our good name until some great Empire maker will take over the entire question and make it a "one man's duty of service" and carry on with his job to the end, above all politics and parties. No lesser man can do the needed work.

And I can think of no one better fitted for the task than an English gentleman.

*Brisbane Courier, 1930*

The knocking at the door of the Grand Majestic suite was insistent. Rowland emerged from the room he was using as a studio. Jarvis had not as yet returned, so the suite was still without a valet. Clyde, who had been working in the parlour, reached the entrance first. He opened the door, cautiously at first, then flinging it wide as soon as he recognised the gentleman outside.

"Mr. Sinclair." He stood back surprised.

“Mr. Jones.” Wilfred shook Clyde’s hand and removed his hat as he stepped into the room.

“Wil—I’ve been trying to reach you.” Rowland wiped the paint off his hand before he offered it to his brother.

Wilfred looked distastefully at Rowland’s waistcoat, now smeared with Viridian blue, and adjusted his cuffs as he noted the rolled sleeves of his brother’s shirt. His gaze stopped briefly on Rowland’s bruised eye, but he made no comment.

“Rowly, it seems I’ve caught you at a bad time.”

Rowland smiled. “I was just working...” He glanced anxiously back towards his studio as the noise from within became audible. Sobbing. It was unmistakable and impossible to ignore.

“And who may I ask is in there?” Wilfred demanded.

“Miss Martinelli... the model.”

“Good Lord, Rowly, what’s wrong with her?”

Rowland scratched his head. “She’s a little emotional.”

“What in the blazes did you do to her?” Wilfred glared at him.

“I didn’t do anything to her!” Rowland replied, mortified and angered by the suggestion.

Wilfred stopped. “No... of course you wouldn’t.”

“I’ll see if Miss Martinelli needs anything,” Clyde said awkwardly. “Why don’t you talk in the drawing room... it’ll be... quieter.”

And so the Sinclair brothers left Clyde trying to calm Rosalina Martinelli through the closed door of the studio.

“So, what are you doing here?” Rowland asked once he’d poured Wilfred a drink.

“I drove up to have a word with you.”

Rowland was intrigued. It was more common for Wilfred to summon him to *Oaklea* than to seek him out. Obviously it was important. He handed his brother a glass of whisky.

Wilfred took a seat intimating that Rowland should do likewise. “You might remember that early last year we purchased a snow lease.”

Rowland sat down. His brother was being liberal with his use of the word “we”. Wilfred made all the decisions pertaining to the protection and expansion of the Sinclair fortune. Even if Wilfred had ever sought his input into their commercial dealings, Rowland would have struggled to feign interest. He did, however, vaguely remember some mention of leasing mountain country for the purpose of grazing stock.

“We’ve been driving cattle from our holdings at Nangus and Gundagai up to the lease during the summer,” Wilfred continued. “There was some trouble last year... discrepancies in the numbers, so I sent a man up to look into it.”

“Cattle?” Rowland murmured. “I didn’t know we had gone out of wool.”

Wilfred rolled his eyes. “We haven’t. If you paid a modicum of attention to that which funds your lifestyle, you’d know that we’ve purchased a number of small cattle properties in the last few years. We combined the holdings to maximise economies of scale.”

Rowland was beginning to lose interest. It seemed that Wilfred had tracked him down to lecture him on family finances.

Wilfred removed his spectacles and polished them with a handkerchief as he regarded his brother with the deep blue eyes that marked all the Sinclair men. “He hasn’t returned—by all accounts he’s vanished.”

“Who?”

“The man I sent to investigate—I want you to go up there and look into it.”

Rowland was a little bewildered. “Isn’t this a police matter, Wil?”

“The authorities have taken the position that there’s nothing unusual in this case.”

“Why?”

“It’s Harry, Rowly. I sent Harry. The authorities assume he has just gone wandering... as they do, I guess.”

Rowland understood then. Harry Simpson was an Aboriginal man. His mother had worked for the Sinclairs at *Oaklea* and Harry had grown up on the property. About ten years older than Rowland, he was one of Wilfred’s most trusted men. The Sinclairs had always been good employers. They took particular care of Harry.

“How long has he been missing?”

“It’s hard to say. From what I can ascertain he hasn’t been seen in about a week. One of the men he’d taken with him came back to let me know, but the dashed fool can’t seem to tell me more than that Harry disappeared. As I said, I can’t seem to get the police to take it seriously. That’s why I want you to go.”

“Of course,” Rowland agreed without hesitation. “I’ll set out tomorrow.”

“We have several men up there already—you can call on them if you need to. You might need to take charge of them... Without Harry to keep them in line, God knows what they’re doing.”

Rowland looked up, alarmed. “What do you mean ‘take charge of them?’”

“They work for us, Rowly. They’re up there to do a job. I don’t expect you to become a drover, just make sure the men are managing the stock properly.”

Rowland wondered how he could possibly know if the stock were being managed properly or not, but he let it go.

“Where exactly am I going?” he asked instead.

Wilfred removed a folded map from inside his jacket and opened it out on the occasional table between them. He spent the next twenty minutes pointing out the boundaries of the Sinclair lease, and the major roads, villages and landmarks of the High Country. He described the planned routes of the Sinclair cattle through the mountain pastures.

“Base yourself somewhere near Kiandra,” he said, marking the centre with a pencil. “You’ll need to ask the men up there about Harry’s movements.”

Rowland nodded, refolding the map. “I’ll find Harry,” he assured his brother.

“Look Rowly,” Wilfred leaned forward. “Harry would not leave the stock and the men without good reason. Something untoward must have happened. Be careful—from what I hear, the High Country is not entirely civilised... though I suppose that might suit you... but be careful nonetheless.”

“On that point,” Rowland started, remembering that he had been trying to get hold of Wilfred for other reasons, “you might need to be careful too.” He proceeded to tell his brother about the intruders.

Wilfred frowned but he reacted calmly. “They knew who you were, you say?”

Rowland nodded. “It seems they had been waiting for me to return.”

“And you are sure you have no idea who sent them.”

“None at all, I’m afraid.”

“Well, perhaps this would be a good time for you to get away. With a bit of luck you’ll have this sorted in a couple of weeks. It’s imperative you be back in Sydney by April.”

“Why?”

“You have a board meeting,” Wilfred informed him brusquely. “Dangars is meeting to vote on the Lister franchise—you’ll need to be there.”

“Oh.”

Rowland had recently been appointed to the board of Dangar, Gedye and Company, a wool-broking firm in which the Sinclairs held a substantial shareholding. He did not pretend to possess any particular commercial insight, nor did he aspire to gain any, being content instead to allow his brother to guide any decisions he was called on to make. He trusted that Wilfred knew what he was doing. To Rowland’s mind the board meetings were in any case a ceremonial formality—most of the business seemed to be done at the Masonic Club.

“These came for you.” Wilfred handed his brother several envelopes. “They’re from Mother. Apparently she’s going to stay with Aunt Mildred till June.”

Rowland nodded. The envelopes were not addressed to him but to his late brother, Aubrey Sinclair. Somehow in the grief that followed Aubrey’s death, his mother had assigned him his brother’s identity. She seemed to have forgotten the existence of her youngest son. Aubrey had been dead for seventeen years now... Rowland had become accustomed to it.

“When are you going back to *Oaklea*?” he asked.

Wilfred checked his pocket watch and stood. “I’m heading back to Sydney now—I’ll catch the afternoon train and be home tonight... I suppose I’ll see you at *Oaklea* tomorrow evening.”

“Yes, I expect you will,” Rowland replied, as he followed his brother out of the room. From Yass, near *Oaklea*, there was a road which followed the travelling stock route to Kiandra. It was probably the most sensible way to get up there.

“I’ll have one of the Rolls ready for you to take up,” Wilfred decided.

“No need—I’ll take my car.”

Wilfred regarded him coldly. Rowland’s flamboyant Mercedes Benz had always been the subject of discord between them. An ex-serviceman, Wilfred maintained that owning a German automobile was somehow an act of disloyalty, a snub to their brother who had fallen in France. Rowland had been too young to see service. Perhaps this was why he saw it differently. He remained besotted with the motor car regardless of her dubious heritage.

The moment was broken by their growing awareness of chanting coming from within the studio. Clyde still stood helplessly outside the closed door. Rowland could just make out the Italian.

Wilfred Sinclair’s brow rose. “What the blazes?”

Rowland sighed. “She’s praying.”

“Whatever for?”

“Forgiveness I think.”

Wilfred shook his head. “Understandable, I suppose.” He had never approved of his brother’s determination to paint naked women; he approved of the women themselves even less. He put on his hat. “Perhaps this really would be a good time for you to get away.”

Rowland smiled ruefully as he shook his brother’s hand. “Quite.”

He turned back to Clyde after he’d shut the door. He straightened his tie and braced himself. “I’d better go in and talk to Miss Martinelli.”

Clyde stepped out of his way. “I’ll pour you a drink.”

Nearly an hour later, Rowland returned to the drawing room, having told Rosalina Martinelli that he had been unexpectedly called away. He had assured her, quite honestly, that his decision to delay,

perhaps abandon, his painting of Eos, the Goddess of Dawn, had nothing to do with her, and quite dishonestly that he looked forward to working with her again. He eventually persuaded her to accept payment for the entire month, a sum which he quietly hoped would help her find another profession. After she left, he had glanced regretfully at the beginnings of his painting. Rosalina was undeniably lovely—a nightmare to paint but the results, however painfully extracted, were promising. He doubted he'd finish anything for the exhibition now.

Clyde handed him a glass of Pimms and lemonade as he sat down. Milton and Edna had returned and were seated on the couch expectantly. Apparently Clyde had informed them that something was afoot.

Rowland told them all of Wilfred's visit and of the disappearance of Harry Simpson.

"Since when do the Sinclairs personally chase their workmen around the countryside?" Milton asked.

"Harry's a good man," Rowland replied carefully. "Wil relies on him."

"Still, Rowly," Milton persisted. "He wouldn't be the first to just wander off."

Rowland was circumspect in his response. Milton was right. The Sinclairs had employed many native stockmen over the years and they had come to accept that sometimes even the best of them would wander... it was just their way. But something told him Wilfred was not overreacting. "Not Harry," he said finally. "He wouldn't just leave the men and stock like that... he's always let us know when he needed to go off."

"But why's Wilfred sending you?" Edna asked. "It's a little odd, don't you think, Rowly?"

“Not really. Harry lived on *Oaklea*, he saw service with Wil—aside from everything else they’re good friends... they go fishing together.”

Edna smiled faintly. Wilfred was a bastion of British traditionalism. It seemed an unlikely friendship, but both the Sinclair brothers appeared drawn to unlikely friendships. “He’s an unusual man, your brother.”

“You might say that.”

“So when do we go?” Clyde asked.

Rowland was startled. “We... I didn’t mean—”

“Of course you didn’t,” Milton interrupted him, “but we’re coming anyway.”

“The High Country’s my old backyard.” Clyde grinned. “You don’t want to go up there without a local, mate. Folks up there take a little getting used to.”

“Don’t worry, Rowly, we’ll look after you. It’ll be a lark,” Milton announced.

“But what about Ed—she’s still not...”

“I’m fine,” Edna protested, “and you are not leaving me behind. I’m jolly sick of baths anyway... I’m getting permanently wrinkled.”

“Nothing like mountain air to fatten her up,” Clyde added. “You should see my sisters.”

Rowland shrugged. It probably wasn’t such a bad idea. “We’ll leave first thing tomorrow.”

Clyde stood, and began rolling up his sleeves. “I’d better check over your car then,” he said. “You coming, Rowly?”

Rowland rose enthusiastically. Clyde had once worked for a motor mechanic. He knew cars in a way that Rowland could only envy. Generally, the Sinclairs did not personally attend to their

vehicles, but maintenance of the Mercedes was more an indulgence than a chore.

“Whoa, Rowly,” Milton reminded him. “Don’t you have to draft up some plans before we go? Old Foy’s already been around this morning asking after them.”

Rowland groaned. He’d forgotten about the plans for Foy’s tomb.

Edna laughed. “Come on, Rowly, I’ll help you draft something up.” Milton had told her of the bargain between Mark Foy and Rowland Sinclair. It amused her, but then she was a sculptress and had worked on tombs before. To her, the request was not so odd. Indeed, the last few years had brought her many commissions for cenotaphs and memorials as each town across New South Wales honoured the men it had lost in the Great War. “Mr. Foy likes to sail, doesn’t he?”

“I believe he founded the Sydney Flying Squadron.”

“The what?” Clyde asked.

“It’s a yacht club.”

“There you go, Rowly—a nautical theme... this might even be fun.”

Rowland sighed. He had given Foy his word. Maybe a nautical tomb would be slightly less daft than the pyramids.