

## The Cow's Story

Maybe it was the smell of newly turned earth, maybe the look of the large brown eyes of the cow as she stood there, impassive and soft. Jess couldn't separate one sensation from the other. She was leaning sideways against the old gate falling off its hinges and saw him a long way off – a neighbour, a stranger to the district perhaps. The light was growing dimmer as the figure drew closer but at a hundred yards she made out a striking man, tall, walking with an animal grace, neither fast nor slow and obviously headed for her gate. She felt a sudden inexplicable rush of excitement, but why? He was probably some stock agent come to see her father, she was irrelevant to those goings on. At most she nodded to people as they came and went except for the time one of the neighbour's sons came upon her suddenly around this time of night, it was years ago, like a strange dream. These things happen in the country, her mother had said, there aren't enough women to go round. Just be thankful that the first time's over. Jess remembered his eyes as he tore off her clothes and as she let out a howl of pain noticed the cows standing over by the clump of trees near the creek, watching with their big soft eyes. The harsh dry grass was softening in the sunset and about to glow. He was walking a little slower now. She stared and stared at him but felt she could register nothing. He was just there and he was coming towards her, that's all she could think, he's coming, he's crossing all the familiar dips, all the stones she'd walked over a thousand times, and he was looking at her as he walked, as though he knew the road himself, as though he knew the time of day, the cows, the hills. She wondered if she should turn away and go home but could find no energy, no motive. He stopped 20 feet away and called, Jess. It wasn't calling out, it was a whisper but she felt as if she'd been delivered a blow. The cows by the creek stirred and began slowly ambling towards the gate. And then as though hours had passed with them standing there, she heard from all around her, in the air, Jess, I've come for you again, and the gently knocking of the cow bells.