

## 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"