

Hill End  
by  
Peter McIntyre

## Chapter One

We all knew he was a bit different, in a town where everyone was a bit different, Robert Crane, a nuggetty gold miner with a cheeky grin and battered hat covering an aged and sun-beaten head.

Life had not been easy for him, born just before WW2, one of eight children. He worked hard in his childhood as kids did in those years before the modern advantage of today. All the kids had a job to do depending on their age. He tells of the time he went on his bike to collect milk from a nearby farm and came a cropper. Back home he went and his Dad patched him up, and then sent him back to get the milk.

Robert had the uncanny ability to sniff out gold, he could look at a seam and predict where the seam would turn or dive. This put him in demand as a consultant engineer in many of the mines in the district.

It was one Saturday in winter when most of the town was either at the football match on the green or in the pub. Robert had just delivered a load of firewood to Mrs Bolger; this was a side business he ran to supplement his income while the mine was not productive. The old lady nattered to him for half an hour while waving the money for a load of wood under his nose. All Robert could think about was the cold beer on the bar in the pub. It was then that he noticed, caught in the hinge of the utilities back gate, a lump of the familiar shiny yellow.

Without any flap, he casually freed the nugget from the hinge and slipped it in his back pocket without raising the interest of the old lady.

After bidding her farewell he climbed into the truck and drove back to the cottage with a little more haste than normal.

All the time thinking, how did that nugget get onto the back of the truck? Was it lodged in the tree he had cut down earlier that week? Was it implanted by some natural event? Or was it put in the tree by someone? Was it hidden there by bushrangers in the 1860s?

Back at his cottage and after a cold beer and more thought, Robert went out to the truck and inspected every inch of the truck's tray. Just to be sure he swept the tray clean.

After a cold roast lamb sandwich, he drove out to the area that on the previous day he had cut and split a load of yellow boxwood for the old lady.

There was still half the tree splayed on the ground yet un-split. Robert liked to give his customers the best wood for burning, cut and split it according to their needs. Now old Mrs Bolger had a Kookaburra wood stove that she and her long-dead husband Ernie had bought with their soldier settlement money that had been paid when he was demobilized after the war. So the wood was split small enough to fit in the small front entrance of the stove.

This tree was like most old trees; hollow in the centre, Robert had pre-cut lengths of the trunk into 20cm pieces. For the woodstove, he split the stumps into eighths. So how did the nuggets get on the truck? On inspection of the remaining wood after each remaining stump had been split, no more nuggets were found. So how did the nugget get onto the back of the truck?

This had Robert stumped? The only solution was to go to the pub and think about it quietly over a cold schooner

of beer. Not much point in discussing it with anyone, finding a stash of gold was a very private thing in a town that had survived on gold finds for the last hundred and sixty years.

As he sipped his beer he pondered where he had been in the last few days. It was winter so wood getting for the locals was a high priority for him.

Then he remembered that about ten days before, some executives from the town's largest gold mine that dominated the life of the town had called on him to pick his brains about one of the shafts he had worked on with his father in the sixties. It was not all big trucks and diamond drilling back then, but a mind-numbing, muscle aching slog with a pelican pick and a bucket, winched slowly up to the top to be emptied. While the bucket made its way to top there was time to lean back against the wall and have a quick puff of a cigarette before the bucket came clanking down to be filled again. Bucket after bucket seemingly never-ending.

It did not seem likely that the bosses there would have put it in the truck. They paid him a pittance for the knowledge he gave them but did at least acknowledge him for his ability to sense where the gold lay by naming one of the veins runs after him. Could it be possible that a ghost from the heyday of the 1870s had popped it in there?

The town where Robert lived I was a classic gold boom to bust town, but yet not quite able to complete the task of the bust. When the gold started to become harder to find in the late 1800s or the rising water table made the recovery of the precious metal impossible or the price made it un-profitable, mining and the town tracked from a bustling town with 30 public houses and 60 thousand people to 30 years later less than one-tenth that population.

But things had changed; a global economic crisis had again put its faith back in the value gold. Robert had never

left mining when many others had. He stayed to be the repository of local knowledge and for the geological district. Now the smart investors from the big end of town were courting him with big plans and promises. Robert had heard it all before and liked to play the game with the young shiny shoe boys from the big smoke, just the glimpse of his “good luck” nugget he carried in his pocket was enough to get a round of beers at the pub. It was just a question of “give me the money” and I will show you the gold.

Robert still pondered the nugget from the truck tray as he turned into the lane that meandered to the cottage; he could see the smoke coming from the chimney and knew that his dinner would be ready. As he parked the truck in the driveway he remembered that the teeth on the chainsaw would have sharpened before he started work gathering wood for the Post Office and Police station the next day. As he lifted the chainsaw from the back of the truck, he found another nugget.

## Chapter Two

Now Robert and Paul his stepson and a right-hand man had swept the back of the truck the day before and had only one load of wood since and that was for the big mine that was being reopened south of the town. They had cut the shoring timber from a stand of trees near the ruins of an old shed on the road to the lookout. This was the area where many Chinese held mining licenses in the early days. As with all gold rushes, the Chinese were always represented as a minority of the population. If they were not mining they were providing other vital services to the community. There were still signs of their habitation everywhere, shrines to their ancestors and many gravestones. Robert and Paul had made a fire in the old shed as it had started to rain. They boiled the billy and made tea to have with their cold roast lamb sandwiches. When the rain stopped they loaded the heavy planks on the truck and delivered it to the mine.

Was this the truck that laid the golden egg?

The next day Robert arose at dawn as do all good country folk. It had been too dark to sharpen the chainsaws the night before, so as soon as he had eaten his porridge with cream and brown sugar, he crunched his way through the glistening frost to where the portable chainsaw vice lay. As he positioned the saw in the vice he was stunned to see that there was yet another nugget caught in the teeth of the chainsaw, shining in the clear light of the early morning sun that follows a frosty night. Robert sharpened the saw with somewhat less than his normal vigour. This whole gold nugget business was starting to get to him and to make matters worse, he discovered his sharpening file was worn out. And it was his last one. Now he would have to make the 170km round trip to Bathurst to get more. He muttered to himself at the lost time and the \$30 it would cost him in fuel.

You'd think he would have known by now to buy the damn files by the dozen.

It was pouring with rain when he left Bathurst, his only consolation that it would have been too wet to get firewood anyway. Just as he was beginning to ponder the warm open fire at the pub and a restorative ale, he heard the all too familiar thump, thump, thump of a flat tyre. It wasn't his day, only 15kms from home, just past Sally's Flat, "chested", someone had added to the sign, He found himself in the pouring rain with the jack slipping this way and that in the red clay mud. As he retrieved the spare tyre, he began to shake, it could not be, another nugget, this time wedged between the metal rim and the rubber tyre. Robert started to question his sanity.

Mud-covered and soaked from changing the tyre, he climbed back into the truck and headed for home. He had only got a kilometre down the road when the motor sputtered and stopped. He immediately knew what the problem was, he should have filled the truck the diesel in Bathurst, but this mind was on other things. The fuel gauge still pointed at just over half full, but that didn't mean anything as it had always pointed to just over half full for the last four years. He had always judged the fuel needs of the truck pretty well and had never run out of fuel before. He had a spare fuel gauge in the spare truck he had bought for parts, but he never had a spare 4 hours to change out either the sensor on the fuel tank or the gauge its self.

He sat in the truck pondering his predicament; he was cold, wet and stuck on the Bathurst road. With the slight chance of catching pneumonia or that another vehicle may pass by and provide him with some spare diesel.

The rain continued to belt down making small rivulets in the road. To pass the time he rolled a smoke and feeling for his lighter he found the nuggets in his overall

pocket. Looking down at the now handful of nuggets he noticed that all the nuggets pretty much looked the same as if someone had moulded them. They all had a shape like a crooked little finger with a definite angled joint in the middle. He now looked more closely at the nuggets and could see what looked like a mould join. He knew that the gold content had to be pure as the nuggets showed no sign of any other material

Just as he finished his smoke he saw in the rearview mirror the lights of a vehicle coming over the ridge. He quickly threw the nuggets into the glove box for safekeeping and got out of the truck to wave down the approaching car.

It was the last person he wanted to see. It was the 4wd of the local police. Dick (appropriately named) had never seen eye to eye with Robert since he had harassed Robert's son over a driving matter. He had even been able to make Robert store his guns in Mudgee at the gunsmith there because he reckoned that they were a danger. How was a man supposed to put down a wounded animal or kill a fox that was getting the chickens? This policeman was from the city and didn't have a clue about country life. Thank goodness he was leaving the town at Christmas to join his church as a pastor. That to Robert was a great Christmas present.

Constable Dick sauntered up to the truck and looked at Robert. He asked Robert for some identification, even though he knew Robert. Robert reached into the glove box for his license, carefully hiding the nuggets from the constable, who probably would have carted him off to gaol for stealing gold if he had half a chance. Constable Dick, however, had not finished with Robert yet, his cunning eyes spotted the 6 pack of whiskey and cola on the passenger seat of the car. It was only half full because changing a tyre and running out of fuel was thirsty work. The constable's next move was to tell Robert that he would like him to take a

breath test. Robert thought he was done-fore this time, but the miracle of miracles occurred, the batteries in the Breath test analyser were flat. Quite put out, the Constable said that he couldn't give Robert a lift because he was on police business, even though Robert knew he was returning from doing a relieving shift at Bathurst. He said he would tell someone at the pub to bring Robert out some diesel, and he got in his police vehicle and drove away, splattering Robert with more mud as he went.

Naturally, as soon as the policeman was over the hill, Robert cracked the top of one of the remaining whiskey and colas and settled down to ponder his latest discovery that the gold appeared to have the marks of being made in a mould, a mould of two pieces that are probably made from clay, moulded around an object then cut in half like you would cut an avocado then carefully the object is removed, a small filling hold made in one end. The two halves would be bound together and allowed to dry. Several could be made beforehand ready for the smelted gold to be cast. Who was it in the small town that had the skill to create a clay mould? There were too many to count as the town was rampant with artist potters, mud-brick builders, powder monkeys and wattle and daub restorers, all of whom would have access to clay and know how to make a basic split mould.

The puzzle was why; why was Robert the target of this deluge of gold fingers. Was he being set-up to take a fall for some fraudulent event perpetrated by someone at the big mine? Was it something or someone in Robert's past now trying to get back at him. Sooner or later he was going to have to tell someone else about these finds. He resolved to make that happen sooner rather than later. He started to hatch a plan that would maybe expose the reason behind the mystery.

The sun was just dipping below the western ridge when a bright set of lights crested the southern ridge; it was

the familiar sound of a Land Cruiser coming from the direction of Bathurst. It was Paul, he had been worried when Robert did not return in a reasonable time from Bathurst so he took the old coach road to Sally's Flat and then doubled back on the main road. Paul knew that one day that broken fuel gauge was going to bite Robert in the arse and today was the day. As Paul filled the truck with 20 litres on diesel it was with a cheeky grin on his face he asked Robert if it might be time to fix the fuel gauge. Robert was not amused at his assistant's timing and humour. He had more important matters on his mind.

Who could be giving him the fingers of gold? When he finally got home to the cottage, he barely touched his food. Later as he lay awake working methodically through the fifty-odd members of the small mining community, this mystery was playing havoc with every aspect of his life, eating, sleeping, even the planning work needed for the mine.

Having drawn a blank with the locals he turned his mind to the well-dressed stranger who had arrived in town about the same time as the nuggets appeared. Decked out in brand new "squatter gear", moleskins, Akubra hat, a Dry-as-a-Bone thrown casually over his shoulder, he had been picking Robert's brain every time they were in the pub.

One clue Robert had that he might be part of this mystery was the fact that the stranger had several gold teeth. Even in this old gold mining town, no-one chose to put gold they found into their teeth. Jake, the stranger, wanted to know all about the shaft Robert was re-opening at the Rose of England mine. Jake spoke with a slight accent which Robert could not put his finger on. He did not seem prepared to give much information about himself, all conversation centred on Robert and his knowledge of gold mining.

With no other possibilities coming to hand, Robert thought of a way to get Jake to open up. Back in the 1870's heyday, locals developed a potent moonshine brew called Hawthorne Herbal Tonic, guaranteed to cure whatever was ailing you. Robert had grown up with this brew and he was pretty immune to it. It was now being produced by an enterprising blow-in (someone who was not born in the town, even if they had lived there for decades) and marketed in a copy of one of the old bottles with a fancy label. Robert decided to introduce Jake to the infamous overproof drop and see if this would loosen his tongue.

Jake was keen to try the local drop, and all was going well as he downed glass after glass of the sickly sweet liquid and his conversation started to ramble from one topic to another. Just when Robert thought he was going to let his guard down, the pub door opened and in walked a tall thin man dressed in a black suit and a black shirt with a full-length overcoat and yellow tie and patent leather shoes. He wore a black broad rim hat that made him look like a Gestapo officer. There was an audible gasp in the front bar of the pub and then it fell as silent as the church on a Sunday morning just before the service started. The patrons looked at each in disbelief as he fronted the bar and asked the barmaid Noelene for "a bottle of this establishments finest Champagne". Now there was only one type of champagne that was sold in the pub and that was because some years ago the pub had been hired out for an enormous wedding; so the publican had ordered all the food and wine for the wedding including the champagne, but the wedding never happened, so now a bottle of "vintage" champagne was being sold to the tall stranger.

He took his bottle and two glasses and proceeded into the "ladies lounge", a large room set aside for the exclusive use of the womenfolk, a hangover from earlier days when ladies were not permitted in the front bars. It was considered too rough and too much cursing and foul

language for the delicate decorum required by ladies. In most ladies lounges there would be a window that connected the lounge to the main bar. This window was always shut. To obtain service, a gentile tap on the frosted glass and the barman or barmaid would attend, making sure to close the window at the end of each transaction.

The tall thin man spoke with a Scandinavian accent, but in perfect English, not learnt from a classroom but from being in an English speaking country for some years, this was made evident by his understanding of many colloquial meanings that was the shorthand of communication in the Australian bush.

Robert had watched the whole performance and followed him into the ladies lounge, he went straight over to the fire and “stoked it up” and regardless of how much wood was burning, threw another log on. After all, it was he who provided the wood for the pub, so the sooner this load was burnt, the sooner there would be the need for another load.

It was Robert’s way of casually introducing himself into the conversation, even when there was no conversation.

“I guess you’re not from around this district,” said Robert.

The foreigner looked over the top of his spectacles at Robert and said, “No, I am not; Do have a drink; I have driven 300 kilometres to see you”.

He handed Robert a glass of champagne even though Robert had refused, as his glass of beer was still at mid-tide. Not to be rude, Robert took the glass and placed the half-full beer glass on the mantle over the fireplace. He raised the fluted glass in a sort of toast or thanks to the foreigner.

“See me?”; said Robert, now feeling quite nervous at the sight of this strangely dress person.

“How do you know me,” he said, “What do you want to know”?

Robert felt a chill run down his spine, as the foreigner turned to place his champagne flute on the table beside him, Robert could see the butt of a holstered handgun under his jacket.

“I believe you’re the permit holder of the Rose of England mine, this is true, yes,” the foreigner asked.

Robert did not want to sound like he was intimidated by the foreigner so he avoided the question by asking, “Who wants to know?”

The foreigner immediately stood up and almost snapped the heels of his boots together as he thrust his hand forward at Robert saying;

“I am so sorry, I should have introduced myself earlier, My name is Erik Hansson – How do you do”.

Robert transferred his glass to his left hand and shook the foreigner’s hand, crushing it with forty years of pick holding strength. The foreigner winced under what would be a normal handshake in Robert’s circle. Robert thought, “What a Nancy boy”, and wondered if he was going to be able to pick up the champagne flute again.

Some of the fear Robert had felt only seconds ago had suddenly left him, as Robert replied: “I guess you know more about me than I know about you”.

The foreigner started to explain why he had come so far to talk to Robert; he wanted to buy the permit on the Rose of England mine and asked Robert to name his price.

Still massaging his hand the foreigner explained that a group of European businessmen had been following the world price of gold and were looking for some gold mining assets to invest in. But they wanted to be the controllers of their investment.

Robert was tempted to ask Hansson if it was he who had placed the gold fingers in his truck but thought better of it; this might be something more sinister.

Hansson started to make small talk about Uppsala, his hometown in Sweden and how the cold reminded him of where he came from. This almost as a subliminal suggestion prompted Robert to “stoke up the fire” and naturally throw on more wood.

Robert drank the rest of this beer and left the pub without saying one word as to the value of the Rose of England mine. The rain had stopped and bright stars and a near-full moon shone. The yellowy light from the hallway of the pub spilled out on to the veranda. It was a breathless evening, the smoke from the village houses stemmed vertically and then blurred at the top.

He walked down the tree-lined avenue that was the main street of the village, the village that Robert had spent most of his life except for the years where he served in the military.

As he neared the turn off to the cottage, he heard behind him the revving of a large capacity vehicle coming closer and closer towards him. Then it was heading straight for him with no headlights. Robert instinctively dived to the side of the road and rolled down into the ditch that

paralleled the road. The car just missed him but flattened his hat as both wheels rolled over it.

Robert picked himself up and climbed up the side of the ditch, He saw the brake light of the car flash as the driver brake to make the turn onto the Bathurst road. He picked up his battered hat, reshaped it and continued to the cottage.

As he entered the cottage, quite shaken, Paul handed him the phone. It was Hansson asking if they could meet at the mine the next day. Robert agreed and suggested an early hour, about 6:30 am.

After what had just happened Robert was pretty sure that the attempted to run down was the work of Hansson.

## Chapter 3

The next morning at 5:00 am, Robert and Paul made their way to the mine where Robert parked the truck in the shed that housed the old stamper on the lower side of the machinery shed, Paul positioned himself on the ridge that overlooked the shaft and with the rising sun at his back. Robert's military training told him that the advantage of knowing the terrain was half the battle. Paul loaded the 30-30 lever-action rifle and found a comfortable shooting position. He knew he was Robert's guarantee. From his position, he could see that his arc of fire covered from the tailings dam to the shaft header and pump house.

From the previous night's attempt on his life, Robert assumed that Hansson would not arrive at the appointed hour but earlier to ambush Robert as he drove up to the mine shaft.

Robert walked the perimeter trying to work out where Hansson would hide to ambush him. There was a very obvious spot behind the old steam boiler that offered a good cover. Robert placed a half a stick of mining gelignite inside the boiler and another in the timbers of the old water tower that was next to the boiler, he buried the wire to the detonators in the gravel and ran the wire through the long grass to the back of the pump house. It was now ten to six; Robert rolled a cigarette but thought better of smoking it as the smell may give away his surprise.

Robert heard the sound of a V8 well before he saw the lights of the vehicle crest the ridge. It was moving slowly towards the mine compound. It was the same high-performance vehicle that had tried to run him down the night before.

It stopped, a short fat man got out of the passenger's side and took a shotgun from the back seat and loaded both barrels. Paul could see clearly through the telescopic sight all that was happening. He kept the crosshairs on the fat man as the fat man scouted the area for an ambush position. Robert was still behind the pump house and could see the fat man walking directly toward him. Robert, holding the blaster, crept silently into the long grass hoping that in the half-light of dawn the fat man would not see the wire. But then the driver got out and directed the fat man to the boiler. Roberts plan was perfect; the fat man was in for a big surprise.

It was then that Robert noticed that the driver was not Hansson but another man, dressed in designer jeans tee-shirt and a baseball cap that was sitting at a ninety degrees angle to his face. He was no local thought, Robert.

The driver was looking around to find a place to conceal the car. He found a spot behind the generator shed about fifty metres from the head of the mine.

Paul could see through the scope that he was checking a 9mm automatic handgun as he looked for a place to hide to ambush Robert.

Who were these people? Were they hired by Hansson? If so, why was Hansson trying to kill him? It didn't make any sense to Robert, if Hansson wanted to purchase the permit for the Rose of England, then it would be much harder to obtain if Robert was dead.

It was now just before six-thirty; there was a glint of a headlight in the pre-dawn light that caught Paul's attention. He scanned the scope on the rifle and saw that the two strangers had seen the headlights and concealed themselves ready to pounce.

Now Paul could see the late model European sedan come into view, through the scope he could see a well-dressed man looking around as if he wasn't sure where to park. He stopped the car just inside the gate and opened the door of the car to get out when suddenly the city boy stood up and aimed the handgun at what was unmistakably Erik Hansson. Hansson immediately ducked behind the car door as the city boy took careful aim. There was a sudden sharp bang and the handgun flew from the city boy's hand. The force of the impact whipped his arm violently and he was thrown to the ground Paul had a bead on him all the time and it was a simple shot for him, (the second-best shot in the district) to take him out.

Now the fat man emerged from his position behind the boiler and started towards Hansson. He hadn't advanced three paces when the concussion of an almighty blast behind him threw him to the ground. He was down for the count.

Hansson timidly emerged from the shelter of the car door, gun in hand. By now Robert had changed his position and came out into the open.

"Put down the weapon Mr Hansson", said Robert, "You have some explaining to do".

Hansson complied, carefully laying the weapon in the dust of the road. He could see the city boy getting to his feet to make his getaway. Another loud sharp bang of the 30-30 and the shower of dirt between his feet froze him to the spot.

"I wouldn't move city boy, if you want to keep your balls, he can take them one at a time or both together, it depends on his mood", said Robert waving a hand in the general direction where Paul was concealed.

"It might be a bit hard to take one at a time with those tight jeans," yelled Paul, "I'll have to settle for both".

Slowly the crotch of the city boys' jeans went a darker blue.

Hansson, clearly quite shaken by the situation asked Robert what was going on.

"Who were these men and why were they out to kill him" Hansson exclaimed.

As Robert tied a length of detonating cable around the fat man's wrist and ankles, Paul did the same to the city boy. It was now time to get some answers and Robert had the perfect way to get the information he needed.

Robert took the city boy to the mineshaft head and hooked the bucket hook through his belt and lowered him screaming into the dark dank mine shaft.

"All you have to do is tell me who you are working for and then I'll pull you up" shouted Robert, as the city boy disappeared down the shaft.

At about eighty metres down the city boy started to sing, he blubbered how he and his uncle, the fat man were approached by a man in a club in the city to eliminate Hansson for two thousand dollars, as he was interfering with their plans to get control of the Rose of England mine.

Robert now felt that he could trust Hansson enough to allow him his freedom. With that Hansson walked over to the city boy and kicked him in the head sending him sprawling. Hansson reached into the city boys back pocket and removed his wallet to find out just who he was. Kenny Khoury of Haberfield turned out not to trust banks as he still had the thousand dollars. Hansson gave the money to Robert and said. "For saving my life". Paul did the same inspection on the fat man's wallet and sure enough, he was related to

the city boy. Asad Khoury also did not trust banks. Paul relieved the wallet of its bulge as had Hansson.

“Well you can’t be expected to be paid if you don’t complete the job,” said Hansson as he replaced the wallet in the city boys back pocket.

Robert agreed to meet with Hansson later in the day, but first, he had to deal with the two problems from the city. Paul helped Robert load the two problems into the back of the Ute and covered them with a tarp. They drove into the village and stopped in front of the police station. The village was quiet, not a soul stirred. Now Roberts and Paul had figured that if they took these two criminals to the Police station, with Roberts history with the constable, the constable would surely have taken the side of the two men.

Paul emptied the city boy’s handgun and shoved it down the front of his damp jeans. Roberts took the shotgun and looped it through the fat man's belt. Cocking the shotgun and aiming it for the Police sign that was still lit, blasted both barrels, destroying the sign.

Paul and Robert pushed the two city thugs to the ground and quietly rolled the Ute down the road and out of town. They could barely contain their laughter as they knew that poor Constable Dick would be doing paperwork for the next week. What sweet revenge thought Robert for all the trouble that constable had caused his family. “Dopey Bible-basher” laughed Paul.

They circled the town and went back to the mine; they had some cleaning up to do. First, the old boiler had to be straightened up and all traces of the blast removed. Paul drove the city boys hot V8 to the farm and hid it between an old Bedford truck and a Toyota Ute which were among twenty or other “spare part vehicles”. A few sheets of tin to cover it and even Robert would have trouble finding it.

Robert and Paul met back at the cottage for breakfast and waited for the constable to call. But he never did! Two days went by without a murmur. Robert was delivering another load of wood to the pub when “young” Bluey Dobson, well young was a bit optimistic as Bluey was a best guess about 84 and had no teeth. It was not advisable to stand too close to Bluey while he was drinking and talking, you could easily wear half his beer. Bluey had heard that the Local copper had arrested two wanted criminals from the city single-handed after a shoot out in the main street.

Later that afternoon Robert and Paul met Hansson at the Ladies Lounge in the pub. Robert stoked the roaring fire and laid another log on for good measure. Hansson returned from the main bar with a tray of drinks. He must have been paying attention or the barmaid had recognized who the drinks were for.

Hansson went over his plans for acquiring a mine that only needed the infrastructure added, to be operational. Exactly what Robert had and was willing to listen to any profitable suggestion Hansson may have to offer. Hansson’s company, “Hansson & Auger”, were experts in retrofitting old mines, to make them profitable through better mechanisation. From the old 1870 government mine records, Hansson had theorised that the Rose of England was abandoned due to unseasonable rain, the water table had risen beyond the ability of the pumps of the day to remove the water so mining could continue.

Hansson explained, he believed that with the changing weather patterns, less rain had fallen than it did in the 1870s; therefore the water table would have dropped.

Robert was impressed with the level of knowledge of this strange man. The reasons Hansson had given were the same reasons why Robert purchased the mine permit in the first place.

Robert pressed Hansson harder for more detailed information; did he know the tonnages and yield numbers last reported in 1870? Today, with the price of gold above \$2000 per ounce makes the Rose of England a good investment. Finally, Hansson asks Robert if he knows the layout of the mine and how much gold he thinks is left.

Robert reaches in his pocket for the lucky nugget he uses to impress prospective investors. He turns the 5½ oz shiny blob in his hand and smiles at Hansson.

“I think we may be able to do business,” says Robert.

## Chapter 4

The train ride from Bathurst was uneventful; Central Station was the same as it always was, busy with people in a hurry to get to work. Robert had never liked the city for just that reason.

He made his way down to the Circular Quay and to Goldfields House where Hansson had offices on the 24th floor. He was too early for the appointment so he sat in a small café that overlooked the busy harbour and had a cup of black tea. Ferries crisscrossing the harbour taking people to and from the north side of the harbour.

While he killed time, he wondered about the mystery nuggets. What was the connection, did Hansson have a hand in this or had missed something that may make sense.

Soon it was time for the meeting with Hansson, he had grown to like him but not trust him yet.

The offices of Hansson and Auger were impressively Scandanavian in design. The board room had a floor to ceiling glass wall giving a panoramic view of the harbour. Robert felt very out of place in this corporate temple. An assistant asked Robert if he would like coffee or tea. He asked for strong black tea with two sugars.

On the board room table were geological maps of the exploration permits that Robert held and other maps to the north of his permits. Each map had a set of geologist reports and handwritten notes and coloured lines indicating known yields from government reports from the 1800s.

Robert's respect for this man began to rise as he could see that Hansson was not a fool.

Robert sipped on his tea as Hansson outline the extent of his project. He knew that Robert held all the cards the biggest of them being the Permits that covered the Rose of England mine.

“Well what do you think Mr Crane?” said Hansson. Robert was about to reply when the door of the board room opened and a shabbily dressed man entered the room.

“Hello, I’m Inge Auger, Erik’s partner”. Robert rose from the high-back corporate chair and shook his hand remembering not to crush it.

Auger was the opposite of Hansson; he wore a faded pair of jeans that needed a good wash and a tee-shirt that was as faded as the jeans and just as unwashed. His hair was unkempt and he wore old riding boots. Robert was immediately comfortable with this working man.

Auger explained his appearance, he had just returned from a weekend trip to their mine where he had to fix a sludge pump.