

Castlemaine

Christine Lavin

Back in the 1850s this town just teemed with life
150,000 Miners all were dreaming of a strike
7,000 live here in Castlemaine
And he still works for the mines
Extracts 2 grams of gold per ton of sand
Dust the gold rush left behind.

I met him on a November Day
The Australian sun was bright
He squinted his eyes
He lit a cigarette
Another rough night.
The house he shared with his wife and babies
He had built with his own two hands
He could no longer call it home
In his place, another man
So he lives here with a friend of his
His wife lives down the street
They joke that it's a halfway house for men
Suffering temporary defeat
He makes me a cup of coffee
I notice his young (bud) weathered hands
Tanned except for where it was he wore a wedding band.

He asks me about America
A place he would love to be
He's been all over Australia
He's seen all there is to see
He shows me pictures of Ayers Rock
Wild Birds and Kangaroos
Pictures of his little ones
And his wife too
Then he said put out your hand
And I will give to you what I found on a recent trip
He lays in my palm a mound of multi colored opal chips
When his fingers touch mine
I feel a longing from within
Did that originate from me or from him?
But it's 4:00
He leaves for work
He returns home late that night
I'm in the room right down the hall
I can hear him snap on the light
I hear him softly humming
I hear a turning of a page
I dream that night of wild birds trapped inside an opal cage.

In the morning when I get up
He's in the kitchen making tea
He smiles and he says he's got one more parting gift for me
"Close your eyes, put out your hand"