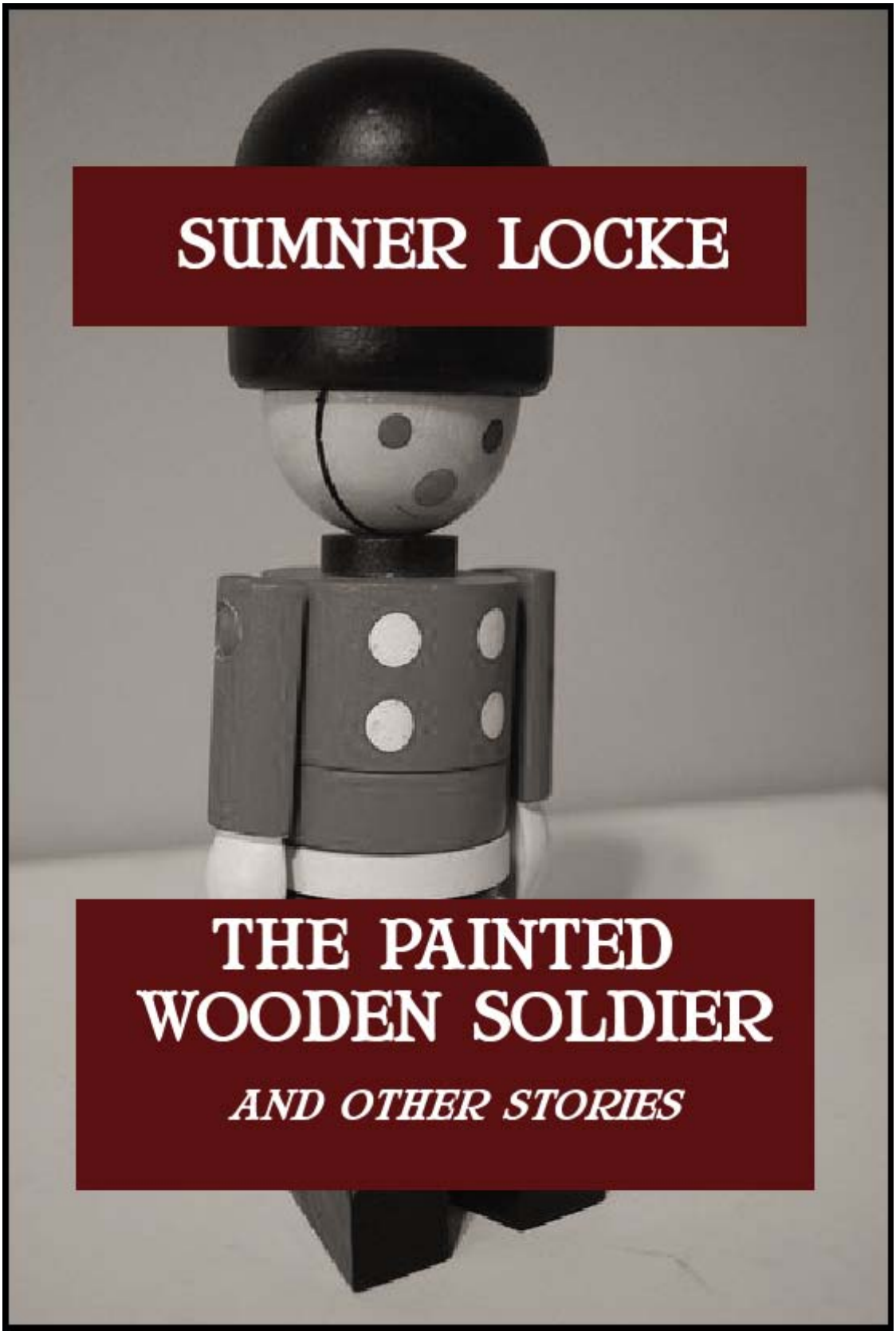


*Cover artwork by Terry Walker 2024*

# THE PAINTED WOODEN SOLDIER

***and other stories***

## Sumner Locke

1881-1917

Produced and Edited by Terry Walker
*January 2024*

The stories in this original 2024 short story collection were first published in the following Australian magazines and newspapers between 1907 and 1916

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Sunday Times (Sydney)
The Native Companion (Melbourne)
The Lone Hand (Sydney)
Punch (Melbourne)
The Western Mail (Perth)

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# Sumner Locke

HELENA SUMNER LOCKE was born in Sandgate, now a northen beach suburb of Brisbane, Queensland, in 1881. It was then a seaside village, some miles from the capital. In 1888 the Locke family moved to Melbourne.

She began publishing short stories in *The Bulletin* and *The Native Companion*. By 1906, she branched out into plays and novels. She had published 3 plays and 4 novels as well as over 100 short stories by her early death in 1917.

She married Henry Elliott in January 1917, two weeks before he was posted to the front. She died after giving birth to son Sumner Locke Elliott in October 1917. The son subsequently embarked on his own considerable career as an author and dramatist.

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**Contents**


| | |
|---|---|
| 1: White Hills and the Silences | 5 |
| 2: Home for Christmas | 13 |
| 3: "Potatoes and Diamonds" | 18 |
| 4: That Horse | 25 |
| 5: The Green Cat | 31 |
| 6: A House of Mountain Ash | 36 |
| 7: One Man from the West | 41 |
| 8: Paper Ladies | 50 |
| 9: Ragtime | 59 |
| 10: A Question of Rights | 68 |
| 11: At the Pitch of the Scrap | 73 |
| 12: The Case of Camelia | 85 |
| 13: The Painted Wooden Soldier | 92 |
| 14: Mobilising Johnnie | 97 |
| 15: What Luck | 103 |
| 16: The Water Finders | 115 |
| 17: Blue Wattles | 120 |
| 18: As One British Subject to Another | 127 |
| 19: A Lonely Man | 135 |
| 20: When Dawson Died | 138 |
| 21: The Life Sentence | 143 |
| 22: The Eternal Softness | 150 |
| 23: A Miss in the Mails | 157 |
| 24: Hoofs and Horns and Hyacinths | 161 |
| 25: The Claim on Emily Crow | 169 |
| 26: An Office Derelict | 176 |


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## 1: White Hills and the Silences

*Weekly Times* 3 Sep 1910

A GIRL in leggings and a strapped waist shirt tucked into knee breeches, rode astride a horse down the incline to a rough bark hut at the foot. She found the track difficult for the horse, so she got off and ran the last 200 yards, bursting into the door of the hut like a sudden blasting westerly wind, and commanding, attention by mere reason, of her extreme hurry.

"Say, Tod, I near broke my neck takin' this track. I been to the house hours ago an' I been huntin' you since you came from the station. What do you think?"

She was breathless, and the man at the camp fire, who was 6ft. 4in. stood over her with earnestness stamped on his almost dark-blooded face. "Don't break your neck, anyway, talkin'," he said quietly. "What's the matter?"

The girl pulled off her hat and threw it on the sand floor. "Why, they're up to their neck in it— over there— they're real serious, too. They're talkin' an' talkin' and arguin' and all that— all a lot of blessed bother 'bout sendin' me to school."

She shot out the last words like, a volley of fire from a gun that one is not expecting, and the brown burnt man came a bit nearer.

"Oh, are they?"

"Yes— there's talk like a meeting of crows over a dead lamb. I'm to be educated and all that. I'm the wildest girl in the country, which is funny, seein' I'm the only one in about two hundred odd miles. Oh, there's doings over there as never was."

"An' you're going to school?" The man did not go back to the fire. He sat on the slab table that accommodated itself to the other rude furniture of the hut.

"No, not if I can help it. Look here, Tod, can you see what's in it?"

"Only that your dad's got a new worm worryin' him."

"That's it, an' it's queer. Why can't I write me name a heap more like it than he can figure his out? Can't I give him learnin what he never got in his life?"

Tod became strangely serious and calm. "You ain't goin' to no school, kid. Haven't I given you instructions about all you'll ever want? Didn't it take me a week spellin' it every day to make you understand 'station' wasn't wrote as you had it?"

"An' didn't I tell him all that? My oath. There's a parson chap travellin' through, drivin' a hymn book trade, an' he tells the Johnstons at 'Weebug' it's a sinful country that only breeds cattle and hills without learnin'. Dad— he hears all this an he says, 'Where's the money I'm makin' goin' to if my girl don't get

away with some schoolin' sooner or later.' That started it, an' the Dad talks about fixin' up for me.'

Tod's face was bursting with hot anger

"They'll be measurin' you for a cut suit soon, I s'pose. One of them advertised straight up and down— with a heap of buttons that don't do up, an a look about you that means 'Hands off' every time anyone passed you."

The girl swung on to the table. "They says I'm to marry some day, and cut all this cow doin'; it's unsuitable an' I've money enough by-an'-by to ride me own motor-car, a thing Dad ain't even 'seen out of a picture paper."

Tod blew a whiff as of invisible smoke through his nostrils.

"I'm hot about it," he said, trying to be calm. "Dunno what I'd like to do."

"I'd rather face the mob— wild as it is— alone," she said, fixing her powerful eyes on him. "I don't know, girls and all that, and I'm not built for sitting long on things that don't move when you use the spur."

"Think I'll see him meself," said Tod, as if in communion with himself.

"See Dad? Will that stop anything he ever made up his mind upon?"

"I might do it." Tod as vehement in his aCtions. "I might do anything, but I'm not havin' you learnin' and being made into a nonsensical woman with with rum ideas about the wag of your skirt an how your teeth is goin' to be veined out with gold— or what you're goin to say if it's a question what only wants 'yes' or 'no' for an answer. There's plenty to leant out here, and there's life on the hills and plains clean and good. And that's all we want— considerin' it's me that's marryin' you— if it's needin', by-an-'bye."

The girl swung her feet as if in restive understanding to her mood.

"He says I'm done with here— I've been out too long. I can't well meet my sort anywhere in the world, so I must change my kind. Well, I'm blamed for nothin', seein' it's usual to be lazy and work hard at the same time out here. I don't want none of Dad's money if I'm stayin' with you— for life, Tod. It's inexpensive, and it's all right livin' under the sun risin' and settin', and thle stars gettin' over us at night. When we stayed out with the cattle that time, fightin' the fires of the scrub together and never gettin' no sign of sleep until 12 next day— my oath! it was good! Bein' tired's as good as bein' thorough hungry, and a bed anywhere soft and open aired is same as a meal when you're mighty ready for it. They don't get that down school parts, do they?"

"They get a lot of understandin' one way or another," said Tod, "an' it suits their cut of life, maybe; but it's no more level with you than them hilltops is on a line with the sea! They'll teach you 'God in a church with velvet trappin's an' money clinkin' in a plate, and out here you can find Him at any moment unawares in His own place of making', an' He don't put class or distinction on us as understands what's on'y best for us."

He picked up his hat from the table and went to the door. "You stop where you are, girl. I'm goin' to take on anyone who's ready for argument, an' I'll start right now."

He walked out into the hot air, and the sun-slants off the hills told him it was two hours' ride to cool him off before he could say a word.

When the darkness was beginning to dip into the slope where the hut was, he had reached the home of the girl, and stood at the door, waiting entrance. The. elderly man inside was her father, known to him for sixteen years, ever since the girl had been born in that low, fly-studded house, that cracked in the hot sun and moaned in the increasing winds. A dust-covered clergyman, with a heat-marked face and a loud voice, greeted him as though he was a familiar acquaintance. Tod stood iust inside the door, massive and brown and hot from his hurry. "You're possibly the man needed in this little altercation," said the man of cloth. Tod stood level with the top shelf in the room, and the other men sitting below seemed like shrivelled dwarfs of the forest. "Yes," he said, "I think you're right!"

Then Wiggman joined in. "It's about my girl. You're to blame, Tod . You've run her mad with your ideas, and the cattle life and all that."

"Depends," said Tod, "what you call mad. I've put her straight onto the correct methods of livin' a bush life—"

"Which, for a girl of her apparent temperament, isn't the right life," interrupted the parson.

"Well— I dunno," said Tod.

"I am advised wrisely," began Wiggman.

"You are," said Tod, "but not too well— for Mag. You're talkin' education— of the wrong kind for her. I've heard about it. Mag's built for here for the rest of her life, and if there's money in it let it he there for the future. What's she want with a looking-glass learnin'? That's all it is!"

"My friend," the parson rose up in indignation, "if you are desirous for that child's welfare, give her a chance to see her fellow creatures."

Tod distended his nostrils.

"Presoomin' you don't term us them same, Reverend Minister, what good's they goin' to do her?"

"My man"— the parson was horrified— "my man, this girl is the only child of her father; she will have an income to live up to, a marriage to make, and children to rear. Can she do that minus an education, without the knowledge of the ways of the world? Why, she can't even read or write."

"Beg pardon." Tod was indifferently smiling. "She can do enough of that to suit herself— an' me, who's she's marryin'— by and bye— without leave."

Wiggman got to his feet in a second.

"Cut that out," he shouted. "She's been too long in your comp'ny already, An' money been banked each year for he to marry you— an out-drover without means or learnin'."

Tod removed his hat and sat on the table. The interest was growing, and he was earnest to the core about winning, though.

"Your money ain't necessary along of that girl," he said quietly. "I'm educatin' her to my likin' and her own— ask her."

Wiggman sat down again. "

"You'd go on livin' in that mud swamp, I suppose. Well, I'd kill my girl first."

"I think not," said Tod. "I'm fightin' for her, for mud hole or swamp or schoolin', or whatever she wants it."

The parson began to draw in his lips.

"Dear, dear, I never thought such barbarity could be so near civilisation."

"Leastways it's natural," said Tod. "I don't care if he writes or if she don't. If she's my girl for life, then I don't want another man's money to help us out, and if there's an after business an' children to count in as well— well, I'm keener on; the life than ever, 'cause I'd learn them to be men, and mem of the soil as God intended when he placed the mountains away up out of the sea."

The parson coughed vigorously, and Wiggman walked about again.

"I'm determined on doin' my girl a right before I die," he said with emphasis in his heavy, tread.

"We're agreed on that," said Tod. "Now let us go to points."

"First of all," said Wiggman, "she's got to realise she's startin' over again. She might be ten years younger for all she knows."

"Or ten years older for her good experience," said Tod.

Wiggman continued to walk about. "I'd like her in a good school or college."

Tod roared out loud. "With a set of clinkin' new harness what would break first go off."

"She might learn all the necessary things, such as writin and sums, and book readin'."

"An' how she figures next the other girls about her waist measurements," said Tod angrily.

"She could have music," said Wiggman, " 'cause it's always done at them high places."

"And toe steppin' to keep her feet walkin right," said Tod.

Then Wiggman got annoyed. "What's it to you, anyway?"

"It's this," said Tod. "She's a natural born of the soil, and she's strong and well-minded. What's all that goin to do but make her unhappy. Could you place a wild dingo down among the street curs of the town and expect it to feel at

home and unselfish like? Wouldn't he fight and want to rush back to his own earth spot?"

Wiggman's fury was lasting.

"My girl's of good blood, and can take her place anywhere when she gets used to it."

"Ah— when she gets used to it," said Tod, "but during that time you're goin to make her feel what's different in her to the other people she meets. You're goin' to set up rules and regulations that she don't understand and she couldn't nohow keep. I'm ready for her any day without, an ounce of learnin', and her waist line like a bracelet an her toes turned anyways."

Tod was thoroughly holding the floor, "She knows her creed of livin' well enough to treat everybody as well as they treat her. We ain't lookin' for more."

"That won't do for me," said Wiggman. "My girl goes to school, an' she goes now."

The parson stood up for the third time. "Then the law of the father shall have it," he said, nodding in assurance.

"Takin' it kindly that you'll help me in this, reverend sir," said Wiggman, "an keep an eye on her when she's there, I'll see you're done well by for repayment."

The clergyman folded his fingers before him. "I can arrange the matter of my return at once," he said firmly.

Tod barred the door with his body and one arm lay along the frame over his head.

"You're makin' a lot of trouble for yourself," he said very evenly, and half shutting his eyes on the man before him. "You're not takin' into account the girl herself— she's woman enough to raise fire if she's minded— and I don't know a better one to fight it through." Then he stood outside the door. "I'd like your company, mister, if you're goin' over the hills— there's many worse dangers than fhightin' a woman that I can tell you about there."

The parson smiled grimly. "My way lies through the hills, certainly, and I fear not its dangers; but I cannot stay to dally in argument. I must be 'Wingoon' by to-night to perform a marriage there on the morrow."

"Then maybe I'll go ahead?' said Tod, "and you'll remember what I've told you."

He went out of the verandah to the yard, found his horse and rode away, when he had leisurely climbed the first hill he took a cut through the scrub and altered his pace to a canter, then when he found the bush track to the hut spanked the horse into a lightning gallop

Mag stood near the door, straining her eyes up the hills in the light that lay About between the rising paleness of the ataoon and the shadows of the dip. It

was the voice of Tod coming from the upper track behind the dead pine fence that told her he had returned.

THE PARSON, leaving the dust track from the home of Wiggman, took the short cut to the hilis with a resolution and firm belief in his own particular nerve in standing up to danger. The short steps of the mountain pony hit the soft ground under him in rhythm to his thoughts, and for half an hour he kept on not noticing an accompaniment of other hoof sounds, in the shadows to the left.

The boys had marked him at the rise, and kept an even distance, watchinig when the light allowed, and listening when the timber grew, too thick. The big silence of the hills made the night oppressive, and the good man stared round once or twice as if to speak to some unknown beings but the space behind was blocked in shadow, and he hurried the pony into the patches of white skylight. Tod and the young girl rode abreast a narrow strip of rook cutting, and kept out of the main road of the hills.

"We ought to meet him before he turns at the White Hill," said Tod, "I'll go ahead presently."

Then the sound of short clump steps on cut metal hit upon the night, and Tod came from cover facing the road, but with his back to the light. The clergyman pulled up a steep incline before him, the animal struggling with the loose ground for a minute, then taking to the top road with an assertive rush. Tod was ready, and placed himself between the White Hill ascent and the man.

"Off your horse!" he said quietly, fixing the level barrel of a revolver straight between the eyes of the clergyman, who sat rigidly and calm on the pony.

"To what purpose— is it money?"

Tod never budged or moved his arm. "It's not— it's a purpose of my own, and one you're rightly here for."

"My man"— the parson was wonderfully calm, nor did he recognise the man of the previous dispute down at the house— "my man, I'm rightly here for many purposes— of good, I hope. Let me on; I have a ceremony to perform to-morrow early, and it is far enough away to take me all night to reach."

"A ceremony," said Tod. "You need go no further. You're a licensed man. and carry papers. "

"NOW, then, parson, you'll please get off that horse. We'll have a wedding right here now." The parson got down slowly, and Mag, listening behind, came out to the road and stood near Tod.

"At such a pressing time," began the parson, "and with no witnesses; I must ask you to consider—"

"Considerin' ain't for to-night," said Tod. "There's time pressin', you're right, and for witnesses there's God's own stars above you, Mister Parson, same as His eyes watchin' down on people what follows the natural course of the instinct He puts into them; but if you're distressin' yourself about makin' it more legal for his humans, I can fix you easy.'

He gave a whistle, and the cattle men then came out of the shadow to the left, leading their ponies and clanking their spurs.

"You didn't know you travelled with an escort," said Tod. "Well, I saw to it— you wasn't alone in these parts. Now I'll ask you to begin.'

Standing there in the light, with the White Hill behind him, and the girl's fingers in his own, a level weapon forcing the action, the clergyman took a book from his pocket.

"I'd like you to understand," said Tod, "that I'm not doin' this without rarpecting make it a though business transaction. It wont tstyou no rent being under heaven this day, an the silence in these parts is as good music as one might know who's been livin in it most ot his life, but I'm payin' you understand, I'm payin' after you've fixed us two."

The weapon still between his eyes and the book spread under the moon rays, the parson then began to read hurriedly. Through the dull forest the words carried, and on to the stars, and to the all-understanding Power behind it all."

Tod wrote his name and that of the girl in a manner correct as a city church, and his strong voice, held in check by his strong mind, toned in with the surroundings like a great quiet power that is turbulent beneath.

Never once during the reading did he drop the weapon; knelt together on the cut rock road with the vibrating voice of the clergyman above their heads and the exquisite softness of the white night.

The parson shut the book and Tod dropped the revolver.

"That's a deal if it's true," he said. "We can't tell in these parts when we're bein' done, good by or otherwise. Now, Mr Parson, we'll just fill in those papers you carry."

"This is a most unusual proceeding," the parson began.

But Tod cut in, "Yes, but we'll make it right by law presently." He moved to a great boulder cut at the side of the road. "Here's the neatest table that ever a bride and bridegroom fixed their names at, but it's suitable to the altar of them stars same as your church room, Mr Parson."

He affixed his full name after reading the papers, careful lest any slip might prove the thing not legal. Then Mag took up the pencil. She looked at Tod; then at the clergyman. Tod ran his finger down the line.

"Maggie— Elizabeth— Wiggman," he said, with full eyes on the parson.

The Clergyman stepped forward hurriedly.

"Wiggman!" he almost shouted, "The girl that—"

"That you've just married to me," said Tod, levelling the weapon again as Mag took time signing the paper.

Then a burst of merriment shot out from Tod.

"That's a good night's work, an' here I'm goin' to deal fair. There's a note for ten pounds to compensate your delay, Mr Parson." He took off his hat and stood further away surveying the clergyman with a smile on his open face.

"If you're runnin' any school classes about the district further on we'll be glad to come, as we're both a bit ragged with our lettering, but you'll do no town training for my girl, whatever her father says he'll pay you— now."

Then he laughed again. "You'd best get away from these parts," he said, bringing the pony forward to the clergyman. "You're liable to a fine of £200 for marrying a girl below age without the consent of her father."

"It was done under fire," urged the parson, getting on to the pony.

"Under fire," said Tod, "which don't make it any the less legal. I've got this paper here to show, if you try to upset things, and I've paid proper. Now, as you're in a hurry— it's goodnight."

The pony ambled forward and struck its feet against the loose stones of the White Hill. Tod and the girl stood watching; then he signalled to the boys to follow on.

"He won't be about talkin' of this," said Tod, "an' the girl'll wait news at your place about the school learnin' an' all that, an' meantime I'm cuttin' for that bit of blue range beyond the ridge— there's a strip of ground quite suitable to start again an'— an' we'll take it together, kid— an' maybe later on, we'll talk about this schoolin' when it's wanted most— and the God of them stars says it's necessary."

Then they rode away into the timber and the night sounds, and the light broke over them in communion with their great understanding.

———————————

## 2: Home for Christmas

*Weekly Times* 17 Dec 1910

A TIRED old tramp untied the narrow gate in the yard of "Barrawindy" station, and came shuffling through the dust to the kitchen door. A woman watched him from the verandah, and grew somewhat bad tempered. She hated the tramps at Christmas. They were a bother, and there were so many, and the boss had made allowances for them because of the fact of it being Christmas.

The old tramp dropped his roll on the ground, and bent his back very slowly to pat the retriever dog, who was too hot and lazy to even bark at him.

"Old dog.... Old Mascot," he said over and over again, and the women shouted loudly:

"He ain't Mascot; he's Brown John."

The man looked startled— stared at her, and then unbent his back as though in heavy pain.

"You tell me that ain't Mascot? I know her anyway."

"Know nothin', then," snapped the woman. "You been here before, eh? I don't remember you."

"You haven't known me, old woman," said the tramp, "but that old dog— old Mascot...."

"Ain't Mascot," screamed the woman. "I been here for thirty years. I know!"

Then the tramp stared harder.

"Maybe," he said wearily. "I'm a bit dazed with time. 'Spose old Mascot reached the terminus a while ago. I muster been gone for sixty years—"

"Sixty years!" The woman gasped, and then came out further on to the verandah.

"Yes, an' things have changed. I see you've painted the kitchen and made a bath-room by the well."

"Did you know the boss?" came in a thick way from the woman.

"What boss? Yer mean Mr John Winter? I know him as the boss—"

"That's him," said the woman, "but he's not likely to remember you. He ain't that old himself."

Then the tramp tried to remember. His head was perpetually moving in a 'mandarin' sort of fashion, and he tried to steady his memory.

"He ought to be nigh on a century— the boss I'm talkin' of— Mr John P. Winter, of 'Barrawindy.' This is it, eh? I'm not wandering, old woman, am I?"

"Yer a bit out, I'm thinking," she said with a sensation of distrust about her. "Mr John P. Winter is on'y over the bar of thirty, as I knows rightly."

Then she went back to the kitchen.

"Better come in and get yer feed if yer ready," she called presently. "Christmas dinner is too busy a time for me to stand yappin to a road man."

The old man sat on the step. "I wrote I was coming," he said, looking afar into the distance of timbered country and scrubby land.

"Did yer now?" The woman began to laugh at this mad old man. She gave over all ideas of his sanity, and was putting up a parcel of tucker in a fashion notable for its size and suitable to the Christmas season.

"I wrote I was coming," he said again, "but it was a long way to come. Why, my legs is that tired and my eyes could hardly find the way."

Then the woman laughed again.

"Must have got lost in the post," she said softly, "or the gig would have gone down to meet you."

But the old man shook his head more violently.

"Wasn't lost," he said, "wasn't lost. I got an answer, 'Come home,' and I've come."

Then the woman shrugged her shoulders and left the kitchen. A man came round the verandah, and the tramp got on to his feet.

"Hullo, boy," he shouted; "hullo, did you come home too?"

The man stood transfixed. He was a large-sized, antiquated specimen of the road, dirty with travel, and with eyes glowing with tears, swaying before him and waving his arms.

"Did you come home for Christmas?" he said shakily.

Then Mr John P. Winter, of Barrawindy Station, got his hand crushed in the palm of the tramp.

"Hullo, mate," he said kindly. "You're first off the road to-day, eh ?"

"First off the road, an' home in time for Christmas. I said I'd come; I wrote I'd come."

Then the boss of Barrawindy saw a crazed mind before him, and he led the old man inside and through to the hall.

"Come in! Come in!" he said. "The children are at breakfast, and there's space for another yet."

But the tramp stopped dead.

"No," he said, nodding at the man who held his arm; "I never thought much of a dining-room when the kitchen was good enough."

"Then we'll go back to the kitchen," said Winter, "and cook shall give you a set out and a cup of coffee."

Again the tramp opposed.

"No no. Some water in the billy and a handful of dry tea. It's what I'm used to, and it's good for a dry throat." He sat down at the table, and Winter stood near.

"A slice of bacon from the grill," he said, as the woman came back and stood staring.

"A slice of bread and some of Martha's butter," said the tramp, slapping the table with his hand to enforce his objection to the bacon.

"Martha's butter?" Winter looked at the cook, and they smiled in one understanding. "Martha's butter. You mind, John used to say, 'No marryin' for Martha when there's butter to be made.' Did you see John when you came home?"

The boss of "Barrawindy" looked muddled. He was John, his father was John, and his boy was John. Then a light of something becoming clearer shot into his eyes.

"You're a friend of my father, I expect," he said softly. "Do you remember John P. Winter?"

Then the tramp showed a toothless gum in a grin of satisfaction. "Your father? You mean the owner of this place?"

"He was the owner," said Winter, "I'm the boss here now."

"You're the boss?" The old man set his eyes firm on Winter, and then got slowly to his feet.

"I'm John P. Winter," said the younger man near the table. But the tramp stood amazed.

"Can't make it out at all," he said, "you're John— and you're— my father?"

A roar of laughter shook the black rafters of the kitchen. "He's certain mad," said the woman, staring from the fire where she swung a swivel kettle into place.

"Can't make it out," he said, again. Winter put out a hand and pushed the old man to his chair.

"I'll tell you over again," he said; "but first let us hear about yourself. Who are you?"

"Me?" The tramp showed signs of disappointment. "Didn't I write I was coming home? Coming home for Christmas."

"Yes— yes," said Winter; but if this is home, who are you? What's your name?"

"It's hard to be forgotten, but it's my own fault," said the tramp. "I'm the boy that wandered outward; Mr William, son to John P. Winter, of 'Barrawindy' station. But I said I would come home."

Then the younger man breathed quickly.

"You're William— William— son to John— and— my father's brother—"

But the tramp was talking again. "There was little John— my brother— he ought to be in by now. He's got a craze for cattle and ridin' round the place. Ain't he home for Christmas?"

Then Winter, dropping a big sigh for a big discovery, came nearer to the tramp.

"Listen to me," he said quietly. "We've got to go back a bit. You remember John, your brother— your younger brother— eh?"

"My younger brother. I was fifteen. He was ten."

"You remember your father?"

The tramp began to tremble and to stand again. "I've come home to see him. Didn't I tell you I wrote?"

"That's all gone," said Winter; "you're too late."

Then the tramp stared dumbly.

"You're years ahead now, uncle," said the younger man kindly. "There is no brother for you, and your father went before."

Still the tramp stared. "You see, I'm the only John P. Winter. I'm the son of your young brother. I took on things when he died."

"You're the son of—" Then the tramp got to his feet. "Where's me hat?" he shouted. "Where's me hat? I'll go back again... it's no good comin' home too late."

But the younger man detained him by the hand.

"I've heard a lot about you. You're the brother that— that— got lost?"

"Got lost!" The old man trembled again. "I never got lost in my life. Don't I know every track in Queensland... Don't I live in the world of trees?"

"Well, you went away when you were fifteen, and— and you forgot to come home again."

"No— I didn't forget. I was comin'. But it's been a long way, an' I had to walk. But I said I'd come home at Christmas—"

"And you are home after all."

But the old tramp's spirit had broken. He couldn't get right at all as to how things had shaped with the years. Winter, with a new look of horror in his face, touched him again.

"Did you ever know how this place was left— I mean by your father?"

The tramp frowned.

"Did he leave it, too?"

"I mean," said Winter, "how it was willed by him before he died?"

"He died," repeated the tramp, just as a child who is taught a lesson.

"Just after you went away," said Winter. "And the will had been made out previous, leaving most things to you. Do you understand me— old man— leaving most things here to you?"

Winter was agitated, and the tramp just shook his head.

"You're the rightful— lawful— owner," said Winter. "Now you're home again, you see. You're the boss of Barrawindy, and my children—"

"Children?" The tramp stepped forward. "Little children... here at home?"

Then he listened and walked forward. The voices in the dining room were mixed in noisy play. He stepped with even measure to the door, and Winter followed heavy at heart. The children shouted louder, and a woman ran about and made herself conspicuous in the fun at Christmas time. When she saw the tramp she screamed, and the children gathered round her, and a deadly silence came.

"Children... children!" said the old man. "There were never children here before."

Then Winter pushed in front of him, and reassured them then.

"Come in," he said quite calmly, but the tramp stayed at the door.

"It's a very merry Christmas, little faces, I can see," he said smiling on them though his eyes were tearful, and the dust on his face frightened them so. "There's... something wrong... about me... an I'm not goin to come in. You're the family... and the boss... an I'm sorter out of place... but I did come home for Christmas— cos, of course, I wrote I would." He stood there just a moment, and then in an ambling, shuffling movement went away down the hall.

When Winter caught him up, he was picking up his swag. His hat was crushed on to his head, and the black billy stood ready near the gate.

"You're to come back," said Winter; "it's all yours, you know— all yours."

But the old tramp, with a new light in his face, was steadily looking at him.

"I only came for Christmas... and... I'm going on again... there's a stretch of God's good country waitin' way out there for... me... but... you tell them..." Here he waved toward the children who watched him from the door "...Tell them darlin' faces... I didn't bring no presents where I came from... not knowing they was here... but they can keep it all for Christmas... keep it all... an' welcome, too."

He picked up the billycan and opened the gate.

"Won't you come back?" said Winter, feeling deeply the things that were. But the old tramp shook his head resolutely.

"I can't wait," he said. "I've rested, and I'm still a bit behind... I promised 'home' for Christmas, and they're waiting there for me. I wrote I'd come at Christmas... so I must go on, you see."

And John P. Winter could only stand wondering as he passed through the gate.

THEY found him shortly after with the sunshine and the trees. He had gone home for Christmas with his face up to the blue.

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## 3: "Potatoes and Diamonds"

*Weekly Times* 28 Jan 1911

IT WAS NO surprise to Jacob Graham when he suddenly found unrest in the mind of his only son, unrest that meant a complete change in the young man's life.

Both had worked the farm for a period of long years. Sweat and sun and drought had formed a biting part, and now it was that the solid graft had told, and Jacob the younger was suddenly gripped with a desire to see the other side of life, the gay-loving centre of men and women and wine and laughter, away from the rigid discipline of his father, who had kept him toeing the mark for so long with a persistence that had ultimately resulted in a fair bank balance.

When he spoke out, leaning on his spade, at a patch of early potatoes, the elder man never dropped his work, but kept his eyes intent before him, and first of all remarked, in casual tones, that a fleck of white in the distance might mean rain, but it was doubtful. Then he considered his son's remark.

"Father, I'm goin' to town."

The elder Graham took off his hat and wiped the drops from under his straight grey hair.

"Yes," he said, and waited.

"Joe worked a deal"— young Jacob went on, resting on his spade and measuring his words carefully. Again the old man nodded only. "And I've got an account of my own."

"I've paid it in since you was fifteen."

After this both men stared, thought, into the other's eye. It was clearly understood that the discussion was to be a serious one and without disagreement, though at the same time there was fire pulsing through the minds of both.

"I've earned it, father. You've often said that."

The voice of the boy was a trifle slow and unsteady, as though he feared to fire a volley until the first shot told.

"You've worked, lad. You've worked." The elder man was kindly in his thought, though he dreaded the result his encouragement might bring with the words.

"And," young Jacob burst out, "I've had no play— leastways, I'm due it now."

Then the elder Graham came nearer, and there was sudden blood in his face. "Do you want to— to fool it away, son— three hundred pounds?"

"Three hundred!" young Jacob gasped. He had known the bank held the money of the hard-worked seasons, but anything like that sum had never entered his mind. He breathed heavily, and then threw down the spade. "Father!— three hundred!— and we are still laboring in the sun as men who have nothin' but these acres of uncleared scrub. Three hundred, an no holiday for thirteen years."

"Holiday!" The old matt was ablaze with a passion of disgust. "Holiday ! I've never had a holiday in my life. When I was your age I worked for nought. Holiday! why my work is going to be your holiday some day— some day— young fool. Can't you see it?"

The young man spoke calmer then, looking deeply into the enraged face before him.

"Father, what use to a man is money an' all that when he is too old to enjoy it? I'm young now, an I've never seen a day of life outside this land. The men an' women of the town are as far away different from all this here as the stars as come out at night, I must go. I must go now. While I'm hearty it's all right."

"Right! Right!" The elder Graham, shaking before his son, brought his tones lower. "You want to go to the world, where men lie for the lives of other men, and women laugh when they have got the good out of you! I knew all that once— once— only once. I got cured."

Then the spade in the old man's hand was suddenly thrust into the brown ground, and the young man spoken further, but walked away, and for a day there was meditation for each.

"Got cured," repeated the elder Graham again and again during that day. "Was like him once," he said, looking across a distance of flat plain that was only green in patches, "an I got it outer me."

Then, as the sun took a turn into the far west, after a day of burning thought, the father of the boy went in and found his son still a rebel against the strenuous farm life.

"You was right, Jacob," he said, with his heated head still wearing his hat. "You was right 'bout going into life an' all that. I'm not saying stay if you feel that way; an' as long as you're here you'll be whipping away fore the change. The money's in your name— go!"

Then as he turned away and took off his hat, he said quickly, "You'll come back— oh, yes. I did! An' what's in me— is in you— same as me!"

And three nights after this, the old man sat in the dim light of the kerosene lamp, where only the whirling mosquitoes flung out a challenge to the death-like silence of the dark, and in the space of shadow beyond, saw many things that were but the replica of his own thoughts. Young Jacob had set out for the

station 30 miles away, minus anything but a bank book and the clothes he wore, to find the life that was portrayed only in his hot passionate blood.

JACOB GRAHAM, having drawn half the balance at the bank in Adelaide, feeling that his rightful share only, and being desirous of possessing a fair conscience towards the old man, took a train to Melbourne, and put up at a hotel suggested by a kindly fellow-traveller who knew where money could be saved and indifferent meals consumed at low prices. Then he walked the broad streets and stared wide-eyed at painted hoardings and laughing girls, who wore big hats and hair that hid their eyes, and made much wonder went in the mind of Jacob.

Once he walked into a tailor's shop, after being buttonholed by a commissioned counter hand on the pavement, and was readily persuaded to buy a suit ready-made at 42 shillings. It fitted neither closely nor too well, but to Jacob felt easy and was majestic in its cut.

Standing before a playhouse in Bourke street the same day he watched the gay stream pass and repass until, at an hour of eight o'clock, he got a ticket and went into the show. Everything seemed mist to him then. It was like a moving panorama of a golden life without a shadow. The limbs of half-clad ballet girls made blood circulate in his face and almost for a moment propelled him into a desire to walk out.

The mood he took to his bed that night was not analytical even to himself. He had forgotten his father, now that life was in full swing, and the pendulum that had started was not going to stop until the vibration was through.

Next night he joined another theatre, and, as before, bought himself a stall ticket, and walked in.

He was surprised to find the scene on the stage somewhat different. Instead of fresh-limbed girls in attitudes of bathers on a sunlit beach, his piercing eyes got a check in somewhat different manners. A massive hall was before him. Some ancient king's home, where robed and graceful ladies of the court showed only curved white throats and alabaster-moulded arms. Jacob was entranced in another way— a way in which his mind took beauty in as worship only.

In the middle of the second act he stood up. A woman, entering the left of the stage with soft curled hair and pearl-bound throat, had faced him in his seat with eyes of such commanding lustre that he was unable to do anything but stare. It was as if he couldn't take his sight away again; he felt nothing; knew nothing; but saw— saw only the wonderful face near his own. He could not make out whether she spoke words that meant joy or sadness to the other players on the stage. He saw her red lips open and shut, and the awakening

came only by a hand rudely pulling him from the back, and a loud whisper at his collar that brought him to his normal senses.

"Sit down, can't you."

Jacob just stared, hot in face and blood red under both eyes. Then he walked out of the theatre. A clerk met him in the narrow passage of the stage door and asked him brusquely what he wanted.

Jacob quietly responded. "I want to speak to— someone here."

"What name?" The official measured his remarks by the cut of young Graham's 42 shilling suit.

"I don't know," said Jacob, fumbling with his programme. "It's the lady there!"

He turned to a photo, on the second page, and the clerk sniffed first, and then roared out in laughter. "Get out! You can't speak to her."

Jacob felt all the blood of his hard-worked years rise in passionate heat.

"You've got to stop me, mister! She's got a hold on me. I'll wait till she comes out."

The official grinned and walked away and the tale was repeated to several rough-limbed firemen who stood about the rear of the stage.

"He's harmless!" said one jovially, watching Jacob's back as she stood on the step at the door.

Presently a crowd of laughing chorus girls swung through the passage, pausing only for a cheery word with the clerk, and demanding letters from the tape rack. .Young Graham saw them only in perspective! He waited for the woman with the magnetic eyes, and soon she too came by him. A cab rolled to the curb just where he stood, and the tall, passive figure of the woman swathed in clinging soft silk draperies, passed near. The wind in kindly movement blew a width of her gown so that it enveloped him on the step. A moment for Jacob. He caught the wrap tightly in his fingers.

"Madam!" His voice was sudden and hard, and she turned a moment, facing him. "Madam!" again, but he seemed to be choking this time. Then he fought hard, and energy returned.

"Will you talk a little— to me?"

She cut one glance straight down to his feet and he never flinched a. muscle under the burning eyes, only just slightly shivered when the cab door closed with a snap that was like an electric force to his body. Then he heard her voice.

"Home!"

He stood paralysed, and half-an-hour after, walked to his hotel, where he lay in bed, in submissive thought till early morning.

Going up Collins street that afternoon he watched the faces. Every woman had his siren's enticing glance. He saw the beautiful woman of the play in the mirrors of the shops. The scintillating silver and gold and precious stones in the jeweller's shop at the corner reflected her face, her neck, her arms! How every force in his nature seemed dead! He could only give way to thought and mind reflection. She held him in a way he could not understand; why he did not know. Only that she was the first woman in his life, and he had waked to new things.

A massive diamond throat pendant caught fire in the afternoon light from behind him. It was like her, he thought. Entrancing, pure liquid light shot back at him like her eyes had! He strode with big, sudden steps, into the shop.

"I want that!" he said to the man who asked his wants, and pointing to the window as though it contained nothing but the diamond star!

"Do you mean the pendant?"

"Yes— the pendant! I want it!"

Jacob's voice was quick and the attendant grew alarmed.

"It's £87," he said, with meaning eyes on Jacob. Then young Graham began to count loose notes from his pocket, and the shop man took opportunity to bring the chief of the business into closer quarters.

"You wish to purchase that star?" began the head man.

"No!" said Jacob, deliberately; "I want to buy it."

The attendant got behind the counter and laughed easily, but the chief moved away, and after a good real of observation of Jacob, brought the case out of the window.

Ten minutes after, young Graham was back at his hotel. The glittering throat pendant was before him, and on a scrap of white paper he had written words that were meant to bring everything to him.

*"I bought this because it was like you— and I must talk to you."*

That night again he waited at the stage door, and when the cab drew up at twenty past eleven he grasped the door of it in a grip that was determination at any cost. He had sent the little parcel in by the same official, who had grinned again, but promised good-humoredly to deliver it to the lady. When she came out she did not look at him!

"Get in!" was all she said, and Jacob did so.

"You are a stranger," began the actress, piercing him with her calm, dark eyes.

"I come from South Australia— from the bush," Jacob began, excitedly, intoxicated with the whole suddenness of things. "I — dig— and—"

"For diamonds?" interrupted the actress, opening the box in her hand, and smiling on them.

"Oh, no!" said Jacob, calmer now that he was assured of her good grace towards him; "just potatoes and—"

Then he stopped under her lowering eyes. "I mean," he said, stupidly relapsing into careless thought and not too particular English, "I work on the land, with my father. We— we— have a lot of money in the bank, an' I came to town last week."

"To spend it?" The actress put the question meaningly.

"I think it was to love you," said Jacob, with wide eyes on her face. "You was most beautiful on the stage, and you are wonderful now."

She laughed a cold ripple that was lost on the young bushman; then she took his fingers and held them, looking him over.

"Will you do what I ask?"

Jacob, marvelling, spoke up. "Yes — whatever you ask."

"Go to an address I'll give you and buy some clothes."

Again Jacob, marvelling, answered hurriedly:

"Yes."

"What is your name?" She was earnestly considering his whole physique while she spoke.

"Jacob Graham!"

The cab stopped. "Good night! You can come and see me to-morrow; there's address."

She stepped out of the cab and waved her hand, but Jacob caught her up at the step.

"Will you let me— love you, and— will you care for me in return?" he said, with the joy of new life in him.

The Actress laughed lightly as she fingered the case of diamonds.

"Oh, yes—" she said, going further up the steps. "I'll— care for you— it won't be very hard."

And still laughing at the man of quaint cut on the footpath, she ran into the wide doors of the hotel.

THE ELDER Graham dug at a patch where the old root potatoes had had their season. Occasionally he would straighten his back and lean on the spade! Once he took a piece of paper from his shirt and looked at it hard.

"That's the last," he said, "the last words of the fool in him— 'Send me money, father, I'm done.' "

It was a month since the telegram had come, and the old man had neither replied nor sent the money. Across the plains a low wind was aching to get

loose in the deserted land. A distant brown blot on the sky at a point where it seemed to touch the ground gradually developed into moving life as the old man watched from the patch.

He knew it was his son, and not a movement on his face showed how his old heart was racking pain into his head with its rapid beat. The distant object took shape, and the slow steps showed feet that dragged as though weighted to the earth. With bent head and dust-covered person young Jacob Graham let the sliprail fall to the ground, and did not put it back into place. Father and son stared , at each other, two feet apart. "Father!"

"What is there left— my son?"

"Nothing— because I loved her!" Then the boy broke into a cry where he stood, holding his arms across his face. "Nothing! Nothing!" he cried, shaking his head between his hands.

Then the elder Graham pointed to a length of cut ground, chocolate brown in the light. He spoke calmly, as though nothing had changed in all the months.

"There is the potato patch you forgot to finish," he said, and the boy, staring with blood in his fees sudden resolution firing his whole person, answered:

"Father— give me the spade!"

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## 4: That Horse

*Weekly Times* 22 April 1911

OLD MILL, the horse of many tired years, was lying in the yard with the fowls wandering round and an empty bucket standing guard by her side, when Will drove into the place with a new horse and a girl.

Old Mill knew the bucket was empty, but she got a few drops of the water that was on the ground, and looked up for the last time. She saw another of her breed standing in the yard, and the old man walking round with a survey on him worthy of an inspector at show time. She could see in one look that the other horse had come a long way, and that she had had a solid feed not so long ago.

Old Mill had a way of discerning these things just as she had a way of finding out the old man when he used to disappear from the railway station, and come back when all the work was done. She also saw that the other horse was a brute of heavy make, and that it would take more than the Dawson family to break or kill anything of the fibre in that equine flesh, even if they succeeded in getting it home at twice the usual rate in a nasty, bad temper.

After this Old Mill breathed again, and shut up shop.

But though she could hear the voice of Mrs Dawson even after she had dragged her spirit away from the fowl yard and the dirty bucket of weedy water, she floated through the sun mist just as Mrs Dawson discovered that it was Will come home again.

" 'Ave you come 'ome?" she said, as if Will could answer that he hadn't, and that he was still five hundred miles away.

"Brought my girl," said Will as he helped a solid one hundredweight and a half of woman out of the vehicle.

Mrs Dawson stood square. She was measuring up the bulk in comparison to her own weight. She was not altogether pleased, and though the return of her eldest was a thing of great worth at this time of the year, she wanted to know right then how long Miss Beef was going to stay.

"Will tells me," said the heavy one, "that you is used to havin' one or more in the house. I thought I'd come along."

Mrs Dawson looked her right in the eye. She sized up the past, present, and future of that young lady as soon as she had stepped on to the old man's corns.

"Used to more!" said the mother of the driver. "Will was right. We was many more before he went away and had to be kept at home, an' before he

got strayin' away from his own paddocks an goin' the Lord knows where an pickin' up with anybodies, an not lettin' us know what he was up to."

The fleshy lady couldn't understand all this, but she smiled at one of the children, which only irritated Mrs Dawson the more. She never liked people who smiled when they hadn't been in the place more than a few minutes.

Will came round from the wheel, and his mother wiped her mouth, and let him kiss her. He was looking at his girl when he did it, and nearly took off Mrs. Dawson's nose trying to be quick over it.

The old man was still taking points. He was mumbling and conning and putting; his head on one side, and when Will spoke to him he said absently, "Yes, that's it—medium draught— Eh? Oh, yes, I see her."

Will was certain that he didn't see her. He pulled the girl round to his father again. "Brought my girl," said Will, and Dawson, with one of the horse's feet in his hand, spoke from his cramped position. "—Good points all round—" he said, "—Feet all right, too."

Will took the girl away, and she went back to Mrs Dawson.

"You an' Will is married?" said the mother of the prodigal.

"Didn't Will tell you?" said the fleshy one, and Mrs Dawson repeated her remark: "You and Will is—married?"

Here Will caught her up. "Course we are— thought you'd er knowed that!"

Mrs Dawson raised her head. "What I'd er known if I hadn't asked you mightn't er been worse," she said. "I got three of the children with the fever, an' things is anyhow— it was time you come home, Will."

"Been in Brisbane," said Will. "Had a good time there, didn't we, Dolly?"

"Dolly?" Mrs Dawson stared. "Ain't you got no proper name? Who's got time to think about a name like that when you is past it by fifteen years?"

Will began to explain, as the old man came round to the horse's head again.

"What's that?" said Dawson, "Dolly? Well I never— I thought it might be Brownie or Beauty— but Dolly." He kept shaking his head and apostrophising the horse. He was certain it was no more Dolly than Mrs Dawson thought the odd twelve-stone lady ought to have been.

"She's on the heavy side—" he went on; "but she's a mover, I should say."

Will tried to distract him.

"I got my girl here, Dad."

"Where'd you get her? Brisbane way?"

Will was certain that at last he had taken in what he meant, and as Mrs Dawson and his woman moved off to the house he became more confidential.

"You see, Dad, it was this way: I was workin' up the old man's place— grocery, wine, and spirits— an' the old man he says to me he says— 'I like you— an' I mean to set you up in life,'— an' he give me—"

"The horse?" said Dawson, with joy in his set jaw.

"Well, not exactly," said Will; "but he says to me—'I'll make you part of the business if you'll take my girl and make her—' "

"What's her dam?" said Dawson, who had wandered off to the horse again. Will lost a place in the conversation and nearly gave up hope of ever making him see the truth at all.

"He says to me, 'you take my girl, and make her a good husband, and I'll not disremember you bime-by;' so I says to Dolly—"

"Dolly?" repeated the old man as if he had heard the entire thing, and appreciated it. "Dolly?" he said yet again, and stroked the horse as if he meant it.

"Yes," said Will; " 'Dolly— you marry Dolly, and I'll set you—' "

Here Will stopped. He had to stop because Dawson was standing staring at him for once instead of the horse. The old man was fixed into a smile and a frown, and wedged there, so that Will felt that he must put him right before he went any further.

"He says, 'you marry Dolly.' " The old man shook his head very slowly, and looked at his son; and then turned and looked at the other sun. He was beginning to think that Will had better share the head douche that they had been giving the old horse when the sun had got to it.

"Did he really expect you to do it?" he said, not too loudly, for fear of alarming Will.

"Well," said Will, "I done it."

"What!!!" The old man nearly jumped out of the yard. He went be-hind the cart, and looked over the horse at Will as if he thought he had better try and get Mrs Dawson out before Will could get over at him.

"Yes," said Will, "I done it, and if anybody 'as anything to say about it, they can do it right here."

The old man was quite sure about the condition of his son now, and yet he didn't want to act hurriedly.

"That horse—"

"That's awlright," he said, soothingly. "You just come in and tell your mother all about it— an' I'll stand near you (he was getting as far away as he possibly could), and— and—"

"Mum?" said Will. "She knows all about it. Dolly went into the house with her."

This was too much for Dawson. He shook his head and began to undo the traces. "Oh, well," he said, "you know best: but I suppose it won't last long—these fits never does."

Will shouted at this, "It's goin' to last just as long as I likes. I ain't come home to argue what, or what not, about my wife."

"Course not," said Dawson, looking over the animal, and keeping an eye on Will at the same time. He thought that Mrs Dawson might have come out again, but he supposed she had seen how things were, or she wouldn't have gone off to the house in such a hurry.

When he got the horse out Will seemed more reasonable.

"We'll give the old girl a feed," he said. "I brought along the bag hearin' the place was pretty dry in the season."

Dawson kept patting the animal and took care to keep on the opposite side to Will as they walked to the shed. There they found old Mill still in peaceful death.

Dawson told Will all about the horse that had died, in hopes that if he broke it gently Will might not get excited when he saw it. Will was so quiet that the old man thought he would risk it and call his wife.

However, just then Will made a sensible suggestion. He told his father that they had better get the carcase away for the time being, and to-morrow they would get at the hide and stretch it in the sun in the cow yard.

Dawson got a rope and they tied old Mill's head to it, and then hitched the new horse (which went back four paces when it saw what was before it), to the old one, and smacked it on the flank until it dragged the carcase out of the way. This done, Will said he wanted a wash, and the old man thinking he had quite got over the fit, told him to go into the house and tell Mrs Dawson he wanted her.

Will went in quite calmly, but Mrs Dawson came out quite ruffled.

"Dawson," she said, and the old man who had begun another observation on the horse, forgot he had sent for her, and was planted next to the feed box trying to look at the horse's teeth.

"Dawson!" she shouted at his head, so that he heard and answered with a grunt of satisfaction, and didn't remember what it was he wanted her for.

"You think I am going to keep that lump in my house at this time of year!" she said.

The old man had got to the horse's teeth.

"About three years," he said.

"Not a week," said Mrs Dawson. "Do you think I can't see how things is? Ain't we got enough of that in the family now with Annie and Mary both married proper. And, what with the tanks down, an' no feed for the cows, an'

the last couple goin' dry on us, an' the sick children— not a week, an' you can tell Will so."

The old man came round in the middle of this harangue. "Say, Anna, this is the merciful doin' of Providence— what with old Mill dyin' to-day, an' a new horse walkin' right into the yard, just as we was wonderin' how we was to get the milk to the station; well, I calls it a workin' miracle."

Mrs Dawson held her ground.

"I won't have her a week, I says."

"I want her for the milk, I tell you," said Dawson, beginning to get angry at last.

"She'll only eat up what's in the place," said his wife.

"She's useful to me," said Dawson.

This brought a scream from the woman.

"What are you goin' to do?" she said. "You tell me why you are so quick about havin' her in the place?"

"I'm goin' to work her in the plough, and get that old stuff burnt off first. I'm goin' to borrer Worster's disc drill, an hitch her into the work. I'm goin' to drive the milk with her; and I'm goin' to cart the water when the time comes for us to move the tank with her to drag it to the Ten-mile dam. I'm goin' to—"

Here Mrs Dawson stopped him with a look.

"Think I better call Will," she said, quite sure that Dawson was going to have another fit.

"Will?" said the old man, looking about as if he was afraid she meant it. He came a bit nearer and touched her on the arm. "Anna— don't shout till I tells you— you must watch Will!"

"Eh? What for?"

"He's off 'is 'ead, and thinks 'e's married a *horse*!" The last words of the old man were emphasised, and were so loud that Will and his wife, who had just come out into the yard, heard every word, and looked as if they had, too.

Will's next movement was to try a little explanation in his wife's ear, but she wouldn't listen, and started to go for the old man just as Mrs Dawson ran for the empty bucket and the water. She didn't know who wanted it the most, Dawson or Will, but she thought she had better get the old man right first of all.

While Will struggled with her and the bucket, the twelve-stone lady gave Dawson a bit of her tongue that was of equal weight to her body. She said a few things about horses and other cattle, and called him an ass when she was at it.

She bounced over to Will and told him what she thought of his people, and said she was going away then and there; and he was to put the horse in for

her, and the next time he compared her to a horse she was goin' to take him to court.

The old man was standing dumb, as he had suddenly got the right bump of the truth. He couldn't speak, but he let Mrs Dawson do it for him.

She took to the lady, and the lady took to her, and they took turns together.

Will put in the horse and drove into the yard, as Mrs Dawson, senior, and Mrs Dawson, junior, got to their fourth round. Mrs Dawson the elder said the most, but Mrs Dawson, junior, looked the bigger. She ran her eyes round her mother-in-law that she didn't want, and sized her up with a curl of her lip.

The mother of the other one's husband let her tongue go, and it wiped the scorn out of Mrs Will, and left her in a flood of tears that reached the house and brought the family out.

The old man was standing as far off as he thought fit, and he shook his head again and again like a deserted ram in a drought. He didn't give a blade of corn what the women did, but he was concerned about that horse.

When Will had half carried his wife out of the yard into the cart, not waiting for her hat, and had driven right over the weakest part of the dog-leg fence, Mrs Dawson still went on with her opinion.

The old man interjected once, but no one heard him. He kept moving his head.

"Born an' bred for heavy work— good shape and solid in quarters— action—"

He was still talking about that horse.

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## 5: The Green Cat

*Weekly Times* 16 Nov 1912

WE WERE the only inmates of the sitting room, the green cat and I, and the sun had gone behind a cloud which seemed to be made of such durable material that it wasn't even vaguely showing a vestige of the light that betokens a return visit to the earth. For the green cat and me there was no sunshine anywhere about. The door of the room was shut, and had been so for at least an hour, as the landlady of the house had particularly desired the door should be closed, as it disturbed the blind when the wind blew in a frenzy, through the draught caused by the open door.

The green cat had never been noticed by me before, as I had never had reason to stay even a minute or two in the room where Mrs Keep held the traditions of her family so fast and bound that if one had lifted a book off the shelf in this, room a whole horde of dusty spirits might have flown out at one and hurled vituperative words at such inconsideration and irreverence as had been shown by the idle hand- who had touched them.

My reason for so noticing the green cat was this: I had to stay in that front room, borrowed for the occasion for the visit of a friend I had not seen for years. He ought to have come out of the greenery of the wattles and the elms outside, fully two hours ago; but as yet no sign had shown me that he was anywhere near.

The green cat was perched upon the centre of a table which had for its environs a stuffed mole-colored sofa, and a piano that was horribly out of tune. It made a very sick sort of sound when one even touched a note by mistake. On the table with the green cat were a whole army of tortoise-shell snuff boxes, some old-fashioned silver combs worn by ladies of the nobility, and not by Mrs Keep, the landlady. The green cat apparently could not bear even the sight of any of them for her head was reared like a wind tossed cone on to a pine tree, and her neck was so elongated that she overlooked the fact that she was not the only habitant of the room. I was there feeling just as the green cat did— decidedly out of place and pretty much as likely to want to get away. My face was filled with something that might have been fear, and my heart was dead —within me. Those trees outside seemed to stand in the wind and just wave cold hands at me and say, "There is nothing— nothing— here— so don't look as if you expected anything— he is not coming— go back— there is nothing here." Go back— I was many miles from home— go back— I had no money— nothing but the week's rent for the landlady— go back to nothing— the trees were mad— I must stay here— stay with the green cat.

Then I noticed something. The green cat had an expression on her face that had been there ever since she had been made. Truly the potter who had shaped her, had intended her to be a sort of joke on the surroundings she had got into. There was nothing to smile about— nothing to bring such a look into her face— nothing to make her extend spasms of laughter to the environment of the room— but it was there— this wonderful look— this marvellous glamor of "delight". I turned from watering the pines and wattles of the walk. My friend, for whom I would have waited a lifetime, had he been coming to me, was nowhere in sight, and the green cat was entertaining me like someone who had taken my hand in the dark of a strange cold place.

I looked across the room. The green cat was made of china and she had been fashioned with her neck in the absurd position that stretched rigid across the thing she sat upon. Her ears had been allowed to prick up so that anything, might not escape her apparent hearing, and her mouth was tightened across her face so that she had become stiff— with joy. Laughter was painted there and delight— strained laughter and forced delight, so hard— so distressingly blatant, and there was so much, of it that one could hardly bear to look. The green cat, painted and made of china, sitting on the table with the traditional and immortal opinions of the race laid out in rows of tortoise-shell emblems. This was what met my eyes and made me think again. The green cat could smile like that and show such awful joy that anyone coming into the room and observing it ought to roar with laughter if they were in their sane senses and. had nothing physically wrong with them. I marvelled that I had not noticed it before; but then I had gone straight to the window and stayed there; and even now as I watched the thing with eyes that nearly stared themselves out of the green china head, I could not drop my mood or laugh. My heart was too heavy— and there were yet a thousand leaden balls dropping— dropping into my soul. I felt one drop as I stood watching the cat— and I knew that there were another and another ready to fall into place. The place of the leaden balls seemed to be my soul.

But the green cat was smiling— with outstretched neck and protruding eyes. Her body shone like the sea, with the sun upon it, and her ears seemed straining for some sound. How like— I thought. My every sense was widened at that moment to hear, see, and believe that my friend had come through the wattles that lined the walk. There were the two of us— without utterances of what was evident, waiting, listening, and believing that things were going to be all right— presently. But the green cat had been like that for years, perhaps centuries; even though she had only been born in this world since the advent of china beasts. She had worn that insipid smile, that cap of buffoonery ever since she knew anything at all, and she was smiling on all things in the world

both good and bad, sick or well, rich or poor, and she would go on smiling as if the whole earth was a huge panorama of passing mirth.

I turned away— my heart was breaking, and my mind was like the crumbling of a great cliff that would fall and fall until there was nothing but the waters of a great ocean to wash away the debris. How could I see things in the way the green cat could? She had sat there ages and eternities, laughing at fate, and at all climes of weather; and at everything that was ever sacred or blessed by human tenderness. I could have swept my hand across the table that held her small body and crashed her form to the ground and crushed her under my heel. She seemed so full of confidence that asserts that all things are superlatively humorous and only made for sport. Her mind must have been a continual pantomime, never changing a real thing.

I turned to the window again. A wind that was tearing the branches from their sockets split up the coming night into veins of lightning as the trees swung to right and left, and disclosed the sky rent with streaks of fire. I felt the storm coming in my blood, and I feared for my friend again.

"He will be hurt," kept ringing in my mind, and the green cat, still superior to all things and void of jocularity, sat grinning at my solitude and my fears as if it were a thing to clap one's hands over.

"Stop laughing," I shouted, like one insane. "Is it nothing to you that the man I love is out in the storm, or perhaps you are smiling because you think you know he has forgotten. Men do forget in five years— they do forget—"

And the green cat leered in the same continuous way, and the levity of her whole attitude struck me badly across the heart.

"Lives may he lost— or finished in that last streak of lightning," I said quietly to her.

"A man might be dead— what was that?"

A dim scream came through the wattles, and I felt the hair of my head quiver like sensitised needles.

"Heavens! was it he?" I tore up the window, and put my head out into the coming night. A wave of cool air struck my temples, j and went down to my feet. I called madly— the name of my friend— called— for comfort. But out of the trees there only came the same streaks of fire that tore the sky; and far away a crashing king of the forest went down to the gully and smashed the undergrowth like a monarch that beat his enemies underfoot. Again the dim scream— and I drew back into the room. Why did not somebody come to tell what had happened? Where was the landlady who usually bothered me with her questions?

I opened my eyes again on the green cat. Its frightful grinning countenance drove the blood into my head, and I could not breathe. "Stop!" I shouted.

"Stop laughing. It's true, then — for you have laughed since ever things began and men have died and women suffered and children starved and become things of coarseness because the world is cruel— and yet you have always laughed."

I put out my hand to strike the green cat. I would hurl the thing from the presence of people who could feel every minute of a life that it strained so tightly that even to live hurts. I would finish the pantomime once and for all, and when another such as I came to stay in the place they would I not be tormented with visions of a cynical bloodless thing, that had nothing before it but the joke it alone saw in the common universe.

With my hand raised and my eyes shut I heard the woman outside talking in a loud voice. At last someone had come into the place to show me life had not stopped with the passing of a day. She was calling to someone in the yard.

"There's somebody hurt in the paddock near the railway—" hen my senses seemed to break into chaos, and all my mind was running together like mixed paint. I can just remember that I had swept past the green cat as I dashed from my room. Away with the wind and storm I went, and down to the paddock by the railway. Already a crowd of men of the country were carrying a form on a slab of bark to a hut in the forest.

"Let me near," I kept crying out as I beat the hair from my face so that I could see properly.

"He is not dead," someone shouted as they held me away. And when I went to him in the hut, I put my arms round him, for he was my dear friend whom I loved.

"Are you very unhappy?" I said, with my head close, as the people went out of the place to bring a doctor.

"Not a bit," he said, gathering me into his arms as he lay there with one leg limply disabled and torn from the fall of the tree. "You see," he continued, looking right into my eyes, "I was coming to you as the same friend, and I would never have known that you cared if it had not been for this accident. Sorrow gives us to each other quite often."

And in truth I felt I loved him more— lying there dependent on my aid and services, perhaps for the rest of his life.

"You see, dear,"— his voice was so steady though he was in great pain— "my leg may have to be taken off, and it is so much easier now that I know that you care. Thank God, I have a little money to keep us going now that I could work no longer. Dear, don't look so depressed."

My heart was down within me, though I felt that what he had said was true. Being together would compensate for the damage of the tree, but what

was his life to be now? I felt glad I cared— it was so easy and grand to be able to do things for him.

"Won't you smile?" he said then, softly smoothing my hands.

"Why should I smile?" I said; "you're suffering."

"But— the suffering has brought us together," he said. "I felt that for years you had been my truest friend, but when this thing came upon me, and you rushed forward with the pain of what I was feeling in your very eyes— dear, that told me all I have waited to find out. Thank God, I am alive— it might have been worse. Can you not smile?" -But I covered his face with my caresses, and when the doctor came they carried him to the house, and to the front room where the landlady had kindly and thoughtfully made a bed for him. They carried him to the room where the green cat still sat grinning at Its own huge joke. Before I could touch the thing, or even remove it from the table, the dear man I loved called out in a most happy tone:

"Oh, I say, what a jolly cat— she makes one feel that there is a whole lot more to be thankful for— that we nearly forgot. Yes, old cat, I may have to lose my leg, but I have gained a wife, who will make up for that— see how Miss Puss understands. 'Life is full of compensations,' she says; and she has known it for years. Look at her, dear— can't you hear her saying, You're all right as long as you keep smiling.' "

And with my arms round him I laughed back in the face of the green cat.

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## 6: A House of Mountain Ash

*Weekly Times* 11 Oct 1913

THERE were colored lights trailing through the big tree country, like dainty filmy ribbons unwound by tender, careless hands, and allowed to lie slack and about the bush.

I watched the opal in a clump of yellow and green and red flowers, which was really the reflection of the sun, and I rode forth with the same tenderness in my heart.

Surely life was filled with something that I had only just discovered— or that a dear man— a large-hearted normal-voiced man had thrown at my feet when he had said, "Let us look for treasures together." These were not exactly the words he had whispered, as he had gathered me to his heart one evening— when the same forest glow had been in our faces and in the subtle shades of the wide verandah; but they were meant to convey to me that there were treasures on earth— that one young man and one young woman could have, by simply looking out for them— in the proper direction. What he really had said— was my secret— only one day I told it— to God. He had sent the dear large man and I knew that the secret had started in Heaven.

As I rode through the palace of nature this afternoon, I took my way out of the golden roads and the glistening atmosphere that were like drops of pearl on my cheeks, I stopped at a fence and beckoned a little friendly girl from a deep verandah of a homestead away from the scrub. She ran to the gate and held out a staying hand to me as my pony was as restless in spirit as I was, were aching to find more colors and a silence deeper than that through which we had passed; aching to hear further pledges of love from the birds and creatures of the forest, and to go on— and on— and on— with buried head in the soft, downy thoughts that are mother to a little unlearned soul.

"I cannot understand," my little friend was saying, "how you are allowed to roam about the bush as you do. I never go out as far as the 'Turn-to- West' hill, without one of the men— I should get hidden in the tangle, and lost in the undergrowth."

"It would be beautiful to be lost for a little time," I said. "Fancy having the birds to whisper safety, and the sun to light the stars ready to show you the night creeping up— the cool night that brings tender sleep— in the arms of the scented grass. I think it would be lovely to be lost— for just a little while."

"Dear me!" My little friend was very young and she had not found a nice, dear, large man— therefore she had not learned the silences of the wood or the whispers of the little brown and speckled birds that came and hopped and

hopped and hopped and repeated messages that were incoherent to any-one but— just myself and the dear large man.

"I love to wander and sit still and forget that I have to go inside a house to sleep," I said. "Some day I will build a place and for a roof I will have the trees and the stars, and the lights of Heaven will be the paintings on the ceiling— I shall have chairs cut from the tallest mountain ash, and tables carved from the boulders of granite and footstools of the stones that lie washed in the river right deep out of sight, where no one could have ever used them before. We will have the morning glory of the dawn to draw the curtain when we wake up, and the black-faced servant of the night to shut them tight— tight— at nights— but overhead there will always be the— stars— and—"

My little friend was not laughing.

"How strange you are?" she said. "You have been finding fresh life in the bush— I should go mad if I wandered in the quiet like you do."

"No," I answered her. "You would go— to— Heaven— for I have found it out here in the trees."

"I am afraid it belongs to— just you and— your big man," she said with a fresh smile. "Does he wander too?"

"No—" I was very reticent about that. "No—" I said, carefully. "The dear large man has so much to do— so many angry-faced men to talk to— so many dangerous bullocks to sell all day and all the hours that I am thinking about him— the dear man can't come and wander in the bush."

"Then— you have not taught him— about the house you would build — the house with the carved granite tables and the washed footstools that no one has put a foot on so far—"

"I will show him some, day— after I have married him," I said, and pulled my pony forward.

After I had taken myself and my dreams into the wider labyrinths of the big tree country, I grew tired— just tired at too much goodness and too much self. My friend's chatter had pierced me with a longing that I could hardly bear— surely the dear large man would come and wander with me— once or even twice, or even half the "once" that counted in the radius that I usually undertook when I set out for a day. Just half the distance would be long enough for me to see whether he was bearing the thoughts of the forest and the dreams of the birds in his heart— just an hour or two's ride through the opal country, the incensed purified air, the quiet of God's own private hour and the solemnity of Heaven's understanding— I wished with my most earnest self, in my discerning soul, that the dear large man could come to me— come without having to be told about it— come with the call of the night— the

piercing call in his ears being— "All life awaits you behind the town— all Heaven is there— and I am wanting you."

Then the tiniest conclusion came into my mind. I should let my spirit travel back without me— travel through the golden roads that were even now growing deeper amber and brown lights of the increasing night, let it go swiftly back through the streets of the place where I lived— go further into the main townships— further still to the very door of his office— round to his room— past the angry-voiced man arguing about the stock— travelling up to his ear and down to his heart. I was saying to my spirit, "Go— and stir up his blood— stir up his quiet and incite him to get off his chair and walk towards the door— speak to him in my voice— say that I love him, and that he must come to me where Heaven is waiting to unite our true selves in a bond that is sealed by the stars, which are the eyes of God."

And I sat thinking— dreaming— wandering in mind, with the narcotic influences of the bush in my head, stilling all thought but the one concentrated message, "I love you— you must come to me."

The pony I had let wander and find for herself some more little surprises in the wonderful green shoots between the shrubs and the stones. She turned towards the path we had come, and presently I lost sight of her small grey and speckled body, and I knew then that I was being lost for— at least a little while. In my mind was the great big thought; the thought about the dear big normal man who had given me fresh life and the beginning of all things and the end— no, not the end— for we were waiting for God to hand that down to us— an end that was without finish and without change.

I sat there calling on him, the dear, quiet man, calling with eyes set and a mind travelling right to where he would be sitting in his office. I was lifting his soul so that he could stay away no longer; I was trying my strength of will and putting it against his power to work and do that which was his duty. In my ignorance and in my indiscrimination I told myself that I should have what I wanted— that he should come and build me a house of mountain ash, where I would love my love— for a little.

A LITTLE shivery wind trembled and hid behind the branches; it poked a grinning face out at me and brushed my eyes with a chilly cold dew. Rain falling carelessly about me, I crawled into the big bowl of a burnt gum. There I stayed looking up at the coming dark. Presently a warm feeling of a rushing, tearing, hot-headed storm bounced upon the place. The wind raced upwards and around and tossed the branches dead at my feet, and blew itself mad and madder, and altogether raged against the diminishing light. The sky hid its face and turned thunderous voices back to the ground, the earth pulsed with

indignation, and all the firmament started to up-heave and join in the trouble. I was glad I was in the tree, but I was not feeling very lost— my mind had not ceased to gather the distance in one blink of my eyes, and I was sure that the big, dear man, was coming out to me.

"It will be a grand tremendous noise to greet him," I said. "He will see how firm he must build my house of the granite boulders and the Mountain Ash— I am glad to be lost— for a little while."

And the tree shook about me and creaked like a thing that could not stand the pain. My palace of nature was being thoroughly swept and clean-ed by wind and rain, and the darkness was only there— while the lamps of God were being re-trimmed. I told myself that the dear man with the normal voice would hunt and hunt in the dark and cry in his heart because he would think that I was— really lost. I was glad to feel that he would care so much— I wanted the storm to be larger still, and then I would know— how much I was to him— when he would come in a little while and— take me— close to him.

"We will sit in the tree and hold each other tightly until the fear is all gone— and we will know that we have loved being lost in a great storm because God meant us to be together all times."

And when a stretch of lightning tore the sky I saw a horse in the distance coming slowly over the hills. It was so far away that it was like a little waving tree in the wind. I grew excited and laughed in my shelter, and when the lightning tore the sky again I heard his call over the rise. It was so nice to be found— so sweet a feeling that in another minute— just about another minute— a minute pressed down to fullness with anticipation of the love that would be in his face, he would find me looking out of the tree. I had brought him out of his office fif-teen miles away— brought him through the storm and through the wind, and through the heavy darkness, to find out how precious it was to feel together during great danger.

Yes— the danger was here now— for the swirling tree-tops broke and came to the ground. The gully below was rent again and again with the frenzy of the wind. Great trees went down crashing into the soft earth and carrying little sap-lings and suckers with them in their fall. Something said to me that I must rush out and across the rise before that minute was over— rush out and call, "Here I am— come out into the open and take me in your safe arms;" but even then I stayed. I wanted to be found— to be crushed to him, with the power of a man whose love is madness of strength. I waited till the next shriek came from the gully; till the crash there died down; till the lightning opened up a track from me to my dear, large man and then when I heard him call I allowed a long bubbling laugh to float out to the dark that shut down be-tween.

"Where are you— dear— stand firm" — I heard him say, and I stood till the next flash had died. He was out in the open and I was under the trees. Surely he would not stop there— waiting for me to run to him? But there was no more time in the minute, and the darkness made him sound further away.

"Dear— I cannot see you."

"But you must come," I said between the noise of the storm.

"Where?" came through the earth almost at my feet, and before I could answer I was deafened by the next crash— my head seemed split into fragments, but I found I was standing in the same place — and there were no more— words.

A dim light from above came as the sky opened and allowed the clouds to divide. It was as if a hand had said, "Let there be light," and before me I found my way barred by a great warrior of the bush that had been tripped up in the last crash. I climbed out to find my dear man— the thing had gone far enough, and I was anxious and cold— and — very uncovered out of the warmth of his love— and, below the great body of the tree I saw two straining hands reached towards me, and that was all. I could not go to his arms, for they were crushed to the earth, and his dear form pinned by the weight of the forest king was held for ever by the will of the power behind the storm. Nor could I look into his face nor hear his dear normal voice— nor could— I do— anything at all.

"God dear, Beloved— God"— I called as the light went out of the sky. "I brought him to build me a house of mountain ash, but I have made of him an altar of sacrifice instead."

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## 7: One Man from the West

*Weekly Times* 24 Jan 1914

"OF COURSE," said Mrs Honora, of Elizabeth Bay, "he will be as brown as a cocoanut, and about as coarse, after so many years in the West, but in this instance we will find it easy to overlook that."

"I adore men who put on that kind of exterior and shed their natural skin," one of the girls said. "Tell us some more about him, Hetty. What sort of plans have you regarding him? We are all convinced that you have arranged something quite out of the ordinary, seeing you got a new footman and have had the balcony turned into a hot-house. Now then, own up."

The hostess on this occasion admitted herself found out. She drew together her week-end guests, a happy, chattering crowd of girls, who ranged from brilliance and brightness to sallowness and sentimentality. The subject she spoke about was just what anyone in their sane, serious senses would have expected had they stepped into the room, A man was under discussion; a solitary man from out the west. A "back of beyond" relation of Mrs Honora, who might have sprung back to his own element had he known in time.

"You see," said the hostess, "Hilson Band has been packed away somewhere— oh, somewhere behind the scrub— for years. Been dabbling in cattle and that sort of thing. Money? Well, girls, the only reason that I have for supposing that he is up to his ears in it is the fact that every year he sends me a Christmas present worth half a year's rent. His plans, of course, I cannot speak of ; but, I ask you— altogether, or one at a time, if you like, girls"— she laughed merrily— "would any man like that come home for a trip, even if he hadn't some special motive in his mind? Now, don't all jump to a conclusion that a woman is the special reason of his journey. I think myself that it's several women— three, four, five, six, or even twenty. He wants to see life and choose a wife. That's my idea, anyway. Now you can all— explode!"

The burst of femininity that came after this delivery was enough to bring in the roof. The most beautiful girl of the number grew flushed as the heart of a red rose.

Someone said, "How interesting," and someone else remarked with some carelessness, "Good gracious!" and the tall, slender girl tucked away in the arms of a gracious Chesterfield chair, called out in the tone a refrigerator might have used, "I don't see that any of us have a right to suppose anything at all about— Hil— er, Mr Rand."

This brought the hostess round like a spring wheel.

"Lorna— you surprise me." The little hostess was really most amazed. "Considering that you, of the whole crowd, know Hilson like a— brother

almost, I can't see where you should put a damp blanket on our— our appreciation of the dear man.... Do be sensible, because all of us know that Hilson has got to marry sooner or later, and take his wife back to, to— well, his scrub home, I suppose you would call it, unless he prefers to buy a mansion a little way out of Sydney and put a man in as manager on the station. I want you all to understand fully that he's the dearest thing in cousins l have even had, and *do* all be peaceful and give him a chance to, well— find out for himself just— just—"

She stopped and the girl in the Chesterfield rose to the occasion again. It was like a refrigerator throwing up blocks of ice now.

"In my last from Hill," she began, and the general crowd stared amazed. "Well, perhaps it is not fair to speak of the confidence between us, because, of course, we made mud-puddings together when we were children.... and...

"*Mud* puddings? *How* delicious," shouted one of the guests.

"Oh, Lorna— it's a case of 'enough said.' If I had made mud-puddings with a man when he was a child, I'd expect to make something of that nature, only rather more tasty, when he had regulated his finances. Do tell us some more?"

But Lorna Grand rose to her feet with a yawn.

"Sorry, girls, but there *is* no more. Hill just mentioned coming back, and, of course, Hetty asked me, among the rest of you, to be here to make things lively. Really, it's too shockingly indecent to speak of a man in this way when he's not here— I'm going for a swim— anyone coming?"

Mrs Honora spoke to those who were *not* coming, for fully ten minutes afterwards.

"I can't say that I agree with Lorna at all. Hilson is a dear; but I say, girls— gather around closer. Perhaps it's true that Lorna has been contemplating things for such a long time, and she ought not to be put out of her right place. I know that Hilson has had a tremendous admiration for her ever since they, splashed in the open sea at the age of five, and I ought to have foreseen that at the time. Now, my plan is this. Suppose we give her first shot. She's the only one among the lot of you thstt has really got to look to her future seriously. She's nearly 25, and when her Uncle died it was thought that he had left her the bulk, of his fortune. Oh, What a smash was there! He left her a hundred a year, and gracious! she wears out a pair of shoes in a week, she has a face of a flower, and dare not go in the sun without a veil. Let's be fair. I think its likely that Hilson will choose her."

The girls spoke solemnly together.

"Considering the circumstance, lets give Lorna first chance," was what was agreed. "It won't do to run the poor man to earth, or he will think we are after his fortune. Besides, are there not other men to be asked, Hetty?"

"Five of them," answered Mrs Honora. "They arrive in a bunch tonight; and, I say, girls— lend me your ears again— if we stand in to allow Lorna first chance, whatever do you think we can do with that little pussy cat, Blarney?"

Furious questions then rained on the hostess.

"Blarney— you mean that little girl with the Irish eyes and the perpetual motion in her bronchial tubes?"

"Oh, my dears, I never calculated on Blarney. Now, that child is absolutely ignorant. She endeavors to learn, and arrives at what you wished her to swallow just as the trouble is over. Blarney must be kept in the background."

"But the child would never entertain any ideas of marrying anyone at her age, surely," said one of the girls.

"My dear," the hostess looked overburdened with information. "The mere fact of that, with her way, is enough to make more than one mere man want to marry her. She is like a beautiful moth fluttering round a candle; always a nuisance till you catch it, then most beautiful to handle. Now, I never thought of that when her mother sent her down to me for the week. Hilson is about nine years older, but if she does one of what you may call her 'natural turns,' he's going to book a front seat for life. What can you suggest in this circumstance? If I sent her to bed on bread and treacle she would be sure to smile, and the thing would be conspicuous by her very absence. Hilson isn't likely to look away from Lorna once he's got a start, and the child hasn't a particle of interest in her outside her quaint originality. If we could only give her some idea, some little notion that we want Lorna to— well—to..."

"It could be done quite casually," said one girl. "Blarney sits on my bed at night while she does her hair, I'll ask several of the girls to come in tonight, and we will make it a matter of ordinary conversation that Lorna is meeting her— whatever you like to call him— for the first time in years. The child is fond of Lorna, and she will be delighted to help the thing along."

"Quite a good idea," said Mrs Honora. "Do see what you can do."

And outside the restricted Blarney was making toffee with one of the maids.

HILSON RAND arrived in Elizabeth Bay with one trunk, a crushed unshapely felt hat, quite too small for him, and his mouth full of chocolate ginger. Mrs Honora ignored it all with her tender heart, and rushed to tell the girls.

"Don't believe he has even a dress suit for dinner, girls; and he's browner than mahogany, and eats chocolate all the time he is talking to you. Don't all get frightened— it's always the way with the rich cattle men. I never saw one yet who didn't resemble his own cows in something."

"But— do his cows eat chocolate?" asked Blarney, the child of original thought. This brought a laugh from the throng, and the hostess fled away to arrange her dinner party and inform the butler he was not to smile.

Hilson Rand had a dress suit, and this relieved Mrs Honora. But when she saw him closer she strangled a laugh and went feverish in the cheeks for fully an hour. Hilson, the man from behind the scrub, wore clothes of a fashion of nearly twenty years ago. He looked quite, ignorant of it too, which made it all the worse for the girl, who has been placed along side of him.

"You can do anything with money," confided Lorna to herself. "A day in the city and it won't be my fault if he isn't looking his worth." For this reason she consented to be made a fuss of by Hilson, the man who had come back into her life. After dinner he deliberately propelled the girl into the conservatory, and the rest avoided that part of the house, with a fine spirit of fraternity; or, rather, discriminating sisterhood. Blarney, finding the Society dull after a wild swimming match with a boy who did *not* belong to the house, and whom she had talked to in the surf for fully three days since she had arrived, went about looking for something different. Through the glass of the verandah she could see the man from behind the scrub and the beauty of the house party talking in merry tones.

"He's got the most ripping figure I've ever seen," she said, lying in the grass by the water frontage. "Must take hard work to do that sort of thing. I wish some of the men here in Sydney would get up and try it for a change. Doing hard work is better a long way than looking starched in a drawing room."

LATER on Hilson stumbled over her as he tried to find a place under the stars to stop his mentality from slipping a cog through too much pressure. His mind was full of Lorna, and he had left her to retire; and thought to find himself alone by the water. Blarney still lay curled on the grass.

"I've been watching you," said the girl when he had apologised for nearly walking over her. "It's just a treat to see Lorna's face. Oh, my Goodness! wouldn't I be glad if a young man came forty thousand miles, it is? to see me again."

Hilson looked nearer at her.

"Wait till you grow up," he answered, and went on thinking of the girl he had left.

"Of course, I'll wait. You didn't think I'd want to be married until my nose is properly formed, or directly I had met the man? I'm glad for Lorna's sake—I never knew till last night. Did you ever try to eat those mud-puddings you made with her?"

Hilson again looked close at her.

"I don't, don't remember. She has grown up into a most beautiful woman— far more beautiful than I expected, and she ought to marry— money— oh, yes, I am quite convinced of that."

"So is everybody," said Blarney. "Isn't it a good thing she waited, and didn't marry some little importer or one of the shipping clerks?"

Hilson took this seriously. He leaned right over where he sat near the girl, and spoke quietly.

"Are you sure she waited?"

"Positive.... and kissed your photograph every night. You're hot much like it now. I mean the photograph in the silver frame with the South African war medal on your coat. I've seen it on her table often."

"South African war medal?" Hilson ruffled his forehead into lines of thought. "I never was in Africa in my life. You're a bit off the track, aren't you?"

"Oh, well, it must be her brother, then, or—"

"Somebody else's," finished Hilson. This finished the conversation, for Blarney rose up. Before rushing to the house she invited him to walk the narrow wall of the baths while the tide was full in. Hilson refused on the plea that he was no acrobat, and the child hurried away to bed, thinking him no sport. She was singing at the top of her voice a snatch of that quaint ragtime measure. "I Wouldn't Leave My Little Wooden Hut for You."

The sound came, to the man as he started his pipe under the stars. Then came the girl's laugh from the balcony high above his head; then a whole lot of cold water was poured over him, and a thin-voiced apology which was in the same register as that of the song.

He went to bed confused.

A DAY or two afterwards Hilson caught Lorna near the drawing-room by herself. Somehow he had managed to find her by herself quite ten times a day. The reason was obvious, and he took the chance thrown out to him in both hands, and, striding it as he would do his horse, liiade it come round m his direction. He was manipulating chocolate ginger, with his teeth.

"It seems," he said, jerkily, "seems— as if everybody else in the house didn't want us, Lorna. I'm glad."

"How much money do you spend a day on chocolate?" was what the girl asked him as they sat down in a corner.

Hilson crunched a triangular lump and spoke quickly. "You don't get such stuff out my way once in twenty years. I suppose I spend about a shilling a. day. Sounds extravagant when you have to slog all your life to get— get anything at all. I can easily pull up when I get back to my little place."

"Oh," said Lorna, "are you talking of going back so soon?"

"Must get back within a month, you know. The boys would mutiny if the boss had too much holiday, and they were tied out there."

"You've made a small wild world, haven't you?" said Lorna, to whom the idea of the west was more of a bogie than she really cared to anticipate.

"I'll show you my photographs tonight or to-morrow," said Hilson; "it's the best little crib out our way, and I've starved to get it."

"You're wonderful," said Lorna.

"I've gone without things— for years, and now—"

"You buy chocolates instead of—"

Lorna had not meant really to infer that he had forgotten to renew his wardrobe, so she stopped and smiled at him. Hilson was quite easy over it.

"I suppose," he said, slowly, "that I've got most things a man wants out there, barring the gentle hand of a proper mate, and I've managed to keep myself pretty well in order, though I've had no reason to buy a new suit for years. For instance, look at this coat."

It was about fifteen years out of date.

"I was amazed to find that my things were so good when I went to hunt them out. Saved me no end of expense."

Lorna felt crawling microbes of nervousness run over her. She told herself that it was always the way with a man who drifted away from the world. A woman was the only person to pull him. out of the mire of sordidness and cheapness.

It was evident that he considered her the only one in the house worthy of his special attention. Certainly he had had to give occasional minutes to Blarney but then she was such a child, and everybody had had to laugh when she had invited him to give her a ride in the gardener's wheelbarrow, which had been left by mistake on the walk. Hilson Rand came , in without his coat when this drive was finished. He did not even remember leaving it on the water tap, until Blarney came into the room wearing it over her shoulders. Lorna showed her objection by going to bed with a headache but 'recovered' when she had been told that Hilson had taken himself off for a walk under the stars. Blarney had then made friends with another man, and was tearing about the morning-room in a new kind of turkey trot which the new young man was endeavouring to learn.

Hilson spoke about his feeling when he sat near Lorna at the motor picnic. The girl showed a fine young spirit at the idea of the whole thing.

"Don't you adore motoring?" she asked Hilson, and he smiled and then looked grave.

"Costs such a beastly lot of money, that's all."

"Oh, but if you've got it—" Lorna looked him right in the eyes.

"Then, I suppose, it's quite the thing," he ended, and leaned near her in the tonneau. "Lorna... seems to me there's no need to ask you if you really... care..." He stopped, because Blarney, who was sitting with the chaffeur, had suddenly taken the wheel.

"The daring of that child," he went on. "I never saw anything so vigorous before as her methods...."

"She's a madcap," said Lorna, "but she will manage it. About caring, Hilson... it depends on you, of course."

"Are you sure?" The man from the west was fighting for himself as much as the girl was battling her own inclinations forward. "There is— no one else, Lorna?" He was thinking deeply, and before the girl could recover he had continued: "I thought that there was some affair— something to do with South Africa."

Trembling white lines had started under the girl's eyes. She righted herself as the car jumped to the open throttle.

"What a rough road," she said. "South Africa, did you say? My dear Hilson... that was before you— you thought of coming back.... He couldn't afford to marry, and I had you in my thoughts. Oh, Hilson, do you care... I wonder?"

Hilson Hand looked placid. "There is a lot of something, Lorna, growing in my heart, and I'm just about getting ready to nourish it up. Caring niy way, hasn't to do with this sort of thing, you know. It's just two people and one stretch of bush."

"But you would give up everything for the woman you loved—you could afford to...?"

"I'd give up Heaven if she— was worth it," he answered. Lorna, relieved again, smiled. "And buy her chocolate ginger?"

He looked her right in the face. "Buying—hasn't anything to do with it. I'd expect her to care like— like anything, even if there wasn't bread to eat. That's loving ..."

He stopped, and Lorna touched him gently. "Don't look so serious. You make me creep. Tell, me some more about the station. ... How many rooms has the house? Is there a decent road to the place? Water laid on through the kitchens, and that sort of thing? Is it a brick frontage, or— or... "

Hilson stroked his face with two fingers. He looked as if he wanted to laugh.

"Wait till you see my photographs," was all he said, and helped her out of the car.

Several hours afterwards he went to find Blarney. Under his arm he carried his little book of snaps taken out West. The girl was standing watching a wave dip and curl, away— away right over from where she stood on the summit of a

hill. Hilson spoke rather suddenly, and she turned, and he saw that her eyes were dim with tears.

"It was just like you to come and interrupt me when I was crying," she broke out.

"I'm sorry," said Hilson. "But why do you want to cry?"

"Just because I'm a girl," jerked Blarney, rudely. "If I was a man, and could do what I liked, I'd— I'd— just make other girls cry. Men do, you know— they do—quite often."

Some more bubbling tears drenched her dark eyes. Hilson thought he had better ignore them. He did not know what else to do.

"I thought that you might like to see my photographs," he said.

"So I would," said Blarney, "only— only—you'll have to lend me your handkerchief first. Mine's all over grease. Did you see me run the car into the garage? That's the sort of fun I like; not beastly women's picnics, where everybody wants to share one man."

"One man?" Hilson looked around him. "Would you mind telling me what sort of— of— creature you call those other guests wearing my sort of clothes?"

Blarney actually laughed. "I suppose you would call them men," she said; "but the girls don't seem to have any ideas about them; it's you."

"Me?" Hilson really went very uncomfortable.

"You, because you've got what they call 'gilt;' you're all stamped out like a sovereign. Your measure has been taken long ago.... It's my particular objection to you."

Hilson sat down on the cliffs and pulled the girl to his side. "Stop talking Greek to me and have a look at my album."

Blarney smudged her face with one machine-oiled hand. Then she looked towards the house party camped by the car.

"What's Lorna doing with that man? Why aren't you chasing her?"

Hilson opened his book of snaps. "Turn to me and I'll show you why."

He showed Blarney a small photograph of a rough wooden hut standing beneath some tall, dead timber. A man with an axe stood near the door lighting his pipe, and a dog sat near. There was nothing much in the picture beside a pump and a grind-stone. Blarney shouted with glee.

"What a dear little wooden hut!" she screamed. "Who is the man— you? How free one could be: never have to dress for dinner or that sort of thing. I'd just love to see it!"

"Would you? Well, Lorna wouldn't. She had ideas that I have just found out. She threw me over just now When I told her that was my home."

"Your home?" Blarney gasped again: "No wonder you are original, and— and— not like other men."

Hilson felt the glow of a new spirit run through his veins. He turned over the pages of the album.

"There is the inside," he said... "See the log fireplace — built it myself... and that chair made out of a tree stump— oh, the glow and the comfort in the cold nights... and the ease of the stars peering through the roof during the calmer ones.... There is Roger, my dog, again.... he can almost speak, and there is Pebble, the parrot, who wanders about loose.... Ah this motor picnic fades very much, little girl, when I think of the life and dangers out there.... it makes a man good for life and a woman... well, I've not thought about that— before... maybe it wouldn't be fair, as Lorna has showed me.'

Blarney was breathing like a runner in a race.

"I can see it all," she said, "and it does not strike me I have judged you fair... you're not all 'Gilt,' as they have made out— you're *natural*, and quite ragged, aren't you?"

"I'm happy..." was all Hilson said, and shut the book.

But Blarney grabbed it from him. "I want to look again," she said. "Oh, I wish it was real and not a photograph.' .

Hilson caught her by the wrist;

"Straight," he said. "You'd like to see it— a poor little hut, with the stars making holes through at nights, and that log fireplace, all to stop the wind breaking your bones in two at times."

Blarney flashed upon him. Her eyes were worlds of truth. "Sure as life I would," she said.

"Then you shall, little girl," Hilson broke out. "Come back with me... and make a mate for Roger and the parrot. I will try and make things steady up, so that there will be nothing but freedom and happiness for you.... you can have 'Monach' to ride. He will fly with you, thinking you just a beautiful bird...."

Blarney deliberately leaned against him as they sat near the edge of the cliffs. "Oh, stop, stop," she cried. "I cried because of Lorna and now I'm starting because I've got you myself."

Hilson kissed her under cover of a great grass tussock. Then he whispered in her ear.

"Lorna will never forgive you... because I told her that was my home— so it is; but it is the out-station hut, thirty miles from the head station. I live in a place with every imaginable comfort, miles from that. Now what about that little wooden hut, Miss Gadfly?"

"I'm going to ride there on Monach," said Blarney, and threw her arms round his neck in full light.

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## 8: Paper Ladies

*Sydney Mail* 11 March 1914

A VERY large man was watching a very little girl through the narrow window that was cut in the front of the low shanty-house behind the great timber of the forest. He stood there for some time with a demure look in his eyes and a somewhat tired heart.

'That child's been doing that ever since I brought the paper along,' he said— 'cutting out the pictures— paper ladies. Poor little kid, she's wonderfully taken with them, and there's nothing much but trees for her to amuse herself with out here.'

Just then the child looked up and saw the man standing there. 'Father Jim!' she called with the most radiant smile. 'It's my day at home, and these are my guests. They are only paper people, but I'm getting them ready to walk about.'

The man leaned on the window-sill.

'Child,' he said, 'don't you ever get tired of cutting those things out? Aren't your little fingers sore with turning them through the scissors? It must be three months since I found that old journal in the train coming from the sales, and you've been here every day since, cutting and cutting—

'You wouldn't understand, Father Jim,' said the child. 'It's what we call "society"— I think that is the word, meaning a lovely lot of ladies who walk about and show their pretty new dresses. I think mother always called it that. She said it was what made life, didn't she?'

The last words brought the man to a firmer position on his feet. He looked at her now with a tremendous sorrow in his face.

'Joan, she used to say a lot of things that you and I could never understand— leastways, they were above our heads. We are only very ordinary people, you and I. Your mother was— Well, anyway, I think— I know now why— why you care so much for the — paper ladies.'

He went away from the window and round to the back of the house, where a thin, burnt woman washed some clothes at a bench near the kitchen door.

'Ann,' he said very slowly and bitterly, 'I understand a deal more in the last few minutes than I have since— since that time— you remember?'

'Good heavens,' said Ann, the worker in soap and water, 'you don't mean you have heard something about— I mean, something to make you think she was right in going off and leaving you and the child? You are always making her correct in what she did; but— oh, well, I s'pose it's caring that makes a man see only reason in his wife's stupid actions.'

'Hush!' said the man. 'The child must never know— I mean, I have discovered just where that little trouble starts— the taste for fresh life, the sort of always wanting to see the wheels going round. The child's got it— yes, Ann, sure as she is born!'

'Don't see what she can get from another that has left her these four years, uucared for and—'

'She's got it, I tell you, Ann!' said the man. 'It's her blood coursing the same way— rushing along with the spirit of her mind driving it at a frantic nace whenever she gets a fresh notion. She's not wrong— she's only following her ideas, and they come from—'

'Not from you,' said the practical Ann.

'The child,' said the man, 'has lately had a frantic fascination for that journal I brought home from Bungawindy a while ago. I found it in the train— wish I'd left it there now. She's been cutting and cutting at the figures, and she has a large number of what she calls her paper ladies. She wants life, same as her mother did: only she's too young to— clear out yet a bit.'

'And pray the good Lord,' said Ann with reverence, 'she never will.'

The man stood where he was and thought a bit.

'You remember so much, Ann,' he went on. 'You came with her when she first married me, and if it had not been for you stopping it out, well, I don't know what I should have done. You see, the kid remembers enough about things to start working it now she is right out of her babyhood. She even quotes her mother's words, though it is only her little brain that is going to bother her. Oh, Ann, I never tried to hold the mother back when she wanted to go, as I ought not to have made her come out here. She begged to wait another few years, and I persuaded her to marry me right away. I could not blame her after that— but I do not want the kiddie to— want to follow.'

'Heaven help us— no!' said Ann with feeling.

'You see, my wife was unused to the quiet, and when she wanted to go hack to her people and their social whirl I would not have asked her to stay. She had no particular love for the child, either, and— so you acted the part, Ann, and I can never thank—'

'Did only what God saw fit to show me,' said Ann. 'I wouldn't have been happy myself with strangers, seeing I had known her all her life, or thought I had. Don't I just sit down to my happiness when it comes to that child?'

She took in the tub to have no further conversation, but put her head out of the door again to give him another ounce of consolation.

'There's a good bit of yourself in the child, Jim, so what's the good of worrying?'

'We never know ourselves,' said the man quietly. 'I am certain that I should prefer the town life if I was a woman— I don't know now if I wouldn't rather like the noise and the lights and the humi of a mighty big universe right at the front door, 'stead of those giant timber-men over there.'

An hour after this the child came to her father with the box of paper ladies, and deposited them and herself, scissors and all, at his feet.

'Father Jim,' she said in her funny little way, 'now watch me. These ladies are getting ready for my garden party. What would you call that kind of dress this one has on? I want to remember it.'

The man looked at the flimsy bit of paper propped up against the saw he had put down on the floor of the toolhouse. He knew as much about the picture of the Parisian-gowned paper lady as he knew about the tides of the great city five hundred miles away.

'Now really, kiddie,' he began, 'how should a man know? Is she one of your guests?'

'Yes.' said the child; 'and, of course, it would be rude to ask her the name of the stuff her dress is made of; and, besides, it would be of no use, as, of course, my guests can't speak.'

'I see,' said the man with the tired heart. 'And I am to be a sort of interlocutor— a person who speaks for the rest. Well, I really know nothing of ladies' dresses.'

The child's face fell. She looked at him with great, distressful eyes. 'Oh. Father Jim, don't you ever want— mother? I do!'

'Don't!' The man stood up very straight. 'Don't, kiddie! Aren't you very happy, dear? Tell me. Mother has been away so long now, and you know she can't come back, as she can't live in the bush— she gets— sick in the bush?'

The child seemed to be dreaming, yet she smiled a very weary smile. 'Oh, Father Jim, I wish— I got sick— in the bush,' she said, and the man clasped her in his arms and held her tightly. 'I'd die if you got sick— sick— really sick of this life,' he said. 'I can't give up the place till I make more out of it; and I can't afford to live in the town. You won't get sick of it?'

'Well, I am,' said the child. 'It doesn't seem fair not to tell you. Mother told you, didn't she?'

The man let her down very quietly. His face was scarlet.

'Who— who told you? Whoever said—'

'Oh, I know such a lot of things since I was nine,' said the child.

'And— and the paper ladies have only started you thinking a whole heap more,' said the man with another severe pain ringing somewhere in his head. 'It would have been better if I had never found that— thing.'

'You mean the paper ladies?' said the child seriously. 'Oh, Father Jim, I can just see things that I love when I have them to play with.'

'Same as— she,' sighed the man and quietly turned away. 'God help us all,' he said, and went out of the toolhouse.

LATER on in the years ahead he struck another turning in his life that gave him a queer feeling about the child who had been left unmothered by a woman who preferred to live in the bustle rather than share the smaller things with her man. He drove in from the township with the stores and necessaries that he would want in the place. Only once a month he went to the general store fifteen miles away. The child, now grown into promising womanhood, stood waiting for him.

'Father Jim,' she said, 'you'll have to go back to the store. You forgot my gloves, and they must be changed— they're miles too small. Also I want some shoes— not heavy ones, you know, but some pretty ones with buckles if possible, so that I can wear them to the dance at the woolshed next week.'

The man looked down from the cart.

'Right, girl,' he said. 'I know I have been acting strangely of late and forgetting things — it's the dry spell, and things have not been too good lately. But you shall have your things. Wait till I change the horse— this chap's a bit tired.'

'If the store has not the nicest kind of shoes, you had better wire to town,' said Joan. 'You know I must think about that sort of thing now. that the boys all seem to prefer me to the Gunter girls. Father Jim, will you get me some ribbon, too? The wide sash ribbon. I don't know how much it will cost, but you are so good to me.'

'Buckled shoes, gloves, and ribbon,' said the man. 'You shall have them all.'

And he took the girl to him as she stood there with the last colour of the day on her hair. Then he went round with the horse and got another one from the paddock.

'She will ruin us, old chap,' he said. 'And any more seasons like the last one— But never mind; she's first, whatever comes now. I must keep her to myself and not let her get the stir in her blood that will send her from me. I must keep her, old horse.'

ANOTHER instance of the mother's spirit in the girl came across the life of the man a few years later. The girl, delightful, and with some recommending beauty, stood before him one summer night and looked so tall and sweet that he felt things were going from him. He was tired from the field, and she looked so cool as she said:

'Father Jim, could I have a bank account?'

There was not a break in the tone, and she was so outright and honest that the man smiled, though he was groping about in the dark for an answer. Affairs had been only medium of late, and the concern did not run to a private bank account for the family.

'You're clean outspoken, child,' he said. 'Who could refuse you? We'll see.'

'You won't be long, then, will you?' said the girl, 'for I have a distinct reason in asking you.'

'What is it?' said her father, slightly disturbed.

'It's my clothes,' said the girl. 'I wish to get my things from the town. The store in the township does not order up the things I could wear when I put my hair up. I nearly hate going out to tea nowadays. I look so commonplace. You remember the paper ladies, Father Jim? Well, I simply must be one of them.'

The man wiped his forehead, and went awav without speaking.

'Paper ladies!' he said, when he was alone. 'Oh, how can I help her? First the mother, then— it's coming— style and dress and life! Oh, paper ladies — my two paper ladies!'

But the menace that had been over him all the years came stumbling down on his head soon after that.

'Could I go. to town?' said the girl one night when he sat tired. He struggled with a quick desire to get up and crush her into unconsciousness.

'When?' was all he said; and the girl, pleased with herself, put both her hands to his face. They were warm, but the man felt cold under them.

'Just as soon as I can get away, Father Jim— just when I can get ready. You can spare the money, eh?'

'Better than I can spare you, child,' he said.

'Well, you could come after me if I did not want to come back,' she said, and looked so tall and so fresh with young life that the man thought he understood enough to feel for her in the bush, among the tall trees— away from life— wanting the things that other women of her standing had.

He stood up. cold, and with steel in his heart.

'Your mother never came back,' was all he said, and he went inside to tell the woman who did the work.

EIGHTEEN months after, the girl went to the great city of lights and congested traffic, and the man found he could not keep pace with her innocent demand for hard cash. She was harmlessly enjoying herself with some relations he had arranged for her to stay with, and she gave no thought to the thing that was cutting into her father.

There had been such a drawing on the bank that the man was afraid to look past the next few months or so. He wrote to her. and it was the first time in her life that the girl had even had a reminder from him that she must think herself for once.

She wrote to him that she was sorry she had been so unthinking, but that she had determined that rather than return to the silences of the scrub and timber country she would work, and that he was not to bother to send her another penny.

This hurt the man more than anything, but the old working woman, who could look further into the future than he could, held up a finger.

'Give her the chance to find out.' she said. 'Let her learn both sides of the life— she'll regret her going sooner.'

This was so much scalding water on the wounds of the man; but he could do nothing else and yet allow his daughter to remain where she was. So he said no more and the girl went her own way.

First she took a position in a tea-room in the city, and found much more pulsing life there, the exigencies of which nearly sent her to bed at nights too tired to sleep. But she persuaded herself that it was better than going back to the bush home, so she kept on at it. During the days that followed she found much amusement, and some slight irritations to her vanity, when she was spoken to by the proprietor in rather a nasty way.

She put that also behind her; but when she was lightly laughed at by a visitor to the room, and told she was a jolly pretty girl and that he would think seriously of marrying her if she had been anything else but a tea-room girl, she decided it was time to take another course.

This started in someone giving her the idea that girls on the stage were very happy and well paid. She decided to see to it right away, and when interviewed with another couple of dozen applicants for the position advertised was told she was a 'thumping big girl, and that she could go in the chorus at two pounds a week.'

'They have such a peculiar way of speaking to one that it almost seems rudeness,' she said, as she came away. 'Anyway, Father Jim will be glad to hear I am making such good money.'

But Father Jim, who knew a little more than the inexperienced child of the bush, flew to the woman of the kitchen and breathed hurriedly the truth. 'Ann, Ann, what shall we do?'

'Leave her,' said Ann. 'It's getting near the finish, I tell you. Can't you wait? She's not learned her lesson to the full yet.'

'And when she does!' gasped the man. 'Oh, Ann! the life— the horrid glaring facts she has to learn— the sordidness— the dreadful way the men will

stare! Oh. the little kid— my paper lady! Better rather she had never been born. And it's the mother over again!'

'I tell you to wait,' said Ann, and went away from him and left him wisely alone.

And far away in the town the girl trod to the measure of many new things— things that excited her and made her think she was at last in the right way to success and happiness. She enjoyed the laughter of the girls, and she knew she could afford frocks as good as they wore, directly her salary started.

One day before the opening night the girls were all congregated in the wardrobe department to be fitted and made ready for the costumes they were to wear in the opera. The head woman was decidedly cross and irritable, and spoke in such a rude way to the girls that they answered her in as nasty tones. Joan stood back waiting her turn.

'Don't stand waiting if you want us to get away to-day,' said the woman. 'Come over here and let me try this tunic on you.'

'Aren't you too tired to do any more?' said the girl, and the woman laughed slightly. 'Well, you're a funny one! Who cares if we are tired? It's the chatter that nearly makes me mad, and I have a constant headache. You're new — I can see that.'

The bush girl stood easily.

'Yes.' she said. 'It's my first try, you know. Do you think I shall get on well?'

'Not as well as if you had stopped off the stage,' she said, and looked hard at the girl. 'You're— awfully like someone I used to know. Who are you?'

'I'm from the bush,' said the girl, 'and I wanted to see life and make myself like the pictures in the books I used to cut out when I was a little girl. My father is so good, and he is letting me have a try.'

'The bush!' said the woman. 'You were better off there, if you only knew it. Got a father, too. Heavens! there are girls here that have to work because they have no parents; but you— well, you'll have to find out, as I did.'

'Find out what?' said the girl.

'Find out that there is no place like home, and that father is the best man in the world. I had a home and a dear, good husband. I wanted all you thought you want, and when it was too late I wanted to go back.'

'And couldn't you?'

'I was too proud, after my stupid behaviour,' said the woman. 'I have never been the same since.'

Just then someone called the woman by name, and the girl caught her arm as she was going to leave her.

'Do you know,' she said, 'that your name is the same as mine?'

The woman stared at her, and then burst into tears.

'That's what I have been suspecting, and I feel the double sin. Your father's name is Jim, and I'm the stupid-minded mother who ran away.'

But as the girl tried to speak the call came for chorus on stage. She tore to the steps and to the rehearsal. When there the assistant stage manager was also found in a bad temper. He shouted to the girls to come down stage, and not stand about like so many cows. The bush girl thought it was rude, and not feeling too bright for the first time since she had come to town and heard the things the woman had told her, she stood back of the rest and did not j go forward.

'Come on, you little fool!' called the stage manager. Joan went scarlet. She knew that her father would not have spoken to one of the dogs that way. and she trembled and felt she could not move a step without ! bringing herself to the level of the man who had addressed her. It was the worst degradation, she felt, that could have been I put upon her. 'If you don't come forward when I speak, you can get off the stage,' said the man, and the girl, with the blood of her progenitors welling in her head, stood firm with raised chin, and then calmly walked off the stage by the left wing. She sought the woman who was in the wardrobe-room.

'And now you will go back, dearie,' said her mother. 'You will go back to— him.' But Joan sobbed, hurt and badly wounded. 'How can I, when I wanted to come after he told me I had better not? Oh, how rude the people are in town!'

'You know you were wrong to come,' said the woman. 'But you will go back.'

'Not unless you go with me?' said Joan.

'That would hardly be fair,' said the woman. 'After leaving him and you all this time, how could I ask him to take me back? No, you must go alone.'

But the girl clung to her.

'We'll stay and work together, but we must get away from this place.'

Then as it was after time to go down to lunch they departed together.

'There's a country-looking chap wants you at the door,' said the attendant as Joan went through the passage.

'It's Father Jim— oh!' She ran forward and fell into his arms.

'Had to come,' said the man. 'Couldn't stand it, kid. I guess it's my turn to run away, and this time I've run after you.'

And the girl could hardly speak to tell him the truth.

'It was like you, Father Jim, dear, to come— I said you would. But there's more than that to reward you for your journey. There's—'

But the woman standing there had heard enough, and she came to the two slowly, penitently.

'Will you take us— home?' was all she said, and the man, riveted to the footpath, could only stare and blink hot, tired eyes. 'We're so— sorry,' said the girl, standing there with limp hands, too. And then the man laughed aloud, out of a full heart.

'Give me a hand each.' he said. 'Home we go— back to the bush. Let me take you home— my two paper ladies!'

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## 9: Ragtime

*Weekly Times* 9 May 1914

THE GIRL STOOD every inch her five foot seven, and looked her father, Joe Herdy, in the face.

"Whatever did you bring me back for, father? What sort of cruel thing had you in your mind? After so many years in the town with all the advantages of being a lady, even if you did not hold with the things that go to make a gentleman! What— what—?"

She seemed to lose her breath. Joe Herdy hipped both his hands.

"I think I've paid long enough for you, my lady, all this time, without keeping it up much longer. When your mother died, I promised her I'd do my best for you, as there wasn't a school nearer than Melbourne— that is, a school where you'd have been made what you are now— that's all there is about it. I'm not so well off now; things don't happen like they did in the good old droving days, and I can't afford to keep you down there any longer. It's about time. I think, that you ought to be doing something with all that education and music in return for me."

"I don't see what I could do in such a place as this, father. I came back when you asked me to, but had I known that you intended me to live in the hotel and— and mix with the dreadful people whom you call your friends— I'd have taught in the town before I budged an inch. It isn't as if you had the old place, dad."

A certain regret made her fall into her childish name for him.

"This— hotel, now— it is known all along the line as— as a harborage for drunken shearers and a place where a man never goes away with any of his pay once he enters the door after his cheque is paid to him."

"It's all fair!" shouted Joe Herdy. "You never would have objected to a thing I did once upon a time. Now you're filled with education and all that sort of thing, you want me to house and keep a man and charge him nothing, I suppose! How do you think I've been j paying all these years for your education and dress if it wasn't for the bit I make at shearing-time? Get to bed, my girl."

"Not till this thing is settled, father. I tell you I won't stay here in this life. Besides, it isn't as if I could be any use to you. If you intend me to take up the bar work and other dreadful things here, you should never have sent me away to learn— what I have. I know that my mother was a lady, and that your father was a gentleman in the good old days, and that has been brought out in me, father, and I can't live anyhow else."

Joe took her arm and twisted her round.

"Who wants you to live anyhow else? It's because of your 'get-up' and manners that I've brought you home. I've spent a hundred and forty guineas, too, on that grand piano in there behind the bar, just to give you the chance of doing something you'd like which will benefit me at the same time. Now, Michael Brand up the road has taken most of my trade since he put up that special parlor with the— the glass verandah and the pianola. I didn't want to go to all that expense to keep trade going, and I couldn't let Michael have It all his own way. There's fresh buildings going up in the place, and we will have to be doing something fresh to keep up with the times. Michael has his new parlor and his pianola, and has taken most of the trade of the town, curse him! I'll get it back through you— there's the piano, and you can play !t like— they, do the pianola,. I expect. So get going, and let's have a tune every afternoon and evening."

"You mean me— to— to play— father— to play to the awful cattle men and travellers who come through for the day? Why, they wouldn't understand my music any more than they would understand me."

Joe stormed at her. He was getting an old man now, aud couldn't argue without losing his temper.

"Make them understand you, then! Make them like the music! Why, I had I a gramophone once that took the wind out of every piano-player in the town. It wasn't when I had a pub to run, or I'd have made trade that way. Michael has put a stop on the gramophone by getting that pianola."

The girl was covered with confusion. Here she was just up from a finished education where music meant one of the highest aims in her life. She had studied Wagner and Lizst, and Chopin, and other masters, and had never really played anything else. She had fed her mind on these things, and she felt she would starve her brain to death before she even put a finger on the piano behind the bar. But the thought that her father had extracted so much money for years from the shearers when they had been in an intoxicated condition made her pause. She must do something to repay some of it back to the town. Even to her father whose goodness in the past she felt now that she would rather repay.

"What do you want me to play?" she said bitterly, holding up her head.

"Play? What everybody else is playing, of course— ragtime! Michael's got the 'Hitchy-Koo' going since last week and every boy is going along after tea at nights to listen. You've got to 'Hitchy-Koo' as well" as he does— that's all there is in it."

"And you expect to get back your trade by that ?"

"By you, it really means. A fellow won't sit round a blessed wooden mangle arrangement, no matter what it plays, if he can look at a pretty girl instead. But

it's the tune that catches them; and unless you stick to that 'Hitchy-Koo' business we won't get as much trade as we think."

"And supposing we don't get trade when I do?"

Joe looked annoyed again.

"If we don't, you can take yourself out of this and earn your own living. I'm too poor these days to keep you unless you bring in something."

The girl walked from the room.

Big veils of blue mist were rising over the hills right away, and she yearned to be out in them— lost— lost to everything.

ALL HER LIFE Miss Herdy had loved her home in the blue-gum hills, but her return to a life in the township instead made her bitter indeed. Once her father and mother had possessed themselves of a fine little bit of farm land, lying just at the edge of the greyish scrub, and that was when she had enjoyed childish dreams and the weird pictures that come with a bush life; but when she had gone to town, and her mother's life had passed quietly away, she had only known about her father's move into the public-house trade.

She was dreaming now, as she had done as a weeny child, of the wonderment of every bird and bush creature.

She used to make up little songs about them once, before she had had the opportunity of a school and a music teacher. Since then she had developed a peculiar mood in her music. It lent her reverie, traditional inspiration, and a whole panorama of beautiful things; but not so with the ragtime. The incessant laughter of cattlemen in the bar and the high piping of youths who tried to sing in tune to her playing, made her feel creepy and cold. Not an ounce of sympathy was there for the overgrown, childish soul.

Still she played on, as she had done for the last week, since her father had told her his conditions. Played with her fingers going to and fro like mad little mice that scattered any nice thoughts from her mind. The beat of feet around her went into her brain and stamped out any feelings she had at all towards her father. She felt as if she had played only such music in another world and would go on playing it till she died.

"Hitchy-Koo! Hitchy-Koo! Hitchy K-o-o !"

Sousa might be dying of aching loneliness; children might be waiting to be soothed in sleepless pain, and yet to her the "Hitchy-Koo" was as much as men of the universe wanted to keep up the stream of their pleasure.

She thought so long about it that an intense longing for the music of her own mind crept back to place. Still retaining the ragtime measure, she somehow, not knowing, slipped a fragment of something better into the melody. An improvision, that came as readily as the notes to her finger tips,

stole among the bars of "Hitchy-Koo," and she felt for the first time since she had returned something happier in her mind. It was the feeling one might have when a dose of medicine secrets a jewel at the bottom of the cup. She went through with it, and found her all within the dreadful potion.

The listeners, drinking in between, knew nothing different to their beloved rag-time, and Joe Herdy in the bar was having all the trade he liked.

Then someone rode from a little square allotment in the blue hills and came through the township. As usual, he was going right to Michael Brand's hotel for the reason that he had never been friendly with Joe Herdy for many years. Before pushing his way through the crowd at Brand's he stood in the middle of the road listening. The Hitchy-Koo music, mixed with the mind-picture music of the girl, came faintly to him, and he walked a bit along the road to listen.

"Blowed if that tune don't catch a man by the heels," he said, and did not turn away. "It might make a chap almost bury the hatchet with a man like Joe to take a spell in there."

He went nearer and peered in the door. The girl played on in the one room, and men drank and quarrelled in the second. Someone called out to the traveller.

"Hullo, there, Peter Dawe, come to bury the fight on account of the piano playin'? Fifteen years we haven't spoken, have we?"

It was Joe Herdy who called through the door.

Peter Dawe went right inside.

"On account of the music, maybe, but never on account of you, Joe Herdy," he said, and walked through to the second room. Miss Herdy had her eyes shut to the sounds of the fresh footsteps, and everybody hearing the words of the men in the bar went to crack the joke with Joe instead of remaining in with the piano. Dawe stood behind the girl for a time, then, at the finish of a series of mind-pictures and ragtime he blew a great breath of happiness.

"That's music if you like," he said. "Gets me down like a kid, when you scramble over the top notes."

Miss Herdy opened her eyes and stopped playing.

Face to face she met him for the first time in all the years.

"Your voice," she said, "brings me back to something that was better than all this."

"Brings you back to the time when I cleaned out the fowl houses on your father's farm, Miss Herdy," he said. "You remember Peter Dawe, the boy I was when— when your mother gave me dough cakes for bringing you home out of the scrub?"

"Peter!" Miss Herdy was all staring eyes now.

"Yes, I stood your father's kicks and bad temper quite long enough in those days. After he came nearer the railway I dropped his acquaintance. Wouldn't want to know him now or come into his house if it wasn't— for that little tune you played, just now."

Miss Herdy did not feel complimented. She remembered treating him as an equal always when he was her father's farm boy; an uneducated kind of youth who had no people or anything to recommend him, but a clever hand with cows and other animals.

"I've got my own place now," said Peter, "just out behind that line of hills. Oh, it's not much bigger than this bit of a street, but it's my own— no one can kick me out of that."

"You've— improved," was all the girl could say.

"The same to you."

Peter smiled and sat down near her. "I didn't have a town schooling, Miss Herdy, but I managed to find you in the scrub often enough to be of some service to your father and mother. I'd do anything, I think, if you'd play music to me sometimes like that— you've just run off the top notes."

"It's 'Hitchy-koo,' the London craze," said Miss Herdy.

" 'Hitchy-Koo, the London Craze,' it might be, but it's going to be my craze as well. I've heard it often enough up at Michael Brand's pianola, but somehow it don't sound the same."

"It isn't." Miss Herdy ran her fingers over the piano and allowed something more of her own improvising to slip in between the notes. Peter jumped to his feet.

"That's got it!!" he shouted. "That little bit, way up in the clouds all rippling like quivering sunshine!! Miss Herdy I'm sorry, indeed, I've got cause to quarrel with your people, but I don't like your father, and I never did." He was going out of the door. "Some nights I might slip along under the window there and listen just because it's that little bit of quivering sunshine; so if you're minded to be thankful at all for anything I did in the old days just you play it often— will you? I'll be listening!"

Before she could, answer him he had gone, and Joe Herdy saw him no more pass through the bar door.

Some time after this the girl remembered the incident, and the remarks about the quivering sunshine. She never knew when he might be listening out the side window, but often she guessed he might be there. Ever after that the girl— growing a sick heart in the loneliness and bitterness of coarse company and ragtime, refrained from the actual tunes set by her father, and allowed a somewhat straggling melody of her own to wander in between. If she thought that the men were getting tired, of it, or that Joe was looking through the door

anxiously at her, she immediately drifted back to the original theme. "Down the Missippi," and "The Robert E. Lee," songs that gave the utmost satisfaction rose higher than ever; but all the time when there was a pause, the girl got her own music in between, like the precious faded leaf of the days gone, that had been pressed among the pages of a new book.

Once, however, when "The Robert E. Lee" was finishing, and the men straggled back to the bar for drinks, the girl forgot it all, and rippled off in a melody of her own. It was a "Nocturne," that came to her fingers as she dreamed of the misunderstanding of outcast souls, the life apart from men... the miserable herding together of souls that suffocated for freedom and love.

Behind the window Dawe lurked, and when the room had emptied he put both hands on the sill and pulled himself level. "You've caught me, Miss Herdy," he said softly. "I've only dreamed the things that kind of music brings to me. Play it all over again ..."

This sort of thing occurred many times— whenever the girl thought that Peter might be under the window. Gradually the Ragtime gave place to better music and the girl was not annoyed so much by the men who frequented her father's bar-room.

Then Joe began to notice it. He caught Peter one night sitting on the windowsiI dreaming with his head high to the stars overhead. He noticed the wrapt expression on the girl's face, and something in him of fear abd jealousy took the place of merriment, usually nowadays, on his face. He walked roughly through the room to where Peter still sat dreaming on the window sill, and with one hand pushed the young man quickly through. The girl, turning her face in time, screamed, though the drop to the ground was but a few feet or so.

"He don't sneak into my house by the window," said Joe.

"Why can't he come in like other men do....?"

Peter was again on the sill. He faced Joe firmly.

"I don't want to come into your house, Joe Herdy! and I'm never going to come in; but if Miss Herdy doesn't mind me looking through here— it's going to be enough for me— for a bit, anyhow."

"You'll be making love to her next," said Joe, furious. "My girl isn't the sort to marry a common scab of the ground, even if he has got a place as big as a dog kennel..."

The girl flushing scarlet took the words from him.

"How do you know? Rather a dog kennel, father, than this kind of thing!"

She covered her face, and Peter put one foot further on the sill.

"It would be a palace if— if Miss Herdy ever happened to even step into it," he said, and the girl dropped her hands.

"Peter," she cried, not caring whether her father heard or not, "Peter, I'd not mind the one room a bit— it would be Heaven out there in the blue hills. Would you— you ask me to come?" She was hurrying over to the window.

Peter could not speak for a minute, and in that time Joe Herdy brought his fist down on the piano with a crash.

"I'll kill her first," he said, and all the men from the bar came heavily through the door.

"I'd work my fingers to the bone picking the rocks for quartz if I thought— you'd marry me— Miss Herdy!"

Peter was absolutely carrying the thing through even with the interruption of. many laughing gibes and much coarse banter from the men.

"I'd do it this instant! Peter."

Both of them now were side by side at the window. The youth still half within the room, only.

"You hear." Joe Herdy was nearly breathless with anger. He was an old man now, and could not hold his temper much at any time.

"You hear that boys... under my very eyes my girl chooses a common scab of the ground."

Restraining himself no longer Peter shot out a hand from where he was, and it caught Joe Herdy on the mouth. Instantly half a dozen men rushed the window, but the girl had given a violent push of both her arms, and Peter went back to the ground rather suddenly.

"Run," she shouted through, "I'll join you somehow."

"You go an inch," Joe shouted at the girl. "You go an inch out of this house to meet Peter Dawe, and I'll shoot both of you. Remember I've always done what I say."

The men tried to quieten Joe down in the bar by filling him up with his own bad liquor, but it had a wrong effect on him. The old man was drinking more in these times, and this business had just put the head on it.

Open defiance on the part of the girl seemed useless. She knew that if she attempted to run away that her father would shoot Peter with no fear of any law in the kingdom. Behind the bullying exterior there was a brave constitution that had helped Joe Herdy through many a tight place when he was young. He would gladly have gone to the hangman's rope if he could have his mind easy first on this score.

The antagonism of many years was bubbling afresh, somehow, and somebody was going to suffer. Therefore the girl suffered afresh. To make things passive again she started the "Robert E. Lee," "Hitchy Koo," and "Down the Mississippi," with renewed vigor, omitting her own part usually

sandwiched in between. Sometimes she fancied that Joe would be under the window, but never did she give him any cause to raise a head.

One day thinking things had settled down into ordinary course, she waylaid a drover taking young bullocks through the stock route that ran past Peter's place.

Hastily scribbling a few words on the back of the envelope she had in her hand at the time, she gave the drover a shilling to deliver it. Later on the man stopped at Michael Brandy's pub, and drank a bit; from there he wandered down to Joe's place and drank a little more, leaving the note sticking in his hat while he did so. Out of sheer fun someone plucked it up, and threw it on the bar; Joe immediately unfolded it and read it— then before anyone could object he had folded it again and stuck it back in the drover's hat.

A general laugh roused the drover.

"Gerr-out!" was all he said, and took care to see the note was safe.

What Joe had read there was this: "Unless I play the Robert E. Lee do not attempt to put your head up above the window sill. There is still danger for you."

That night Joe Herdy cleverly managed to keep his temper, and took care to show no ill feeling to anyone. He himself entertained a number of through travellers in the second room, and the songs were wilder than ever.

"Let's have the 'Robert E. Lee,' " he said purposely, and the girl met his eyes. In them was a depth of meaning. "I can't find the— music." she said, turning idly among the sheets by her side. She knew there was no music there.

"Give us the chorus," came from one of the travellers, who knew it well. But the girl insisted that she could not play it. Again her eyes met those of her father. He smiled; but in the smile there was a point of light to the girl.

She knew somehow that he had purposely come into the music to suggest that song. Then, of course, the rest was clear. Herdy was only waiting quietly for Peter Dawe.

"I'm sorry," she said, slightly flushed. "But unless I find the music…"

"Anyone here play the chorus," said Joe, turning to the men around.

"I can." A traveller staying in the township knew enough about the popular song to thump out the tune. He sat down at the piano.

Miss Herdy watched her father all the time she had her face turned towards the window sill. Out of the corner of one eye she watched him, idly pretending to feel her hot cheek, with a covering hand.

Joe immediately faced the window, too, with one hand behind him, near his hip pocket.

Everybody started singing. The Robert E. Lee drove high and loudly through the mazes of secret trouble, and slowly above the window sill came the fingers

of Peter Dawe. Almost with reeling senses the girl started to stagger forward, but an arm of iron caught at her shoulders and wound round her bosom so that she felt she would strangle if she put out a foot. The song reached its highest, and none but the two were playing any real part at all. Slowly the head and shoulders of Peter Dawe rose quietly above the window sill, the clutch round her body grew tighter still, and in Joe's eyes were lights that were fixed like those in the eyes of a snake, when it means to dart— and dart right to the mark.

Peter Dawe looked right in front of him over the sill, and he saw the two with their backs to the piano— waiting— both with some intention towards himself.

Joe with one arm embracing the girl, and the other behind him in his hip pocket, suggested only one thing. He was face to face with….

Miss Herdy gave a little moan hardly heard, and ere her father could whip up his right hand from the hip pocket, she had made a final effort to catch at it, to strike the trouble to the roof; but Joe was before her.

With a stride towrards the window he let her go and shot his hand out at the boy there. There was just an open palm, seered with the years of work that was being held out to the young man, and a smile of transformation that had spread all over Joe Herdy's face.

"Jump in, Peter," was what the old man said. "Here's my hand. When two young people of two families join up in holy matrimony, it's time we gave them a help this way."

Catching Peter by the shoulders he hauled him through the window. The chorus was going through for the third time, and even the girl felt that she must join in.

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## 10: A Question of Rights

*Western Mail* 25 Sept 1914

THE picnic party clambered out of the open boats and climbed the point of land that jutted into the opal bay, shimmering with sunshine.

Everywhere the party straggled, the men assisting the girls over tarny bracken, and rocky boulder; or laughingly leading them into depth of shrubs where it was impossible to get through, and which necessitated their going back again to the starting point.

The pleasure of the day seemed to be wrought with the spirit of supreme mischief; but the harmless mischief of man and maid whose mind is an open, happy one. Coming round, a nasty jag of iron-stone and blackened ground, one of the girls slipped a little and regained her foot-ing with the assistance of the man next to her. He looked rather disturbed and con-tinued to lead her upwards with the pleasure of something bigger than mischief in his healthy sun-brown face.

The girl removed his hand from her arm and stood looking down upon him from the top-most boulder.

"Please don't think that I require you to look after me..." she said slightly ruffled of face and temper. "It's one of my dearest desires to be able to do things alone."

"Something new— isn't it?" said the young man with half smiling seriousness.

"Perhaps it is, but.... I'd like you to understand it, and to remember, I belong to the new school. Women are gaining sense, thank goodness, and I should say it was about time."

She sprang a little to the left, away from the party, with the deliberate intention of making him follow her like a submissive servant who walks behind.

Later on, the young man caught up to her and began to relieve his mind.

"Look here," he said, "you're not serious."

"Perfectly— about myself," the girl replied, sitting down in the slant of full sunshine and arranging her skirt over her feet.

"You mean... you're getting ideas from the papers... that's the only place you could. You want to be independent... considered like a man.... It sounds too horrible."

The girl looked calmly at him.

"Naturally to you," she said. "We are beginning to realise at last— we girls— that there has been too much weakness on our part. I suppose it does

sound horrible when..." She looked at him with glowing face, "when man knows we are finding ourselves able to do things for ourselves. Naturally it robs him of his superlative power, and destroys any of the so-called chivalry that he might think he has."

She turned eyes upon him that expected to find him full of resentment. His face pleased her. It was the first great battle of her life.

"Seems to me," he said slowly, with all the forces of primitive man in his veins, "that this thing wants going into... that is, the you and me of it ; and what's to come. Now, I've no grievance against the sexes who keep jarring one another about the world for the top place, but I'm just about as unhappy when I think of you joining that sort of thing and pitting me against it, as I suppose I could be."

"But you'll get used to it," said the emancipated girl sticking her fingers playfully in and out of the scrubby dirt of the rocks. The boy looked disgusted.

"Get used to it... to that sort of thing between you and me. Good Heavens! You might as well ask me to get used to allowing my mother to go out and earn her bread."

"Well, that wouldn't be so bad, if she were younger," smiled the girl.

"It's— horrible," and the boy looked into the shimmering sunshine and then threw out his hands.

"Look here... it's all like that to me— the stretch of a woman's life. It ought to be sunshine and glory— glory of the most wonderful thing in the world... the glory of everything that she can do. To speak of her going along unprotected, making her own way, resisting kindnesses and avoiding any help... oh, you're not serious... you couldn't be."

But the girl was serious;  or at least she was trying to be.

"I'm a perfectly strong, healthy woman," she said looking right at him. "Is there any reason for me to suppose, that I need an escort every night, as if I was a child ? That I must have everything carried for me. That I cannot even be allowed to pay my fares. Absurd.... please under-stand me. I may be your friend, but I have every intention of acting for myself alone."

The boy leaned back in the sunlight, and on his open face there came the shadow of lines.

"That means you don't want me to come around, fooling after you, Bessie. That you're thinking for yourself... why, that's been my utmost pleasure ever since we were kids."

"But it hasn't done me any good, Harry. Can't you see it now?"

"Not a little bit."

"Well listen. I've been given a brain for myself, and strength to protect myself. Like things hidden away that go mouldy, those powers are deserting

me. When I was a child I could climb to the roof and clamber down again by myself. Now I can't get more than a little way. I'm losing my nerve— that's you. Don't prevent me. I'm going to start all over again."

"You mean climbing?"

"I mean everything. Now it's very likely that you and I will marry, and I want it to be all quite right. There must be perfect trust and freedom— and full license to both. As much as you want to go out in the evening— so do I. As many times as you want to be later than ten o'clock as many times do I."

The boy looked ghastly. "You mean, you want to go roaming about at nights by yourself, alone— after ten o'clock?"

"It may be so," said Bessie. "And if I do, there is to be nothing said. I want it understood beforehand, that I must be free— as free as you are; because it's my right."

The boy looked across the shimmering bay.

"If I wasn't so fond of you, Bessie, perhaps I shouldn't mind so much, but...."

The girl interrupted. "You've got no right to mind. You really know that you've got no right."

"I have the right of— of my love for you," he said tremulously, "sure that is— something."

He got up off the ground, and walked quietly away. The girl sat on smiling— sure in her mind that she had spoken for both their good.

"We've got to assert our independence, and he's got to take it now." All the same, she felt the first spirit of loneliness stealing over her as the sun dipped behind the sea. The new spirit required getting used to— but she felt certain it would come out all right.

SOMEONE was coming towards her, when she sat, later on a point of rock that over-lapped the extreme shelf of the point. It was one of the party, a gentleman that she had recently met.

"Look here," he said carelessly standing over her and puffing a pipe of glowing weed, "you're the very girl I was looking for. Come and have a climb."

The girl jumped up.

"Rather. I've been simply dying to get a move on. " What way do you wish to go?"

"You're a sport," said the escort. "There's a jolly spot just a bit down here... I'll go first and you can follow. Look out though, or you'll find yourself in the sea."

For a moment the girl looked after him then she hurried along in the decreasing light.

"That's the way I want to be treated," she said, "as if I was capable, and not just a baby doll."

The youth before her took a few turns into deep flowering bushes, and let her slide and trip behind, showing no care whatever whether she came down too sud-denly or if she got her dress torn. He kept calling to her to keep up to him or she would be losing the way.

"Jump that," he said once, looking back a moment and took her over a boulder that ran sheer for a bit over a second shelf of rock. The girl jumped. It was more than she could manage and she came down on her knees. The youth turned laughing.

"Just what I thought you'd do," he said, "mind the next one, you're liable to break your neck a second time."

But the girl did not break her neck the second time. She climbed round carefully and hoping he would not look behind. He didn't. He was too carefully hunting a place for his own feet.

When they reached the chosen corner he took out his pipe again.

"Perfectly gorgeous," said Bessie looking into the creeping blue of the night. "But we mustn't stay, must we?"

The youth looked at her.

"Why not? There's no hurry. Let them all go home if they want to. I know the way overland, where we can get the train and be home when we want to. What a lark, suppose we do?"

Just the faintest signs of depression set- tled on the girl's face. She began to think she was tired, and the evening didn't look so pleasing to her now.

"There is one thing I like about you," said the youth, "you're so pally. You don't expect a fellow to fool round you or make love. And you don't mind what they say about us," He laughed. "Wait till they're ready to go."

"It seems mean to let them hunt for us," said Bessie.

"Oh I don't know," answered the man.

And the girl sat down again in the spirit of her new strength, which was making her so "pallish" and such a real good "sport" as he thought.

The last rim of the tide sprang forward out of the nothing; and the sun went down in the grey. The boy with the languishing pleasure of all things in his eyes, searched among the party for the girl. She didn't seem to be anywhere and then he remem-bered her words.

Just above the rocks where the two sat watching, he sat down, waiting.... and looking across the sea.

The girl had fallen silent and her companion smoked and talked idly a little away from her.

Presently he crept forward.

"Do you mind if I kiss you," he said, "you've got such a pretty mouth."

The girl shrank backwards and almost raised her hand.

"Of course I mind. Don't you do it. I'd be ever so angry, and don't know what I'd do."

But the youth laughed confidently.

"I'd love to see you angry.Your eyes would just be like stars."

His face was close to hers now and she steadied back against the rocks.

"You do!" she said speaking smartly, "and I'll give you a box on the ears."

Already she was feeling the first new power within her, and she was sorry that the other girls were not there to see. Laughing the youth twisted her hand between his strong one, and with the other caught at her face. Bessie worked her small body away from him but knew that she was absolutely in his grip. Slowly he laughed at her, put his face nearer, and looked into her blazing eyes.

"My word it's worth it," he said. "A little tigress underneath." Then he kissed her and retained his hold to take another from her lips.

Just above, the man who waited, heard the first piercing scream of his dear loved girl. There was a drop of twelve feet to get down to her and there was little time to work a way round. He took the drop, and landed crumpled, but flew at the second man like a fury and hurled him back against the great dark wall of the ledge. For the moment they struggled, and then the stronger man loosened a hand. He beat upon the face of the second one, and caused him to shift round a bit towards the edge of the cliff. All the time Bessie stood by dumbly, and could not move a foot. Like something breaking, in her mind, she knew, with a terrific shock, that something had happened; that one man had gone over into the sea; but it was only the calm chilly voice of her sweetheart that came to her, when she opened her eyes.

"Glad to be of some service," he said with vibrating harshness in his voice, "but perhaps I should not have dared?"

But the girl was nearly choking.

"Harry, what have you done? It's dreadful— you may have to go to gaol."

"Maybe," he said stiffening away from her and holding a wonderfully manly reserve. Then he swept her a mocking curtsey. "But surely," he went on, "that is at least, my— right."

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## 11: At the Pitch of the Scrap

*Weekly Times* 31 March 1917

A LONG SEA was rolling in from the ocean, breaking its back against the reef, and entering the mouth of the lagoon with a heavy boom that resounded from the hills. A dull-tempered night was closing in on the island, bringing with it a hopelessness of earth-blackness forbidding to the British man-o'-wars men who had been searching the shores all day, and undoubtedly favorable to any of the enemy who might be hiding in the mangrove swamps.

Lieutenant Walker stepped hurriedly alongside one of the white islanders and talked quickly. He wore uniform, but had substituted a Panama hat for his service cap.

Both men were engrossed discussing the business that they had been engaged in, the rounding-up of the German population of the island, and the Lieutenant had not finished with it by a long way.

"There is only this one beggar to catch, and we can pull up and clear out," he said to his companion. "Funny thing how he escaped just at the pitch of the scrap. When he broke away and we cornered Shultz and his crowd, I was never more surprised in my life. He can't escape. This island isn't big enough to hold him a week, and he's sure of capture unless he swims and chances the sharks, or somebody helps him."

"Helps him?" The second white man looked round quickly. "There isn't a man, woman or child, not even a dog in this group, that would put out a finger to help Schonholtz escape. Besides, how could they? All the boats held up nothing allowed to pass the reef except under escort?"

"He's clever enough to do it, all the same."

Walker cursed beneath his breath.

"Don't you believe it," the islander assured him. "Schonholtz will meet his deserts on this island. I've always had an idea he had something to do with that insurrection among the natives we had here a while ago, though he was never marked for it. Then, when war broke out, he mobilised the Germans, dragged in a couple of dozen natives— though they don't love him. Take my word for it. They're scared of him. He could always put more of the fear of God into a nigger with his tongue than I could with a yard of raw hide. He's the man we want all right, sir and we're going to get him, by—"

Walking as they talked, the two men reached the high land that rose above the lagoon. Lieutenant Walker signified that he was going east to join the men on "outpost" duty at a little distance from the settlement. He raised his hand to his hat, as he turned away, but stopped a pace or two forward.

"Please remember me to your wife, and tell her I am coming along to tiffin again before we go," he said "By the way, Hartly, what a plucky woman she is!"

He smiled deliberately. It was well known in the group that Mrs Hartly and her husband did not go hand in hand through the mazes of their isolated existence. Nobody would have described the marriage as being "hopelessly out of gear," but it was known to be an uncomfortable settlement, although for some reason or other Mrs Hartly stuck to her part of the contract and managed a fairly pleasing appearance.

Hartly stared.

"Why plucky?" he asked, resenting the other's tone.

"Why? Oh well, it was plucky of her to stay when all the other women went to Suva, or west to some place less risky," Lieutenant Walker ventured "We knew there'd be trouble here— but Mrs Hartly stayed."

"Of course she stayed," Hartly exclaimed scarcely irritable, but rather showing fire.

Walker saluted gravely.

"Just what I said— she stayed."

Before Hartly could reply, his companion had wheeled sharply and was walking across the shadowy country.

"She stayed," Hartly repeated to himself. " Of course— but I never thought of that."

SOMETHING sinuous and scurvy-looking crawled to the piles of the house where the woman waited alone. It swarmed up the first support of the verandah and climbed over the wooden rail to gain an entrance by any other way than by the steps, for they were glowing in the full light of the house lamp, and showed distinctly everything near and around.

At first the woman, seeing the shadow lengthening along the hemp-matting of the room, thought that a native, perhaps a sick one, was seeking her comfort and medicines for an ailment. This often occurred. A man would come creeping to her on all fours, roll over on his back, and groan until she gave him the dose which he said was "plenty feller-good man, make debbil debbil— go longa way lie down— no get— up again, boy."

She did not rise from her chair, but wondered why the sick one did not show his head round the door. Then she called out.

"That you, Billy-boy? You sick, lie down— no get up. Plenty feller black pill in medicine chest, eh?"

Round the frame work of the door, a dirty, scaly hand came, then the forehead and nose of a brown man out the profile was too well-cut to be that of a black Islander. She started forward in her chair.

"Oscar," she gasped.

"Sh—" The man, whose face was weed-stained the color of a native's, stepped into the room and closed the door behind him.

"How quickly you knew me." he said whimperingly. "Do you think that— that those navy pigs of yours would spot me so quickly?"

She could not speak. She had had time to realise what in all probability this visit would mean. Her sense of duty, and the realisation that to a certain extent she owed this man who had been her friend some consideration, were already in conflict.

He stepped closer.

"You wouldn't give me up, Mona?" he said.

She knew that he was trying her. Behind his anxious eyes, his smiling, evil face, she read an assurance of power; recognised a craft and cruelty that she would not have believed him capable of a few months ago.

"Why not?" she asked, quietly. "This is war. When my country is fighting another for an indignity, an injustice... I am at war with it's people."

"Even with me for instance?"

The woman threw out her hand. "How can you stand there? How can you come to me at all? At the best we were only... companions in adversity. You had no real friends on the island, and I... well ... I used you to pass the time, I suppose."

(Plucky, the Lieutenant had called her. She was showing her metal now in the face of the enemy.)

Schonholtz moved nearer, his weed-reeking body bent as if to spring. For the first time since she had dealt with other races, Mona Hartly saw the animal behind the man. She met Oscar Schonholtz half way across the room with as cold a nerve as his; they stood a little apart looking each other in the face. The German would have touched her but there was something of an advantage on her side. He was afraid to; he was afraid she might scream, or call, and bring some of the house boys into the room. He held her by his peculiar quiet assurance.

"To pass the time, Mona? Yes, it was to pass the time then... but now I've got you as I never hoped to have you."

Her eyes flashed. "Have you?"

The query was as eerie and derisive as the cry of a bird In the distance. The blinds were beating gently against the verandah posts, the evening breeze swishing the foliage of a hibiscus near the house.

"Once or twice, my dear Mona," Schonholtz said, "you managed to turn on enough sentiment as regards my— my friendship... to give me a complete idea that you might... might, I said, help me at a time like this."

"Really? We play a good deal, in life, I'm afraid. Perhaps as the minutes of sentiment were purely play, so— so the promises of assistance..."

He met her eyes, his own narrowing. "You won't play with me, Mona! again, as long as we both remain on this Island."

"What do you mean?" There was a sudden fear at the back of her mind, but she stayed it.

"I mean that if you allow me to be taken prisoner I shall immediately make some serious business of your so called play, confide particulars of it to your husband, and the authorities. You would not like that, no?"

The impression that this threat made seemed to satisfy him.

"You have not forgotten the time your husband beat a native to death for, well, a matter hardly worthy of death? You were indignant enough about it. You said at the time that Hartly had been guilty of cruelty deserving the most severe censure. You had notions regarding the treatment of blacks in these parts, and you started to write articles containing them, didn't you? You were good enough to ask me to read through a few pages of your manuscripts— just a few pages. After they had appeared in print, there was that little rising down there. Oh, I got no credit for it, although I worked quite hard really, translating those articles to every nigger I came in contact with, for reasons of my own. Oh, you didn't intend to incite to revolt, I'll admit, but every trader and planter in the Pacific blamed those articles, and would have given his hat to know who wrote them. I still have copies— one or two leaflets of them in a very charming and elegant handwriting— also a letter that you wrote to me as your friend, of course, though you tell me now that was all part of the game. But we will play no more, Mona."

Mona Hartly shrank away from him with a gesture of anger and impatience.

"You said just now that this was war," Schonholtz continued. "Well, choose. Help me to remain in hiding here, and see chat I get food, until there is a chance of escaping, and you can have those papers and your letter, though I should prefer to keep the latter as a memento of the time when I— I was bold enough to kiss your hand."

He laughed, but the hard, cracking, little sound was smothered almost the moment it escaped him.

"Where are the papers?"

"Not in my pocket; and where you could not touch them unless I handed them to you. If I am taken by surprise at any moment, dear woman, and you don't help me out somehow, I can speak and say where they can be found at half an hour's notice. You see.... you will be glad to help me, Mona."

The woman was gazing at him thoughtfully, and with apparent indifference.

"To obviate that necessity, perhaps it would be as well if I went to my husband now and told him the story."

"Do so. He will be the wiser when he leads that letter and puts the date back to the time of the rising—"

A sound out of doors disturbed him; he bent forward, listening anxiously.

"The wind!" he muttered. "But I must go. Your fool is with the other fools drilling on the beach, but he will be coming home presently, and— and I should prefer that we did not meet this evening. I shall be quite comfortable in the corner I have found myself near the belt of mangroves by the peninsula. You may bring me food there tomorrow, because I dare not show my face again until there is a chance of escaping— by your tactful advice. In the meantime I am quite safe where I am. Your friends will not wade through the filth of the crab holes for me. Food! Don't forget that a man must be fed— even in war time, Mona. In return, your papers!"

He slipped through the window, and crawled snake-like from the verandah down the pile to the shadow of the house.

Her mind relieved of the oppression of his presence, began to move swiftly and clearly. The impulse that had prompted her to act in the righteous cause of others was as strong now as when she had written the articles Schonholtz had referred to. Then, she had considered Oscar Schonholtz a friend worth having. Life on the islands was very lonely. He was better educated than her husband or the men who traded the Islands, and visited and drank at her house. Schonholtz had been sympathetic towards her idealistic theories of life. At least she thought he had been sympathetic towards them. Now she realised that he had been playing on them— that he, not she, had been playing, as she had said.

In a moment of intense feeling, she hated the man as much, or more, than she had ever known she could hate. That she, Mona Hartly, in this remote Pacific island could have been Involved in a situation of national importance, she could not have believed. The flame of her anger blazed passionately. She hated this man, who ungenerously, dead to every Instinct of chivalry, had sought to use an impulsive, an innocent, folly against her at a time when he knew that knowledge of it would wreck her life and destroy it utterly. She saw in him the representative of a country that had outraged the laws of humanity and cynically disregarded the rights of the weak. She recognised In him the characteristics of the people who had made these things possible.

She knew that he would have no mercy if his opportunity came, yet, whatever the consequences to herself, she had resolved that she would not go

to the swamp. She realised that it was probably her duty to give Information as to Schonholtz's hiding place, but her spirit quailed at the thought of doing so. To do so would antagonise him she knew; she had a hundred brain pictures of the consequences; she was not sure that In the end she would not give information, but Just for the moment, she must wait.... and think a little more, she told herself miserably.

In the days that followed she watched her husband's set face. At meals he was morose, inclined to talk widely and harshly to her and to watch her. She wondered, anxiously, why he discussed subjects that he had never discussed before with her. It was certainly flattering, although she would have preferred him to be a little more moderate in his expression of opinions, and not so particularly polite in asking for an Indication of her views. She did not realise that she had developed a new manner. Her mind was busy with her perplexities— with Schonholtz, his visit, his threats, her duty, the wide spreading results of that old impulsive action of hers. She could not decide what to do. Sometimes while she sat silent, and preoccupied she found her husband's sombre eyes on her face and the train of her thought snapped. She talked nervously, gaily, to distract him. She began to have a scarcely formulated fear that he was watching her.

IT WAS four days after the German's visit to the house that they sat together in the inner room, and for the first time since then a restful silence lay between them. Reading in a low chair with her feet on a little rush stool, Mona Hartly could see her man directly opposite her. He was fidgeting with a newspaper which was neither new nor interesting. Outside the sea breaking on the reef boomed like the great guns taking a turn at the enemy. The wind rushed screamingly round the frail weatherboard dwelling. All the windows had been barred, but shook in their sockets, rattling and creaking ceaselessly. The rain started. Heavy pieces of wood, branches and shells and stones rattled on the corrugated iron roof. Once looking up from her book, Mona found her husband's eyes on her. She did not speak then, but later when their eyes met again she said something about the storm

"A bad night for anybody hiding in the swamps or on the hills," said Hartly.

She took it calmly.

"You mean Oscar Schonholtz?"

"Yes. He must be better in with the natives than we thought, Mona, if he's getting anything to eat... while he lies low. But I can't think he is— I've been keeping a pretty good look out, and I don't thing anybody is taking tucker to him— I don't think so."

She nodded, and went on with her book. Four days had passed since Schonholtz had placed on her the responsibility of taking food to him, and she had not moved a foot to do so. The knowledge that he was starving moved her to compassion in spite of herself. Realisation of his suffering was intensified with every hour that passed. The thought that he had ever been her companion for long mellow evenings, and that she had gone so far as to write him words that might be mistaken for something more than expressions of gay friendliness, infuriated her now-but could she let him starve? He had behaved detestably but— after all, he was a man fighting for his life, and— if she took him the food she would not have the idea of his death among the crab holes of the swamp, to haunt her— she would save herself also. He had promised to give her the papers....

She almost decided that she would go down to the swamps at low tide next day, take a second pair of boots, and hide those that she waded the black mud in. She put down her book. The wind was blowing so. She wondered whether it would burst in some of the windows, scatter the glass and shatter woodwork in every direction, as it sometimes did. She listened, listlessly, to its rushing breath. In it came something from a human throat voicing an uncontrollable agony.

"Food," the wind seemed to shriek. "Food— f-o-o-d. M-o-n-a— f-o-o-d."

It was unendurable, that sound. Rising quickly, she went to her husband. He put down his paper and looked at her, a cynical smile in his eyes.

"I'm frightened," she said, putting her hand out to him. There was a breathless sob in her voice. "It's childish, but I'd like to sit on your knee as I used to put— feel your arms round me— I'm so frightened tonight— it's the wind, I think."

Hartly flamed to the roots of his hair.

"Almost sounds as if someone were calling you from the sea," he said.

She sat on his knee, but he did not attempt to put his arms around her or hold her there.

"That is what startled me, Bertram," she said. "You see, I am the only woman left on the island, and that man at large— used to come here frequently."

She caught his hands, on the brink of confession.

Out of the beating confusion of the storm came that wail again.

"Food! F-o-o-d M-o-n-a— f-o-o-d!"

Hartly broke into rapid speech.

"You were friendly enough to be of use now," he said. "We can't find this man, and there must be a leakage of help from somewhere. The natives are under the strictest military discipline— they can't help him much and he'll

want help presently— want it badly! You were rather friendly once upon a time with Schonholtz."

"Once," she murmured, holding his hand tighter.

"You used to have all sorts of arguments about— oh, stuff I didn't cotton to." Hartly smiled. "You are smart enough to trap him yourself, Mona. Suppose you try?"

"Try? How could I— the only woman on the place?"

"The only reason I ask."

The woman stared into her husband's face. Their eyes were close, but she could not hold his—

"You, my husband, ask me to trap a man because I am a woman— because we were friends before all this trouble started. You ask me to put myself in the position of— of—"

"Of nothing that would do you a minute's harm. You could go about openly— perhaps carry food and drink with you. I should, of course, make arrangements with the authorities— tell them that you were rendering valuable service. And so you would be if you capture Schonholtz. You know that he was found signalling a German cruiser beyond the reef a few days ago."

"But Schonholtz might shoot me on sight."

"No, he wouldn't— not if he saw the food you were taking him "

"And you wish me to search him out and... betray him?"

His piercing eyes were almost black; she realised by a fleeting glitter that she had made a mistake.

"I beg your pardon, Mona," he said, "but there ought to be no such word between you and Schonholtz.  I want you to find him... then I will deal with him."

"I see. And how... do you propose that I am to find him?"

Hartly smiled. She got off his knee.

"Oh, I don't suppose you'll have much difficulty," he said. "You might use some of those airs and graces you used to be so keen on, to keep him where he is, until—"

Mona flushed and turned from him.

"You are insulting," she said. "I'm sorry that I came near you... just now. I'm no longer afraid of Schonholtz.... or of you."

She dropped into her seat by the window again.

"I will do what is necessary, only under the circumstances..." She picked up her book, spread it on her knees, and with hands pressed to her ears, tried to suppress the tumult of emotion that sent the blood rushing past her ears; shut out the moan and roar of the wind; and that terrible call of "food, f-o-o-d... f-o-o-d," which still came through the night.

WHEN Mona Hartly passed out of the house the next morning and went slowly down the steep path to the beach, she looked back to see if her husband had gone on to the verandah. She was sure that he knew she was going, and what the grass-bag, she carried in one hand, contained. She could imagine his slow, cynical, smile as he followed her passage down hill. But he was not on the verandah.

When she reached the beach, he would not be able to see her from the verandah, or the windows beyond it. She wondered whether he would follow her. She did not think so. Once, perhaps, he would have thought of the danger to her in such a task as he had set her, but not now. It was a long time since there had been any sentiment between them, and to judge from the failure of her overture the night before, it would be a still longer time before she attempted to bridge the gulf of their estrangement.

It was probable that Schonholtz had a revolver— if he had... perhaps he would shoot her, when she had given him bread and meat. No... she realised quickly, he would not shoot. That would make a noise... but there were other ways by which he might make an end of her.

She did not think she would greatly object. There was even some comfort in the idea. She was taking food to him; but when she returned she would tell Hartly where she had found Schonholtz, and then the German would be sure to have his revenge.

This, of course, would mean disgrace and misery. There would be nothing to live for. It might be just as well if Schonholtz settled the matter at once. A little, weary, bitter smile played about her mouth.

Some distance along the beach, out of sight of the house, she sat down. A man-o'-war lay on the green waters of the lagoon within the reef; her engines quiet. The evil spirit that had disturbed the island a few days before seemed dead. There was peace in the lisping, dreamy murmur of the waves on the beach, peace in the whisper of the wind that breathed through the palms and the tangled jungle of bushes and trees that climbed the steep cliffs, peace in the haze of sunshine that overhung the island. Mona got up with a sigh, her glance flying back along the beach. She wondered if by chance her husband had followed her; but there was no sign of anyone on the beach or along the cliff edge, against the dark tangle of the trees.

She went on taking a path which led inland; she skirted the mangrove swamps, working her way through the net-worked foliage, and wading through the mud and filth of the thousands of crab-holes which sea-vermin had grooved on the edge of the swamps. She came again to the coast and the high uncertain cliffs of the peninsula at the end of the island. She had to climb those

cliffs, find her way somehow down their steep, perilous slopes on the further side, and there, somewhere, she expected to find the man she was seeking.

She staggered on wearily; the bag in her hand seemed heavier every moment. She slipped on the wet weed-grown rocks of the cliffs. They were worn into a thousand cuttings; worn by the fierce seas that were lashed in on them from the reef, and had edges like the teeth of a saw. Her hands were cut and bleeding. There were curious caves and hollows among the rocks, and into these she peered anxiously, dreading, and yet eager, to meet Schonholtz face to face.

Once or twice she called him; but the wind and the echoing hollows brought back her cry "Oscar!" But word echoed among the rocks but there was no reply. When she reached the top of the cliffs she lay there breathlessly for a while. Then she threw away the basket she was carrying the food in, for fear, when he saw her, Schonholtz might not realise that she was bringing it to him. Slowly, carefully, she began the descent of the cliff again. Hearing a faint, scarcely human, cry when she had gone but a few yards she hesitated. It seemed to come to her again, and from a break in the cliff, a little to her left; leaning over the edge of it, she peered down. Something prostrate and with unkempt hair and tattered clothing, was tearing the slime and sand at the bottom of a cave-like hollow in the rocks.

The smell of putrid fish rose to her nostrils as she looked down. Her hand with the food in it hung just over the edge of the rocks. The man, scenting something different in his atmosphere, looked up. With a snarl, almost canine he sprang towards her, and began to ascend the wall of his hiding-place. She saw the blood drip from his feet as they were cut on the rocks, caught one glimpse of his wild eyes, and then fear, a primitive, unreasoning passion of fear, possessed her, and she fled.

She climbed the cliff, scarcely realising that she was doing so, and ran across the open land on the back of the peninsula in a frenzy of terror. She did not realise that she was clutching the bread and meat that she had meant to throw into that hole among the rocks. Looking over her shoulder, she saw the man beating away behind her, his hair blown, back in the wind, his dirty, weed-stained body, half-clothed only, breaking through the bushes and crashing over the stones.

She was taking to the cover of the scrub that reached away inland, when the crack of a rifle ripped the quiet air.

Mona stopped running. She looked back. Her husband on the far side of the peninsula was lowering his rifle. The man who had been following her lay a few yards away, on the grass, beating the air with his arms, and shrieking all manner of incoherencies.

"Give it to me... something to eat... God! God!" she heard him cry, and with that yell were mingled a thousand imprecations.

Looking down on the food in her hands, she realised that this was probably what he had so fiercely followed her for. He was hunger-mad. And now he thought she had lured him into the open with food in order that Hartly might shoot him. There would be no preventing him telling her husband the story of those articles and the letters unless— On a swift thought she threw the food to him. That would perhaps stop his mouth for a moment, give her time to think.

The writhing creature on the grass grabbed the meat and bread. He tore at it and crammed it into his mouth in large ugly lumps. Mona scarcely looked at him; her eyes went to her husband, who was advancing towards her. The sinister smile on his face seemed to have deepened when she threw that food to the man in the grass. Husband and wife stood staring at each other, a little distance apart. The German watched them out of blood-rimmed eyes, wolfing his meal. He choked and muttered Incoherently.

Mona's eyes did not leave her husband's face; in them was a pitiful pride, fear, and appeal for mercy. She expected Schonholtz to speak. She waited for the words with which he would break the silence. She wondered why he did not speak. Hartly, realising a suspense of her attitude, glanced towards the man in the grass. He muttered an exclamation of impatience, and went over to him.

Mona turned. Bertram Hartly was kneeling beside the other man, whose face was horribly distorted. He seemed to be struggling for breath. In his haste, and after days of hunger, his throat had refused to give to the largeness of the lumps of meat; the muscles had lost control. He seemed to. be choking. Bertram dropped the gun, and leaning over the German rendered what services he could... The man seemed to be trying to speak.

"She— she," he muttered.

It was coming at last, the story she dreaded.

Mona rushed forward.

"Don't believe him, Bertram," she sobbed. "He is delirious; he doesn't know what he is saying. He has some papers of mine— perfectly harmless they were when I wrote them: but they would be hurtful if he used them against me at this. You remember about that house-boy— you know I was indignant—"

She was trembling uncontrollably, the tears streaming down her face.

"I— I talked things over with him. I trusted him with my ideas. We were friends. I even wrote him a rather foolish letter."

Hartly turned his eyes on her, and his smile was not one of relenting.

"Ah— there were possibly plans in that letter?"

"Yes; but I should never have dreamed of trying to carry them out."

Hartly bent over the man on the grass. His breath was easier, his strength seemed to be failing.

"Tell me," he said, casually, "You would have left the island, probably with Schonholtz?"

"Perh-a-ps." She was wondering what game he was playing now.

"More than likely, and—" he stood and looked her in the eyes. "I should never have known but for this—" He indicated the German with his loot, "it is what I have been stacking for— to know."

Taking the direct glance of her eyes, went on coolly.

"You made one fatal error. Oscar Schonholtz was taken prisoner early yesterday and shot. This man— I think he is dead now— is an escaped prisoner from the man o' war— but as you see he has helped me wonderfully to a knowledge of my wife's interests— and associations."

"Wonderfully," she repeated, with slow contempt, and turning away from him went back by the track on the edge of the swamp to the beaches near the township, where Lieutenant Walker was marshalling his men and preparing to leave the island in lifeboats for the man-o'-war.

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## 12: The Case of Camelia

*Punch* 3 Dec 1912

"FOR Gawd's sake stop moonin' about the place," said Mrs. Peel. "Give over thinkin' yer done bad by that feller, and get to the soakin' of the clothes."

The girl put the stump of broom behind the door, and picked up an assortment of dirty dungaree clothing from the corner of the kitchen.

"I dunno why you can't, see that George Gammin was as much above yer head as them stars in Heaven," the woman went on, deliberately eyeing the girl as if she deserved censure for ever having spoken to the man under discussion. "Don't yer know he's better breed than you is, and wants a wife wot can do the things worth talkin' about? Specially now he's come into all that money by his uncle."

The girl went to the galvanised tub near the tank in the yard, and put in the dungaree clothes ready for washing. Then she pumped the water over them. It was full of dregs that showed that the water must be at a low mark in the tank, and it was about the colour of soup, thick soup, soup that had a texture .that wouldn't tear easily. The woman put her head through the kitchen window and shouted:

"Don't waste them drops from the tank, Camelia. We got to be more careful, and go slow on that water now, with the drought right under our very noses."

Camelia lifted the tub to the bench under the window, and the woman walked away while she cut an over-mellow pumpkin into fair-sized cubes and threw them into the boiler on the fire.

"Yer've no right to think about George Gammin at all," she said. "I telled yer father only this mornin' that I knew you been settin' yerself up as a case for him. It ain't a woman, just a common, ordinary woman like you, he's needin', now he's gone in with the school learnin' and the universer v after that. He never was suited to *you*, 'Melia, any more than he was suited to me, and I hopes you got more sense than to think that you could'er lived his ways any more than you could be the King of Europe. Put in some of that soap I made last month— them trousis of yer father's will want sousing by the look of them."

Camelia went into the kitchen and brought out a tin of reeky, corrupted-looking fat that her mother had called soap. She ran her two fingers round the tin, and then worked the grease between her palms and separated it into the

tub. She let her eyes wander over the fences and the undulating land that comprised the Sheep River District.

Presently the woman came to the door.

"There you are," she said, "moonin' again you get me set into nerves with your eyes fixed onto nothing that way. Just becorse a feller sees fit to come to a place for a year and spend a bit of your time for you, talkin' nice, and alkm over the fields with you. I knoo quite well when yer father come and asked me to hitch up years before you was born that he was my man, and not any higher by the laws of ordinary work people, and I never set to lookin' any higher. Now, you believe me, Camelia, I know what's your good in life, and I'm not gom to let you dream about things what you was never born to."

Camelia took her hands out of the tub and rubbed them on her dress. "I wasn't settin' up to nothin'," she said.

"Well, I'd like to know what you was doin' then?" said the woman. "You got wide of the place last night, and one of the boys tells me you was sittin' up at the ironstone hill same as if Gammin had been comin' there to meel you."

"I was jes' thinkin'," said the girl, standing near the door and turning her eyes to the country again.

"Yes, thinkin' how George done you a funny thing after keepin' company with you for near a year. I tell you, 'Melia, that he done you no harm. He meant to be yer friend, but then he didn't know he was comin' into that money by his uncle. Can't you see that he must have a thorough fine girl wot has a bunch of brains in her head? Lord! you got about as much of them as the calves has when they tries to get through the nettin' and barbed-wire fence. You can't even put yer clo'es on proper, never hav ing had any wo'rth anvthing of a fit ; and your boots is never out of the yard dirt until you goes to bed at nights. I dunno how you could think that feller Gammin meant anything by his walks and his intentions."

Camelia went past the window to the room that opened off the yard next to the kitchen, and the woman went inside to attend to the late breakfast of her husband. She talked in a voice that reached the girl through the thin partition between her room and the kitchen, and Camelia went on with the work of doing out her room as if they were nowhere near.

"Jes' what I telled you," said the woman ; "our Camelia sits half the morning moonin' over George Gammin, and him miles away in the town, learnin' himself into a smart man what's going to do something in the world, and her only fit to work in a kitchen."

The man was slopping the basin of tea into his throat without the aid of his mouth at all. He suddenly stopped and put down the basin, and dragged his shirt-sleeve all round his face to clear it of the splashes from his late breakfast.

"I dunno," he said. " 'Melia's a fine standin' lump of solid flesh, and has got eyes that cut into a chap somethin' terrible, Gurdy was tellin' me."

"Eyes?" said Mrs. Peel. "What's eyes to a man who wants a brainful girl to keep up with his learnin' so that he don't need to be ashamed of her at table when he's friends about?"

havin' his Mr. Peel got up to look for his handkerchief.

"Well, I dunno, but 'Melia might do something one of these days. I don't know as much learnin' puts on yer profit in a country. What did you do with me handkerchif? I put it in the corner yesterday."

"It's gone to the wash same as your other things," said the woman. " 'Melia "won't do nothin' save what's shoved under her nose like the wash-tub out there."

Mr. Peel moved to the door.

"I'm goin' to get Gurdy to put in a say for 'Melia," he said, scooping his tongue round his mouth as a finish to the meal. "Gurdy's got the new job up at the Brumbie yards, and may be chief slaughterer in a few years. That'd be a real good thing for 'Melia. You might say something about it in her hearin' presently. Maybe she might think about her rightful place fer marryin' then."

"More in Camelia's line," said the woman, "and she'll find it out one of these days, I can tell you."

That night, just as the gloom was setting in for the Sheep River District, the girl wandered away from the house, and carelessiy lay herself down in the spot where she and her "Might-have-been" man used to talk away from the voice of the woman whose interruptions were as repeated as the tick of the kitchen clock if she saw the two together.

Camelia watched the glow of the sun turn down like a lamp in the west. She was sitting on the stone where she and Gammin sat every time they met or returned from the Sunday outing to the creek. Here they dodged the tongue of the woman and her opinion as to the waste of words and time they might be letting loose. Here they secreted the little tin billycan that they took when they went to picnics. It was hidden now under the stone where the girl sat.

She took it out. It was looking a bit worse for not having been used for the last few weeks. Camelia remembered they had put it there as usual when they parted the last time they had gone to the creek. The water of the creek was pretty low and pretty thick, and so the tea had had a slightly different look about it, but the lovers had not noticed the taste any more than they had noticed the time, and the billycan had been Hidden on the way home, and they had not gone out again. Camelia thought it was a bit rusty, but she liked the feel of it in her hand. She swung it backwards and forwards as she might have

done had she been walking beside her sweetheart again. They would never use it again together; never drink the scalding tea from it in turn.

She put it very carefully back in the cleft under the stone on which she sat. It should stay there, and no one else should learn the secret of its refreshing power. She would forget about it, as Gammin would possibly do. He wouldn't like to be reminded when he was a great man at the top of the world that he had drunk out of a little black billycan when the water of the creek had been dregs and strained from the mud.

The next week she met Tim Gurdy at the door of the kitchen, and she kept her face straight to him, and not to the hills where she had wandered with the man who had gone to town to make his mark.

"Yer fine soild built," said Gurdy, cutting his chew and looking up at Camelia.

"Not good fer nothin', but jest what's here," said Camelia without a trace of the dream in her eyes that had been there a week ago.

"Yer good fer me, anyway," said Gurdy, pushing his hat back and showing his purpose in a ready smile.

" 'Spose we is jus' two ordinary people," said Camelia.

Gurdy didn't try to understand anything but his own point.

"I want you to marrv me," he said. "Would you he my— woman?"

Camelia looked at him, folded her arms over her dress, and said she would.

CAMELIA stood outside the fence of her own place. She wore a man's dungaree coat, rolled up to the elbow, and a pair of blucher hoots. Beside her was a fitting accompaniment of a pot of jaundice-looking paint, which she spread over the fence with a brush formerly used for painting the fowl-house with whitewash. While she worked her way along the fence she kept giving instructions to someone named Hen, inside the gate.

"See the hinge on this here gate?" she said. "I'll have to get it off and put another one on before it gives altogether. We can't have stray cattle wanderin' in to feed over our bit of ground."

Hen, who happened to be ten years old, and the eldest son of the woman, came to leok at the gate. "That means I'll have to walk to Grubbers' tomorrow to get a new hinge," he said.

"Don't know if I can spare you to do the ten mile to-morrow," said Camelia. "We got to go out three miles into the forest to fetch that wood with the horse. There's a big, wallopin' gum right across the track that wants sawin' before wc can get the draw-chains on for the horse."

The child noticed a spiral of dust on the road, and a tramp kicking his feet through it.

"Here's one of them sundowners comin fer tea," he said, and the woman just glanced up and went on daubing the post unmercifully.

"No time to attend to them wasters this season," she said. "Must get on with the paint, and try to start the paperin' of the kitchen before night. Then there's that pig up the yard waitin' to be killed. Hope I can get time to stick it to-night."

The boy went back to the side of the house, where he was engaged with a hammer and tools.

The tramp in the dust stopped, and asked Camelia if she wanted anything done, and if he could get some tucker or a meal there? The woman went on splashing the paint over the fence, and did not look at him.

"Dunno about the job," she said. "There's usual a feed handy about if you can wait a bit. I gotter get the fence done, as there's a pig up the yard got to be killed, as she's ordered up to Wing Flat to-morrow. S'pose you been on the road months by the look of you. Dunno where there ain't work to be done about here. You ought to have plenty of chance to get your hands going. I can^t find time since Gurdy died to get everything in a day. Maybe the boys will be more of a help when they finish the schooling the Government obliges them with across the river. You can chop some wood if you want to. There ain't much to do, as Hen and me's going into the forest to-morrow with the crosscut saw to get a giant tree into our own yard with the horse."

She called out to the boy: "Here, Hen, I just remembered. We got to start early to-morrow. The posts what got burnt last week has to he cut and put in. Nex' time I get a few shillin's from the fat I'm goin' to get a roll of wire. Stops the rabbits from comin' into the pertato patch."

Hen answered from the ill-balanced structure of boards that he was endeavouring to shape into a shed for the lemons to ripen in. The tramp said he would chop the wood, and went into the place and round to the back. The woman came in with him, and carried the paint bucket with her.

"That's a smart boy of yours," said the man.

"Dunno," said Camelia. "Don't call buildin' a fowl-house smart. There's the wood-heap." She pointed to the axe, and went into the kitchen.

"Better put on them plums or the jam won't be ready when the pots gives out," she said to herself. "Glad I got the fence done. What with the township goin' up that quick it takes more than a ordinary man to keep up with it, to say nothing of a woman and five boys. S'pose the little kids will be home soon and want some tea. I better get that swaggie something to eat, too, I s'pose. Then I'll stick the pig and start the papering."

When she looked out of the door she saw a child carrying a spadeful of yard debris about. The tramp was leaning against the shed watching the boy. Camelia called out to the child.

"Ain't you got enough dirt out of that hole, Billy? If you waits till to-morrow, when me and Hen goes with the horse, I'll give you a hand fixin' the sides with stringy bark so that the soil don't give in on yer. We can keep the meat in there in the hot weather if you get a proper sort of hole cut out and lined."

The tramp went over with the boy to investigate the hole. Presently the woman called him from the back-door.

"Yer better come in and have a bite," she said. "There'll be plenty of time before the light goes for you to split them logs afterwards."

The man of the road needed no second bidding, and came into the kitchen with a happy smile.

"You got two boys?" he said.

"I got five," said Camelia. "Dunno what I'd 'er done when my husband died throueh the fever four years ago if I hadn't them boys to work for. Not as I minded Gurdy dyin' so much, but, you see, it wouldn't be much use keepin' up a place all for myself. Providence usually makes it worth while if yer keep goin' long enough. I want the boys to have a bit to go on with when they comes to be men, and so I lets them all do a turn when it comes along. That reminds me, I got that pig "

A small sample of boy flesh shoved his head inside the door.

"My word, mum," he said, "I near lost them fowls through the box breaking on the way to the school. I got the old rooster with his head half out of the thing, and I had to chase the brown chook a mile and a-half."

"Hope you got 'em to the parson," said Camelia.

"Course I did, but I was a bit late for the teacher."

"Better come in fer your tea now," said the woman. "If yer going up to the shed you better tell little Walter to stop sorting out the onions and come inside. I want to put a patch in them trousis of his before he sits through them altogether."

The tramp was making a hearty meal of the bread, and meat, and jam. He kept looking at the woman, but she had no time to take much notice of him. She was slashing the paste over the paper that she was going to put upon the wall.

After a bit the man went out to the yard again to the wood-heap, and Camelia called her five boys and gave them their tea.

Half-an-hour afterwards she went up the yard to look for the tramp. He was nowhere to be seen. The axe lay where it had been lying when she had

called him into his tea, and the logs were the same size as when they had been brought in from the scrub.

"Just one of them wasters," said the woman.

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## 13: The Painted Wooden Soldier

*Weekly Times* 18 Dec 1909

A MAN was sitting on a log cutting a piece of wood with an old pruning knife. His hat was far back on his tousled head, and just shaded his neck from the penetrating rays of the last sun of that day, a sun that sank away in such vibrant glory that could but mean more scorching 'heat on the morrow.

He had been cutting the stick for a solid hour or two without much result of outline, but now it began to look more shapely, more characteristic of a child's toy. Such was the intention of the man— to carve a plaything for his little child on the morrow. After a time he looked up and sighed, then wiped the heavy perspiration drops from his forehead with his shirt sleeve.

"It isn't much like a soldier!" he said, rather grimly. "When I've glued a bit of red paper across the chest of him and painted him up a bit— perhaps he might shape better."

Then he looked across a space of heated atmosphere, and circulating insects, to where a low-roofed flat sort of house stood in a vacant patch between the great giant trees.

"Three years " he said, forgetting the poker-like soldier that he had been carving for two hours. "I thought it might be two but three! No wonder she gets tired and sort of off things every year at this time. Christmas isn't much, out here, when it's 110 degrees in the shade, and pests of flies and mosquitoes every day, and nothing to mark it as Christmas at all. I reckoned on giving them both a bit of a trip this year, but— Lord! here comes Christmas again, and no chance—"

He laughed bitterly, and dropped the wooden soldier on the ground in disgust.

"Why, I haven't even got a fare to town, save what's put by for paying off that old horse! Must fix that up, and let Christmas puddings and presents go for another year! My God! if I could only give her one day of what I had when I was a boy at home this time every year. How things change."

His voice broke; then he picked up the naked wooden stick from among the giant ants on the heated ground, and wandered up the rest of the wooded gully to the house.

"Leastways," he said, sorrowfully, looking at the rude cut toy, "the little kid won't know what she's missing by stopping out among the timber, with only the sound of the traction engine in her little ears for another year or two. God alone knows how Stella bears through it all."

He pushed open the door of this kitchen and went in. Myriads of buzzing, noisome flies rose up with a repeated war cry as he passed the table set for tea. The meal had been left uncovered, and the flies descended again on it in a body, that was like an army set in motion.

A woman with a young, pretty face stood near the main door, and when Jim looked at her, she turned swiftly through the door, and he heard her sobbing in the bedroom. Like a bolt shot into his heart, Jim felt fright strike through him; he strode heavily after her.

"Don't do that!" he said, with his voice quiet, arid his hands shaking. "Don't give up, old girl. I can't bear it."

The girl just cried softly, sitting on the bed in a huddled up attitude.

"If — it— wasn't Christinas," she sobbed, and Jim caught her by the shoulders, turning her face to him.

"Look here, Stella," he said, shaking where he stood, "I knew when I brought you out to this timber hell, three years ago, that it was going to be up-hill work all the time, but, before God, my girl, I never thought that at the end of this time we wouldn't he able to afford even—"

He couldn't go on, and a restless movement of his hand pushing.back the hair on his hot head showed, the gin the little, rudely-cut toy. For a moment she stared at him through her tears; then slowly took the wooden image from his fingers, and, looking at it barely a second, tossed it on to the cover of the bed.

"In all this time," she said quickly, "I've never spoken, out— because, because— I've waited for things to be better. It wouldn't hurt so if— if it wasn't Christmas!"

Jim just looked at her, and did not answer. He was in a mind of bitterness against all things. The girl stood up and shut her fingers well into her palms.

"Down there," she said, flashing on him a look of penetrating bitterness- "down there, where there's music and light, and laughter and happiness— where a woman can be a woman, and not a pest-driven beast; down there, where there are people to talk to— I feel I must go. How can I put in more time here with— with nothing and worse than nothing to make life even an existence at all."

Jim's face lined into a deep regret, a sorrow that was cutting his very soul.

"Wait a moment," he said, slowly crossing the room to a corner shelf. "There is just jenough, I think," he went on, rather roughly for his usual self. "It will take you there, at least, and a little over. Perhaps you could go to your sister for a week."

He put some money down on the bed, beside where she stood, and then he smiled forcedly and unhappily.

Stella, stared at him, still opening and shutting her hands nervously.

"You just hurry now and get into that last summer's new dress; and I'll get you to the station in time to catch the through train to-night! Isn't that a bit of a surprise, eh?"

He was trying to look jovial over it, but his heart was weighted as if with leaden balls.

"You— can't do it— Jim!" she gasped, clasping her hands in an entreaty that might have meant that she hoped he could, all the same. Jim stroked her hair with one hand.

"Yes, I can, though! Me and the little kid won't feel the miss of what you'll be having if you get to town tomorrow morning. You can bring us back the news of what's doing down there. Have a week of it, and never mind how you spend that. It won't go far, but—"

Then he picked up the little wooden soldier from the. bed, and held it carefully in his big hand. "I'm going to give him a red coat," he said, in a strained voice, "a little red boat. He's only a bush soldier— never seen active service— but he's got a big heart, and— and— he's a fine, generous sort of little chap, because he's going to do a heap of good things tomorrow! Ha! Ha! Look at him, Stella! All the joy and sunshine in the word are going to shine out of him to-morrow."

He was laughing, though his face showed the strain that told of forced joviality.

The girl turned towards him. Her voice was fearsome now, like, one about to do an action to be scorned afterwards.

"If I could only go— just for— for— oh! Jim, you're sure you don't mind?"

"Look here, little woman," Jim spoke up again, and this time the tone was more firm, more assured.

"I'm not going to think about this at all. You go along now— and when you see the lights and hear the gay voices and laughter down there you can know that I'm living same as them up here among the timber— living and fighting life, fighting hard like a strong soldier, not a little painted one. And some day — well, some day, we'll remember the worst that ever was, and know it is gone for ever!"

He left the room, telling her to hurry, and, meeting his baby child in the kitchen, he picked it up and folded it tight in his arms.

"We'll have to start all over again, kiddie," he said, with his face in the child's neck. "That money was for old Jack, but, after all, she's before him— isn't she?"

A HUNDRED miles away from the timber gully, amid the dancing lights and the coolness of a refreshing sea breeze that wafted itself over the lamp-lit gardens of the house of Christmas festivity, Stella, with happiness anew in her eyes, looked as if she had suddenly been replanted in another sphere— the sphere of rest and pleasure.

A friend of the years ago sat watching beside her in the colored lights of the garden lamps, and bent his head again and again in subdued questionings.

"You won't go back again, Stella. Oh, you can't go back again!"

Stella's eyes shed the lustre that comes with a desire to take up a tempted opportunity, whatever the cost. She laughed lightly.

"Go back again!" she said, looking straight into his face. "I never want to see those big trees again." Suddenly she shivered and spoke quietly. "Oh, you don't know what it's like out there for a woman! There's nothing but heat, and flies and monotony, and—" She jumped up and moved quickly on to the verandah. The man followed, and stood speaking over her shoulder almost into her ear. "...you are not going back. Do you think I've forgotten in all this time—?"

Stella looked into; the garden and thought hard things of the man who had placed her life so much apart from her own inclination. She felt in her own right in listening to the voice of her friend of the years before her marriage.

"Stella!!" No answer. Her eyes were fixed in thought.

"Stella!!!" A hand warm with the night and its alluring charms, caught at her own in the shadow. ''You... care enough... to stay—?"

She turned close to him then and pressed the hand that had. tempted her. "Yes... I care— enough!!!"

Her eyes were ablaze with this new life, and the lights of the garden danced in them, shutting out the dreadful weariness that had grown there from her monotonous existence in the bush.

But far away, where no soft evening breezes fell, among the rough cut timber, where the hum of biting insects was the only sound to break the night, a man with a set face and troubled eyes, sat in a low-roofed room, holding a tangled headed baby on his knee asleep, and in his hand a painted wooden soldier that he had forgotten to put down.

ANOTHER three years came across the life of the man among the giant trees and the traction engine, but at the end of that time a change broke into the monotony.

It was the remembrance of his home people and the legacy of an English relative that brought Jim Inglis and his child to the comfort of a town life. Again Christmas dawned, hot and sultry, but the filtering sunshine in the suburban

garden of his house seemed more kindly disposed than when it had baked and cracked the ground in the timber gully three years before.

Jim walked about the gravel paths, with earnest eyes turned every now and then towards his child, who sported many gawdy toys on a raised patch of well-kept grass.... Toys there were, enough to make up for all the years that the child had never known such joys.

"See this man walk!"

The six-year-old child laughed, winding up an automatic being and letting it vibrate itself along the gravel walk. Jim watched until the tin man tumbled into the edge of a garden bed, then he turned towards the gate.

Suddenly, from out the moving crowd, a girl with a pretty face and a shabby dress, stopped, staring into the garden at the child on the grass, and not seeing the man near the gate.

"Baby!" she said, almost whispering, and the man near the gate heard and threw it open. She crouched before him.

"You don't want me to come in, Jim— do you?" she asked timidly.

And Jim just waited until the look in his face almost propelled her through the gate.

"We're having a merry Christmas," he said, quietly, not looking at her. "We're not playing at it this time... the little kid is doing the entertaining for the first time in her life. Perhaps you'll want an introduction after— after this long while!"

The children came down the path, with big, serious eyes.

"Have you come for a merry Christmas?" she asked the woman, whose face paled where she stood.

"Will you give it to me?" was the answer in a broken voice.

"Oh yes," said the child. "The table is set for three, so I suppose Daddy must have known you were coming."

Only a gasp from the woman told the surprise she was feeling at it all. She stood watching the child until a hand softly led her into the house, and when they stopped it was in front of a high mantel-shelf, where, before a length of mirror, a glass case held a red painted wooden soldier.

"That... as the only remembrance!" said the man, pointing to the glass case, and the woman understood and burst into tears

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## 14: Mobilising Johnnie

*Weekly Times* 23 Jan 1915.

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE of the hardest work of the season, the eldest son of James and Mary Porters threw up the job he was on, and made a final declaration in the living-room of his father's house.

"Mother, I'm for Sydney."

The words didn't exactly create a panic, but they stirred up enough trouble to make the next few days into a chaos of seething, fermenting, eruptions:

Mrs Porters answered him.

"You're for Sydney, are you? In the middle of the work? P'raps you're, for your best suit of clothes, too, and your other boots, an' p'raps you're asking father an' me to let you have a couple of pounds in your pocket to spend down town. I shouldn't be over-judging you, Johnny, should I, if I was to say you'd be expectin' us to harness up Billy the horse, and get you to the station by the mail train tonight?"

There was enough humor in her tones to give anyone the correct joke she wished to serve, but Johnny knew the seriousness that lay behind.

"I'm not saying a thing about best clothes and money in me pockets. I just said I was for Sydney— right away."

In the low living-room, the woman, standing over a half-cooked joint on a kerosene tin on the fire-chains, turned to look at him.

"You got a great cheek. Johnny, then, to suppose father an me'd allow you to go to the town in your workin' clothes. We'd as soon think of it— as think of you goin' at all at such a time, and the work near killing us all as it is."

She started to walk away, but Johnny brought her back, quick turn, with his repeated declaration.

"I tell you, mother, I'm for Sydney."

More serious now, she asked irritably. "What for?"

"To sign on."

"Sign what on?"

"Sign my name, on."

"On *what*?" She screamed the last word.

"On— on whatever they wants me to. To sign John Henry Porter's to go to the front."

Mrs Porters put her hands firmly on the table and leaned over to stare at him.

"The front— the front of what? Talk plainly and get it over, John."

"The front." Johnny himself became irritable then. "H'ain't you heard of the front, mother?"

"Front! I've heard of the front verandah and the front of father's starched shirts often enough when it comes to the doin' up of both. Look here, Johnny, make things easier if you want me to understand you. What's this 'front' you're talkin' about?"

"Well, didn't Father tell you there was war goin' on between England and Germany? Didn't Bill Hopkins come over last week and say there was printed notices up all over the township an' on the trees along the bridge road: 'Your King and Country Needs you'. That's what it is. 'Your King and Country Needs You.' That means it's calling to us chaps out here too, to go and join the army, that's what!"

Mrs Porters nodded slowly. "I see, and you've been thinking all this week, Johnny, that the King has been sort of calling your name to go to fight, eh? Kind of coo-ee-ing up our paddocks, has he? Funny, thing, neither me nor your father heard as much as a curlew these nights, much less the great King of England."

She laughed at her own joke.

"It's me been calling you, Johnny. Calling you of a morning till I'm tired to death, and the season's work at its hottest, and your father swotting something fearful over it. My word, I'd have something to say to the King and the country if they did happen to call you now."

But John Henry Porters was a son of the soil. A good, honest, steady youth, who only saw the glory of victory and honor in stern, hard, unrelenting duty, and that duty apparently belonged to him"

"Well, mother," he said quietly, I'm going to the front if they'll have me. My name's going down right away."

"Better ask your father," was the next shot from the female parent, and Johnny, as he took himself from the living-room, answered dutifully over his shoulder,

"I've asked him. He says it's all right. I'm going to sign on now."

Later Mrs Porters had a word with her man, in the presence of the entire family. Dinner and other things were the order of the hour.

"Seems like we're all getting highly serious about John having wrote his name to join in the fighting," she said.

"Nothing to laugh at in it, is there?" came from Porters, senior. He fixed a deep meaning eye on his wife.

"Laugh?" She looked thoroughly disgusted. "Who wants to laugh? I m surprised at you, Father. I was about to say that, seeing half the country lads is

what they call 'mobilising' themselves ready. We'd best get Johnny into suthin' decent to go and meet the King."

"Meet the King?" One blood-rimmed eye worked round to search the subject, and the old man held the floor for one fraction of a minute. .

"Well, I s'pose Johnny'll meet the King, as the King has called him! How's he going to fight for his country unless he knows where to go? Isn't the King responsible?"

"Course he's responsible," said the old man.

"And isn't Johnny responsible along with him?"

"Course he is."

This from a younger member of the family who knew something, the rest didn't:

"....Alf Brown says they got to carry a service rifle, but I s'pose the King 'ud have one of those large cannon-guns what's wheeled along."

This set the family thinking, and Mrs Porters looked a trifle more pleased.

"Does anyone happen to know if Geordie Carter is going?" she asked.

"Geordie Carter can't leave now his fathers dead and him in charge of things."

Mrs Porters looked more pleased than ever.

"I must call and have a talk with Mrs Carter," she said. "Must be orful to . have your only boy stoppin ' behind, like, he wasn't wanted. I must say if there was any saving of a country, an me a good strong, strapping fellow like Geordie, I'd like to be saying I had a hand in it."

And, proud as a Christmas turkey before the feast, Mrs Porters called on Mrs Carter.

"We're getting our Johnny away," she told her neighbor, sitting stiffly under her best summer bonnet and talking over an elevated chin. "We been mobilising him ever since the King and his country called him, I'm proud to say. It's a great day for us, too, with the girls all sewing his clothes and things ready, and the schoolmaster teaching him what to say and how to manage his feet."

Mrs Carter had certain instincts culled from her progenitors, who had fought in the Crimea and Peninsula wars, that somehow gave her an impetus now. She tried to put her neighbor right as regards Johnny's enlistment. .

"Your girls are only wasting their time, Mrs Porters. Johnny won't be allowed to take anything but what he stands up in, and a tin to eat his food out of."

"I beg your pardon, Mrs Carter, but Johnny is carrying a service rifle. I suppose you don't know what that is?"

"It's a single barrel gun, something like a Winchester repeater," said the unconquerable Mrs Carter. "I can show you one that my father's father carried

time of the Indian Mutiny. I don't suppose you'd know what that is, would you?"

"I never hold with fighting the natives, Mrs Carter."

Mrs Porters rose, with an objection to most things on her face.

"I should be ashamed to remember my people fighting the aborigines in a country that belonged to them. Up at our place, now, my husband always makes a point of employing black labor if he can. He says the blacks had first say in this country, and I s'pose it was the same in India when— when your fathers father tried to steal it from them."

She walked to the door. "Maybe you'll be seeing Johnny walking past in his uniform, presently. I must order up some red, white and blue ribbon, and make him a flag he can carry and be proud."

"ft would be better if you were to knit him a warm undershirt, go's he doesn't get cold at the front," said Mrs Carter as a benefit, but which somehow the other woman regarded rather as a brick thrown after her.

Meantime, things at the Porters' 16-acre lot progressed favorably. So now Johnny had signed on at the local township, and reflected certain graceful honors on the local maidens, who knew him well at the same time. John Henry Porters was a great success. No one spoke of the work in the present hot season.

The mobilising was complete to the last touch of sentiment. The girls and Mrs Porters, sewed late into the night. They had thought of everything, despite what Mrs Carter had said. Johnny was packed and ready with every available comfort and convenience that would go in a bag. In fact, he was ready to be called any minute, and daily he lingered about the kitchen or the verandah, or the unhinged front gate, in case a "blue paper envelope" might be handed in by the once-a-day mail boy. No one blamed him for leaving the; work to his father, and the -expensively hired man. No one said "Get busy" when he was first down to a meal, in case he got "called" before he was through with it.

Indeed, everybody for once, called him "Dearie," and his sisters lopped over him as he ate his food. Even the sisters, of his local pals lopped over him, where once it took sixpenny worth of milk rock or two seats at the local bioscope to get them to even take his arm. Indeed John Henry Porters knew he was a success generally. He knew it because he felt his King and his country calling him every time his mother woke him in the morning with, "John, it's a quarter to eight, dearie, an' father's been at work three hours."

He knew it by the bulging blanket provided with things he was sure to need at the front. The bulging- blanket contained flour and tea; and a little sugar, scented soap from the girls, and a book on "Doctoring' at Home" supplied by his eldest sister, who had heard hints that she would make a good nurse. (The

gentleman who had credited her with such talents was really looking for a housekeeper and a stepmother to his seven, half-washed bairns).

Another thing supplied to Johnny in his impromptu "kit" was a copy of the song, "A boy's best friend, is his mother," in B flat, and "Let me like a soldier fall," with maternal hopes written in one corner that he wouldn't.

Oh, Johnny knew he was a success from early morn till curlew call at night, and the whole district seemed to approve of him as a man and some thing-that England expected to do some certain deeds of glory presently.

And one day, in a tiring, uneventful afternoon, the "blue paper envelope" came over the gate. Johnny took it to his mother, who took it in her turn, to his father, who also took it out of his turn to his neighbor, and much was said thereon. It wasn't exactly the, "call," but it advised John Henry Porters to report at a certain quarter for examination and medical inspection. Indeed, indeed, the house of Porters was proud. Even the dogs barked with the excitement; the cows lowed; the pet wallaby wallowed, and the family famished for his return.

Johnny departed "pro tem" for inspection, and spent a nasty quarter of an hour under supervision of a burly deep-throated, hard-lipped man who looked at him as if he were a weed.

It was all very well, they told him afterwards, being able to ride like the wind on a bare-backed cow, knowing a gun from a mouth-organ in foggy weather, and having teeth as strong and deep-rooted as the rocks in the Atlantic Ocean; but didn't it ever strike him that the King wanted men the average height, not a foot and five inches under regulation size; and hadn't he better wait till he'd grown up a bit. There might be another war with Japan or Chili by that time. They advised him to stand out in the rain a bit meantime.

When he told his mother she performed like a maddened calf. She wrecked the "bit of country" that hadn't been called, as if he was sheer dirt and nothing better. She talked up hill and down dale, and said things about "her boy" being as good as anyone, whether he was undersized or tall as a gum tree.. She finished off by slapping the entire family, for wasting her time, and reckoned she'd say her say to the King and country next time she got the chance. She hoped Germany would win all the battles, and that it would serve England right for refusing to take Johnny.

Later, she simmered down, and things went on as usual, Porters senior never saying a word. Mrs Carter did see Johnny walking past her place some time after, but he wasn't in uniform, and he wasn't carrying the red, white and blue flag— nor the service rifle. He was in working "corduroys," and carried a cross-cut saw, because he was under engagement to take the place of her son Geordie, at so much per hour per day, while the said Geordie Carter passed his

examinations as "special," and went down to Sydney to answer the call of his King and his country, and to join his comrades ordered to the front.

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## 15: What Luck

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FOUR days with a pack horse and a saddle pony has taken Martin into civilisation after six months; a week later saw him on the way back to camp again laden with rations, dungarees, and newspapers; he also carried one letter— a missive of cold unsatisfactory words, that might have counted of greater value than the half-yearly rations.

The pack horse came to a plateau of cleared vegetation, and stood there blinking tiredly at her own forefeet. She deliberately went to sleep with the outfit of camp tucker and other bundles clinging to her sides.

Martin rode slowly. His pony picked a passage down the trail as daintily as any maiden passing along the stepping-stones of a turbulent little stream..

Martin was debating and measuring mentally the whole circumstances of the-Camp life; its prospects, chances, hopes and successes.

Strangely, the successes worried him!

Down in the bed of the creek the mud ran yellow. A black man tipped a shallow pan about in his hands as he squatted knee deep in the squash of liquid!

The pan was shimmering and glittering in the sun-shaft that drove down through a chink in the hills; and Martin felt no glow of satisfaction as he estimated the wealth that one wash would bring.

He jogged the pony a little.

"Billie's the mascot of Sundown Camp," he said. "If I'd known how much we could have panned in a week, much less in a month, I would have shifted quarters! It's an honest to goodness find this time, and no doubt of it."

Just then the old black nigger delving in the creek, looked up and waved four fingers. He signified that luck was still holding. Martin cursed a little under his breath and climbed off the pony.

"If we keep on panning like that, we'll have to start an ore-crushing plant out here and run a series of banks to handle the gold right on 'Sundown.' What luck!"

He smiled a little and began to unload the beast holding the packs. It would have been just as easy to have given the animal a prod and sent her down the trail to the camp site; but Martin was a man of feeling. He eased the brute of her burden and left her standing on the plateau; then he carried the bags of tucker and clothing down the track himself.

Old Black Billie greeted him with enthusiasm. "The gold run thick, boss, all time you go longa township."

"So I see; and look here, Billie, it's frightening me!"

Billie grinned. He shook his head!

"You no frightened rich man? P'raps you frightened bad man come alonga steal claim?"

"No fear! I'd give it away this minute if anybody wanted it! "

"Why, Boss?"

"I've avoided becoming rich for years," he said. "I left the city for that purpose. Everything I've ever tried has turned out so disgustingly fat and profitable that I've never had one day's real happiness through it. You understand me?"

But it was evident that the blaekman did not understand.

"You go back to city now," said Billie. "You go longa train and live in big camp— you ride in all fine fellow motor car, and have piccaninny and big rich wife. All days now you find big fellow happiness!"

Martin was standing there, a little agitated! He could not answer this, so he went to the left, where a stack of granite boulders formed, a shelter. Here he threw down the packs.

"Go back to the city and ride in a motor car, and have piccaninny and-a wife. In fact, the very things I have avoided. Not on your life, Billie boy!"

While the black man sifted yet another pan of the alluvial gold in the creek mud, Martin became engrossed with supper.

Straight and clean and square he was, and always had been. One of the sort that takes the buffet of life's waves for himself and his neighbour, be that neighbour white or black or variegated.

He sorted out two portions of dried fish, as careful that one should be the equal of the other, or, more earnestly anxious that his own share be, if anything, less than that apportioned to his black servant.

He had come out to "Sundown" with the black man alone. He had come with barely enough rations and camp necessities to last six months. Behind him in the big city he had left an empty cash box and a bank balance scored right through.

Monty Martin, stockbroker and club-man, had, in some "Brewster" fashion, rid himself of every coin and note he possessed.

While he broiled the fish over the camp fire, he thought of this.

"The man who first suggested the accumulating of wealth was a fool. It is the autocracy of the gold that gets a man down. Now, if only I had a few starving relations—"

He turned the fish and glanced towards Black Billie, who was washing himself in the creek as a mark of respect towards his master.

"I wonder if Billie has any starving relations? Sisters or grandmothers or-wives. I could work off this cursed gold that way."

When the black came to the camp he asked him:

"Where your people, Billie? You got folks all same white man, I reckon."

Billie showed a glimmering row of upper teeth, then a second row of lower ones, as even as a painted picket fence.

"All die, all same white folks die."

"But you have lubra— wife— piccaninny— all same city man."

"No same," said Billie, shaking, his dripping head before he sat down with his master. "Wife die— piccaninny die— all same sun go down. No care try again, I belonga country."

"Well, surely you have some people in the country, a brother, cousin, grandfather?"

"All same get lost— die or go to hell anudder way," said Billie, and he began to massacre his portion of the fish in his fingers.

This was mentally deplored by Martin.

"That's no go, then," he said glancing at the bucket of rich gold that Billie had removed from the creek.

Later, the moon came lighting up the little camp and showing the glitter of wealth lying about in pan, bucket, and oatmeal bags distributed around, he felt considerably worse in his mind.

"What luck," he kept repeating as he smoked a quiet pipe and watched the pack horse shambling about nosing for scraps of decent herbage.

"What luck— what honest to goodness, honest to badness luck!"

He dropped his head upon his hands and remembered the letter he carried. There was no need to strike a match to read the contents of the six months' mail. All the way from the township the words had beaten into his brain with the hoof-ring of his saddle pony:

"I could never marry a poor man."

He thought of the girl who had written the words; of his broken engagement to her, the over-indulged child of generous living. Entertainments, jewels, automobile tours— these had constituted their bethrothal, and he had only discovered the trick fate was serving him by a sudden turn of fortune's wheel.

He had himself forced tlrat turn. After many months of luxurious spoiling of his lady-love, he had turned a different lever in the mechanism of daily enjoyment, and behold the little car of destiny that they were riding along in, swung to one side and toppled over.

Deliberately, he had schemed to lose more than three-quarters of his capital. He had then showed her a five pound note and told her it was the remaining ounces of his fortune! Her answer then had been frankly feminine: "I could never marry a poor man."

Looking down the incline of raw desert rock now, he set his face, determinedly.

"Neither could she love a rich one, and so to beat her, win her, shape her to the feelings I carry for her dainty naughtiness, I must get rid of the gold— again!"

Billie was lethargically dozing in the desert high lights. Martin looked over at him.

"The nigger is the only chance now. My philanthropic scheming to provide for hospitals, war funds, and stray canine societies is becoming oppressive."

The gold lay about the camp in bag and bucket. It irritated him. That echo came through the post a many hundred mile of rock and desert and pierced his heart: "I could never marry a poor man."

"Yet she shall," he ejaculated. "Never, never, will I purchase her love with this wretched fortune of the desert. God help me in my great love for her."

Again he addressed Billie, who smoked in a fresh kind of stupor.

"What are you going to do with your share of the gold, Billie?"

The black did not turn his eyes.

"Me no take share, Boss. Too old. No go back alonga city with you any more. This my country— my hunting ground, all little while sun go down."

"Nonsense!" Martin became feverish again. "You've got to have your share, Billie."

But Billie shook his shaggy head.

"No take gold alonga me, Mis' Martin. Gold bring blackman bad luck. He die all same he came alive. Only tobacco pipe, sit down alonga Billie when I shut eye berry soon!"

"Well, you'll want to buy tobacco, and you can't if you don't take your share. If the gold is bad luck for black boy, then it's bad luck for white fellow, all the same, Billie. Here, shake up— I tell you it's been bad luck gold for me all along."

But Billie was adamant.

"Billie shut eye soon— come again winter. No need tobacco then. You take gold longa city and pretty lubra lady."

Martin got up as if he had been stung.

"Not on your life. I take no gold back with me to the city. My pretty lubra-lady does not love me; it is this cursed gold that has always stood between us.

'Come, Billie, it's got to be shares— I'm getting sick with too much success here."

But Billie seemed to be falling asleep. Every now and then during the last few weeks Martin had noticed that the old chap was getting tottery and slept longer.

Martin shook him up.

"Look here, Billie, you can't go 'shut-eye' and leave me here with all this cursed gold to dispose of. It frightens me "

Billie blinked a little behind a pull of curiously coloured smoke.

"You take gold alonga pretty lubra-lady. You marry her and give her Billie's share."

Horror was in Martin's face. .

"Never!" he said. "I'll marry her for love or not at all," he said. "Billie, you're good for another winter. Come, we'll pack up and go to the city, and we'll spend the gold and give it away. I've done it before—" He laughed at the recollection of his disposal of wealth a year ago.

"It's easy to get rid of it if we try, but it's hard luck— cursed luck— to hold it when your heart is aching for love— and there's nothing but the luck— the luck— the luck of cursed gold!"

Later, he portioned out the gold equally into bag and bucket. Billie went to sleep, unheeding.

Next day Martin forbade the old chap to work. He could not bear to look upon the shimmering sun-smitten gold that they-panned every time they lifted a few handfuls of the creek's mud.

The nigger began to show signs of failing.

His whole constitution began to show in shreds of disrepair, and he slept longer. Martin felt that the old chap was right. His call was coming. The last bugle of the great White Hunter of primitive souls was sounding and reverberating among the hills.

Billie sat up one afternoon, clinging to his long-stemmed bowl of tobacco ashes, and in his glistening eyes there revolved a sense of new understanding.

"Shut eye-long time-pretty soon now," he said.

Martin refused to be sentimental over it, as he considered that no man, recognising his God, had ought to do but follow.

But he was stricken with blind reasoning about the unlimited gold in the buckets.

"Hold on, now," he said, producing a slip of paper he had prepared in clear indelible writing. It signified that half the claim on "Sundown Creek," twenty-four chains from the "scalp rock," facing the "Manhead Hills," belonged by right to Billie Blake, late of Reservation, West Mitcheson.

So far as he knew, this would identify the black man sufficiently, and would permit of the rights of anybody claiming the fortune belonging to Billie Blake, in true testimony.

"You write the name of somebody belonga you, Billie-here." He held a firm forefinger over the blank space allotted for the signature. But the black shook his head.

"Nobody belonga Billie— all one fellow world belonga Billie."

Martin tried again.

"See here. I'm not going to let you go out to your hunting-ground, Billie, until you have fixed your share. You've earned it good and well. Come, you can write names fairly well."

He had often watched the old aborigine carving words upon a pipe stem or an axe handle. Only a week ago the old chap had presented him with the jaw-bone of a wild dog on which he had cut the lettering "Good luck, Boss Martin."

He had laughed at the time, because luck was totally in their favour. Beautiful bad luck eternally compromising!

"Come now," insisted Martin, forcing the indelible pencil between his fingers. "You write friend's name right here. You do one good fellow good turn before you go with big Hunter.

Billie's eyes dilated. He gripped the pencil; and Martin, sweating in every pore, was thankful enough to turn his head away, with the knowledge that at least half the gold had been disposed of.

That night the old faithful chap died, just as he was, sitting upright. Martin was not so shocked at this as he was later, when, by chance, he discovered that *it was his own name Billie had written on the paper*.

"Oh, what cursed luck," he cried, bitterly. "Am I never to get away from it?" Then, scarcely waiting to think, he dug a grave for his black mate, where the sun shaft, striking the head-stone of raw rock, at any time would light up the inscription, rudely cut:

*A White Man*

He buried Billie with great reverence, while the moon flame was broad-side over the little camp. He placed the black's share of the gold alongside of him, and taking that which he considered only as his portion, packed the saddles and rode off for the town.

The great White Hunter collected the soul of the black servant, and the gold remained unrecognised.

"ONCE MORE a club-man," said Martin, sinking into the soft velvet of a divan in the Wild Cat Club. "Ten minutes more of it, and if I have not shed this cursed oppression of affluence and loneliness-and lovelessness— by that time, I'm hanged if I don't turn true millionaire and stick it out-without her."

For a few minutes he smoked dreamily, then he found himself sitting upright, listening purposely.

Two fellows of the Club were earnestly wrestling with a iinancial problem, near his chair. Martin felt the hair on his head bristle; he scented the long trail of fatefate that had led him thither for some reason.

A stereotyped-financier was talking almost loudly, and making public the general substance of his schemes.

"It means risk, big risk. We must be prepared to sink every penny. There must be no scarcity of funds and plenty to back up the losses."

Martin took a deep breath. He digested the first sentences rapidly... "we must be prepared to sink every penny."

Martin felt the. hair on his head bristle.... "prepared to sink every penny!" He leaned forward, and listened deliberately to the strangers' conference.

"The chances are that we shall fail. I am prepared to fail— at first; afterwards we shall see."

The second club-man answered this resolutely.

"Are we prepared, with our small amount of capital, to finance the land scheme, and lose on it even if the Government take up the matter of opening up roads and putting in a reservoir? It's a wildcat scheme, but then— if we are prepared to lose—"

"Why should we lose? Why not let the other fellows do that? I don't mind a certain amount, so that I can pull off something at the finish if there is anything in the thing, but—"

There was a dropping of voices, and Martin fell himself quiver with vibrations of expectancy.

The answer came slowly from the man who formed second in the dialogue.

"I suppose I am prepared to lose eight hundred— but preferably I should rather not do so."

Ho chuckled a little, and Martin, over anxious, pushed his chair from under him and advanced nervously. He apologised! Then he .sat down, and went right into the scheme with his club-mates.

Though a little unusual, nevertheless, it was quite in place in the sanctuary of the Club. Every member was a business man, held to his code of living and his methods of finance by the strict rule of hard work. Honesty counted in the fellowship of the Wild Cat Club more than mere interference.

Certainly Martin knew now that his approach to the two scheming a land deal was merely interference, and that it would be counted in good part rather than otherwise.

He talked for an hour, dividing his experiences in land deals, mining ventures, and financial adventures with the honourable Shylocks of the Stock Exchange.

He uncovered the new ground they were footing, and showed them the bright new trail hidden beneath the snows of their caution. Finally, plunging in, he ofi'ered his entire bank balance to their service, saying:

"Gentlemen, I have no faith in your land scheme supported by new roads and a Government reservoir; but the risk of losing-or of winning— it's a gamble I love."

Breathless the first financier stuttered:

"What is the gamble worth to you?"

"My whole life," said Martin.

Not understanding, the two men waiting there were silent. Martin lit his cigar carefully.

"I'll risk— for the sake of the game— twenty thousand!"

He spoke as if he was offering them twenty shillings.

"Twenty thousand!" It seemed incredible. Both the men were older than Martin, and a thing like this told on the nervous system.

"Yes," said Martin, calmly. "It's all I've got-at present."

"And you'd risk it all. Why?"

"To win."

"Excuse me, but with your experience might I enquire, have you any family, any encumbrances?"

There was real fatherly interest in the tone of the first man.

"No family and no encumbrances," said Martin. "Believe me, gentlemen— this is the opportunity of my life."

"What? To pass your entire fortune into a wildcat scheme that may turn out— in fact, is more than likely to turn out—a mirage!"

"The mirage is a pretty one," said Martin, and his eyes brightened. He was thinking of the girl not five miles from where he was sitting.

The next day Martin passed in his cheque, and the scheme started.

IT WAS NOT the brave financier that faced the girl he loved a week after. Martin fidgetted with his hands and talked nervously. And it was not the land scheme that was making him nervous.

A small slip of beauty, with sparkling, dancing eyes and slender white hands, stood before him, questioning his long absence.

"You could never marry a poor man, you said, Hazel?" This was his excuse for his delay. She looked right up into his face.

"You were a rich man— not a poor one when I said that."

Her eyes meant more than Martin could interpret. He was unused to women mostly.

"But it would have been the same had I been a poor one."

"How do you know, Monty?"

Suddenly he caught her by the shoulders. Love brave he was, and fighting for his manhood.

"You loved the things I gave you! You would have been miserable without the wealth. I was not sufficient "

The girl did not answer, but her eyes went aslant, and she could not face him.

"Had I come to you as I come now, your answer would have been the same. You could never marry a poor man."

"But she stammered . a little, "don't you understand you would not have been a poor man. Even when you lost everything in the crash it was not I, Monty, who wished to sever our engagement."

"I think so, Hazel, though you put it gently so as not to hurt. However, here we are again. I love you— I'm crazy enough to want to be rich again for your sake,"and so I have staked all—"

He paused.. .a wildcat scheme that I'm told cannot possibly turn out but failure. For you I have risked every penny— and now choose— and choose quickly."

"How? Choose— what? To marry you?"

Martin left his hands off her shoulders, and stood there like a great school-boy almost blustering.

"You are the soul of me— the beginning of my day, my work, my rest! But, by Heavens, Hazel, I am never going to take you for what my day or my work or my rest earns for me. I want your love and your love for myself only— so listen."

He drew her gently forward with one hand, holding her there while he explained further.

"This week I have invested every penny I own— enough to keep you in luxury for life almost— in a thing that may or may not turn out successful. If successful, it means everything that you could possibly want-things almost priceless and unprocurable; but if it turns out failure, it means poverty and beginning with me in a tent eight by four with the creek for your bathroom and the ground for our bed. It means more than that-it means that the strongest cord of fate linked round two people is going to be the cord of love— love. Do

you hear me? Love that will bind you and me in holy reverence of living, or will strangle lis both with the struggle of poverty and pain."

He paused again. The girl's eyes were full upon him.

"Choose now, Hazel. Choose while yet we stand here, with this great thing in the balance. Choose! Marry me to-morrow and share the risk or refuse again, and leave me to swim or sink on my own."

She took her hands from him.

"Of course, I can choose, Monty. I know what it all means to me, but I am a little frightened. Give me time—"

"Time! Why not ask for the blood of my heart drop by drop. Choose this night, Hazel. To-morrow decides our fate."

For a moment she hesitated.

"You say you have put in every penny you own?"

"Every penny."

"And that it is a wildcat scheme likely to fail?"

"It has nothing reliable but the risk to support it."

She put out both her hands.

"Then I choose, Monty. I choose to stand in with you. To marry you tomorrow— to risk all— and to suffer and begin again with you— in the band of love "

She was shaking and crying a little, and Martin felt his courage ooze out at his fingertips.

"You mean it-Hazel ?"

"I mean it-though I should hate the scheme to fail."

So womanly her answer, and so true to her self, that Martin could not help almost strangling her as she stood below his chin.

The next day he married her, waiting no longer, and adding to his liabilities the risk of her happiness and welfare and health.

Out to the desert he took her to a mere hole of a mine, long ago worked out, and specially designed by Providence to keep a man's living just above starvation mark.

Hazel kept cheerful in a tent, eight by sixteen, and her face took on the high lights of the desert, and her eyes the sunrise blush of the dawn.

Martin, cutting a tobacco plug one evening, as they sat on a cube of granite, looked at her.

"Getting tired of it, old girl?" he asked.

"Perhaps a little," she replied, "but it won't be for long, Monty."

Martin blew down the stem of his pipe. "Maybe for years, or for ever," he said, carefully.

"Impossible," said Hazel, her eyes bright with something secreted in her feminine mechanism.

Martin pinched her cheeks with two fingers. '"What do you mean?"

"I told you I could never marry a poor man."

"And you have done so. My last report on the land scheme is certainly not encouraging."

Hazel, the dauntless, laughed lightly. "We shall see," she said, brightly, and used up the last of the sugar bag feeding the little desert mice' that ran about the camp.

Two months afterwards, the wildcat scheme began to drop fear into the hearts of the promotors drop by drop, as the shares went down heavily.

Martin lead it in the newspaper that came round the goods he conveyed from the township.

"How now, Hazel?" he said, almost fearful in his heart that he had forced poverty upon her rather recklessly.

Hazel smiled, and kissed her fingers toward him. "Quite well, thank you," she said, laughingly.

During the next month Martin began to study the optimistic attitude of his, wife. He could noc in the least understand it. Tney luid leached the last ounce of Hour in the bag, aud credit in the township was too frail to cnance the asking.

Hazel whistled at her work, and Martin began to dig and delve earnestly to find enougu gold in the old shaft to purchase necessities.

He thought of the claim miles away, where a black man lay buried. He determined to pack up, and take the track to the creek of fortune. A week afterwards they were established upon "Sundown"; but "Sundown" had been worked out by a visiting band of pilfering prospectors, and only a few gaping holes in the creek bed rewarded them.

Martin went right down to the lowest level of depression.

"My girl," he said, "I was wrong. You should never have married me; there has been nothing but my love. Vain I was because I thought it was everything you required. Hazel, my only riches now, and always will be, my fathomless love for you"

Hazel took nis head gently between her hands. "Then I am a millionairess!'' she said, and there was no trace of regret in her voice.

That day, a many hundred mites away, the wildcat scheme purred gently. Tnen it began to hum on wheels of perpetual motion. Solid foundations began to form, anf it reared a head crowned in glory, and held out wings of promise to the skies.

Martin's money began to drop back pound by pound, then by tens of pounds, then by hundreds. Like a bright rocket of bursting stars it fell about him, and he saw that it was the great sunburst of his life.

Glad of it now, and more glad of the pure love of his wife, he gathered her to him, reeking hot from his walk to the township, where he had sold his horse to buy. her food.

"What luck!" he cried. "What beautiful, bounding, good luck-now that I recognise that it would never have done for you to have married a poor man."

Hazel's eyes dilated to line points of mischief. With real feminine strategy she replied:

"NeverI I should have been perfectly miserable, Monty; because, knowing and believing in your good luck all along, it would have meant marrying another man."

And in her face he saw the reality of her faith and love.

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## 16: The Water Finders

*Weekly Times* 30 Dec 1911

"THAT was when we were out in the Great Sandy Desert," said Harris, looking at me over the glowing fire. "When Linglish—" Harris looked at me, and I said nothing, for I had known the story before; but Bruce, the third of our party on the gold trail, looked up and asked, What was Linglish? And I signalled to Harris to tell the story, which he did after throwing some debris on the fire.

"THERE was four of us out in the Great Sandy Desert— Linglish, Miller, the nigger boy Monkey, and me. We had been scratching our fingers in the dirt there quite long enough to know when it was time to have sense and come back to the world of human brothers again.

"We had a bit of gold between us, but there wasn't one man of us was going to chance the dry season of the desert for all the gold bricks in the earth; and we set out for the district west to reach Peak Hill, thinking we should travel well if we took the water bags with sufficient cold liquor in them to last us a few days. We packed the camels, and rode one apiece, and set out with all our worldly possessions that way, knowing there was water in the ranges to the right, which would have to be searched for.

"For a couple of days we travelled over country without a sign of water, and I saw the chances of staying out in the desert unburied in our own tracks for the rest of time if we didn't strike something that looked like a wet patch. The land was a trackless bush of sand and spinifex, with stunted mulga here and there frequently, and that sort of outlook ran as far as the skyline— whenever there was a skyline to be seen. We had plenty of heart to go on with, and we knew that the camels would see us further than we could see ourselves, so we pushed across the dry, hot scrub, and daily kept our eves skinned for a sign of anything that suggested water below the sod.

"When the water bags gave out we decided upon a regular course of action. We separated into parties of twos, and took turn to cut the track, one pair of us going off into the hills to the right to find water and to pick up the trail of the others towards night. We did this regular, takin' turns to semi-circle into the ranges and cut the track of the main body as they made it in a line across to the west. The camels were still existing on what wet sustenance they could get out of chewing mulga leaves and other hushes in the desert.

"At the end of the second day we had found no water, and we stopped eating. We threw some of the tucker away to lighten things a bit for the

camels, which had no water for the whole time. We had been without ourselves for two days.

"We pushed on without conversation and without food or drink, and when the first camel gave out we had to throw away some more of the luggage, and give the others a chance. We still took it in turns to cut the track, and every night the returned party brought only dismal faces and dried throats that could hardly utter sense.

"Sometimes it would be Linglish and the nigger boy, and sometimes it would be me and the boy. At others, Miller would start off with a heart full of hope, the boy running along making a track through the ranges, and coming back to pick us up towards night.

"When things got bad you could always hear Miller go off singin' a sort of tune that clings to a fellow all his life afterwards. I thought at first that he was trying to lie cheerful-like, but that song got itself tied up with all the most wonderful notes ever created by the evil one to make men think things in the dead of night, and at times when he believes that life isn't any more for him than it is for a deaf jackal.

"Well, Miller did that tune right away into the ranges, and when he got back to camp at night. I began to think about the way men go at such a time as no-water level, and I was mighty fond of those two men, Miller and Linglish. I didn't want to see myself doin' a thing at the first bar-room after getting through, that I wouldn't have done if things were all right. Everything was knockin' sort of fear into me, and I was hoping that I would go in a heap unconscious when I did tumble silly, so that I wouldn't do no harm to those two mates. When Miller would go off with the boy, Linglish would keep looking at me all the way along the line we were making straight. He never opened his mouth, and I used to pity him terrible because he wasn't used to that desert one point as much as the rest of us. He had come out to our country, and had taken up with a girl there; and it was the thought of that girl, hoping that the fortune he and she wanted to start their crib workin' wholesome with, that had sent him out with us to the great sandy hell where the gold bricks are.

"I used to get scared for that man every time he focussed me with his deep blue eyes. I knew if they were on my back, and I took care to ride a bit in the rear. Afterwards, when we tried walking, as the camels were giving out, and so much of the stuff we were travelling had to be left on the track behind us. I found out that I was watching him as much as he was lookin' at me. I was hopin' that I was goin' to play level with them two men, but when a man's mind begins to rap out orders, and he hasn't enough strength to pull out before he follows them orders, and it isn't always the correct thing that is bein'

laid down for him to do; well, he can't always get out of the way of doin' damage, no matter who it is that get in the way.

"We were all pretty much in the same mind fever, and when Miller wasn't singin' Linglish was watchin' us two, and when I wasn't watching both of them, they were both watching each other. It was something like a game of puss in the dark at nights.

"We sat about, and every eye of the lot of us wandered round like as if it suspected trouble, and was ready to jump.

"Miller kept at his tune mostly, and I gave over thinking that he was tryin' the cheerful exercise business. The tune was always the same, and the desert got painful to look into behind that fire at nights when he was away tramping his mind over the things in the song.

"At last I began to dream, and I saw my place in the bush ahead. I watched a speck of darkness before me taking shape on the night of the seventh day. and the blackness formed a cell in my mind, and I was in it, sealed and bound, and outside the drip drip of water on the walls of my prison sent my nerves quivering for the first time for days. I left the camp that night, and walked around the desert, and only the light of the fire brought me back again when I had worked the delusion off a bit. I never sat still for more than half an hour that night. I was afraid the others might go off and leave me in the cell with the drip drip outside which had got into my brain. Once Miller got up and stood and kept at his song. Linglish, who was a silent man, not knowing the country like a man born in it, would touch my arm when Miller did this; and when a chance occurred once, he told me that Miller ought to be shot for making such a noise when everyone on board was asleep. I looked at Linglish, and remembered part of his previous life had been spent at sea. After that I took turns with myself to walk off my dream and to watch Linglish, and to head Miller back to camp whenever he got lost in the song.

"On the eighth day two more of the camels gave in, and we started an argument in the camp about things. Miller said he would scalp the nigger boy if he didn't get out of the way. Linglish told Miller that he had robbed him of all the gold that he was taking back to marry on. and I was looking for something we used to have in the yard at home for splitting wood with to break the way out of the cell that had become cemented into my head, and that I couldn't walk about in any longer.

"I saw no end to that day. Only the noises of the bush that would come down to us at dark, and I was glad to think I was in a cell where the crows and the jackals and the dogs could not worry my body afterwards. We still had enough sense to regulate the day, more because we had formed the habit than anything else.

"It was turn for Linglish and the nigger boy to depart at daybreak and circle round, to cut the track Miller and I would make during the day. We never made that line, but it didn't much matter, and after the two had gone for the ranges still looking for the water, we wandered along, and the camels struggled behind. All day long Miller sang, and once I stopped until he had got in front of me, and I measured the jump onto his back. At that minute he stopped singing and held his head, and I heard the tune go wide into the desert, and I knew that Miller could not sing any more. Afterwards I thanked the fates that order these programmes that he had stopped in time. I wouldn't have been here telling this story, and Miller might have terminated his career on the gold trail, at that precise moment. As it was, he stopped singing, and sat down, and I came back to my upright position and looked and felt a little less like a creature of the bush that springs from behind his prey.

"I was glad he had stopped that song for more reasons than anyone but myself could know, and I sat down on the ground and felt that I had escaped something that came with the reaction of the silence and levelled my mind a hit.

"We sat like that till the mornin', and with the first goin' up of the sun I saw the nigger boy comin' through the mulga and headin' for our camp. He didn't have no one with him, and I sat up a bit straighter than my mind had let me for days. You know, when man gets a trouble he sort of thinks into himself until everything is himself; but when something turns up that is a worse business to somebody he cares a bit about, he somehow loses the first trouble and hunts round a bit more active to shut up the other if he can. Well, when I sees that nigger without Linglish. I got to my legs and forgot Miller lyin' there in the open desert, and I wants to take that 'Monkey' boy to lesson right away.

"I worked my mind all over him, and when he had finished trying to tell me things in his own way, I found that I had got him by the throat and that he wasn't the dog that wanted wrecking. He had left Linglish away somewhere in the bush. and he carried a bit of paper like the stuff that was made into a pocket-book that Linglish always carried. I tore at it and made out the lead pencil writing. Linglish had directed that nigger to meet me, and the boy had travelled in the night to tell me the message by note."

Harris stopped talking, and we didn't interrupt to ask any questions.

"No one but me ever saw what was in that note," he went one presently, "and till the day of judgment no one will, for I destroyed it then and there, and it melted into the desert and got covered in the sand that blew after that. It was just saying good-bye to Miller and me, and a message to the girl in the West. He wasn't comin' back to camp any more, and I was to tell that girl she was to have the gold if I ever reached the terminus. There was another word or

two to the girl, which was wrote on the bottom of the paper, but it went with the rest and had burned in the scrub.

"I got the nigger boy to his feet pretty quick, and leaving Miller there near dead as I ever thought a man could be and yet be livin', we set off across the desert.

"I was going to find Linglish, and I was leavin' it to that Monkey boy to lead me the track. He found me the man I was looking for just as the sun began to dip into its own dye behind the hills. Linglish was there— behind a bush— and I knew first glance that we wasn't ever goin' to disturb him again, and that he was just ready for packing away out of sight. I had brought along a bit of a spade that belonged to the camp, and the boy and me, we managed to get him under before the dark came and before the dogs was about, and other animals and vermin to scent things."

Harris again stopped, and we men round the fire asked nothing, knowing he would finish the story in his own way and with what modifications he thought fitted to the honour of one man to another.

"Miller lay in the same place that I had left him when we got back; and I sat through that night seeing only another few hours for both of us after the sun was to get up the next day. And it wasn't a day and a half after Linglish had given up things that we was drenched to our bones sitting there in the desert with a blessed shower of rain, that, according to expert notions, happens rare in that part of the land; and that saw us through the rest of the travel, for it picked Miller up from his death condition, and we pushed on with the boy and the rest of the pack.

"I handed that little girl a good portion of the gold, thinkin' that Linglish hadn't come out fair when we got the rain and he, well— anyway, she asked me if there wasn't a message for her. You might have thought I was preparing for a University degree in literature that was about suited to the time of Shakespeare by the way I gave her the last salute of poor old Linglish, who might have been then listening to me stackin' up the lies.

"Anyway it convinced the girl that her man was a man of stuffing, and who had met death in the desert without a word of grumble, and who was on the list of Government papers as having perished from thirst while making a track through the Great Sandy Desert."

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## 17: Blue Wattles

*Sydney Mail* 19 Oct 1910

'I WISH you wouldn't stare ever into my garden,' said Hope, irritably, leaning on the rake, and stopping work for just a few minutes.

'Well,' said the girl on the other side of the fence, 'the Blue Wattles and the river are all for you, it seems.'

'Blue Wattles?' said Hope, 'and the river?'

'Yes, the wattles behind you are so sweet and misty. Then I can hear the river at the foot of your garden, and I can't get down to it. Only the cows go there.'

'Well, you might come when I'm not working in the garden,' said Hope.

'Oh, it's only by chance I found you,' said the pretty child on the fence.

'Then I'm to understand,' said Hope deliberately, 'that this is a habit of yours.'

'Oh no, it's a pleasure,' laughed the girl. 'Habits grow on one. I come here as a special treat. The Blue Wattles are like sunshine dreams, you know— where butterflies are part of the world. The river is a song, I think. I wish you could tell me what it says.'

Hope began to rake the garden violently.

'When did you come to live in that house?' he questioned sternly.

'Oh, only a month ago,' said the child.

'And now you're there I s'pose I've either got to make friends with you or submit to being watched daily.'

'I think you'd better make friends,' she said, seriously.

'Indeed!' said Hope in a tone decidedly meant to show no interest whatever.

Then the girl chattered on.

'Did you ever go to Brisbane?'

'Brisbane?' Thunder shot into Hope's voice.

'Yes; away over there— by train?'

'Are you?— no, I never!' he suddenly ended.

'We came from there,' she said, thinking him interested. 'Helen was so tired, and was always talking of coming back.'

'Corning back?'

'Yes; she was here long ago, when she was happy.'

Then Hope took up the rake. 'I've finished for to-day,' he said roughly, and walked away.

When Hope got into the house an elderly woman set his dinner before him.

'There's people come to live next door,' she said, wiping round his plate with her apron.

'I know,' said Hope, and began to eat. 'The woman keeps cows, and one of 'em's broke the fence at river, just where that bit of vegetable garden is.'

'Send a message in and say,' began Hope, '...say that if the fence is not mended by to-morrow night I shall prosecute.'

'There don't seem to be any men folk,' said the woman, going to the door. 'Like yourself, they seems to be livin' alone.'

Hope never answered, and after dinner he wandered down to the vegetable garden.

The watercourse ran at the foot, and on the left the sapling fence had gone to earth rather badly for several yards. Over the potato patch the cows left a march of footprints, and even now a red and white milker was chewing serenely in the centre of the turnip patch. Disgust ran into Hope's face. Then he aimed some loose earth at the cow, which only stared at him and never budged an inch.

'Well, I'm hanged!' he said, crossly. 'The entire family seems to be calling torday.'

'If you go over to Roily and drive her very gently she'll come through again,' came from behind him, and Hope, turning, saw the child.

'If I go over to Roily,' he said quickly, 'she'll go out quicker than she came' in.'

'Then you'd better let me drive her out.'

And the child ran through the fence.

Hope stood fascinated, yet he could not drop his annoyance.

'You'll have to mend the fence,' she said smilingly, when the cow had walked calmly through still stood staring.

'What's your name?' he shouted after her, and the little girl turned.

'Just Beryl,' she said, looking up into his face. Then, while he waited, saying nothing, she went a bit nearer. 'Would you very much mind, when you're putting up the fence again, making a sort of gate that I could go through to the river?'

'Make a—' Hope frowned indeed.

'Just a little swing gate, big enough for me, and not wide enough for Roily to get through to the turnips.'

But Hope was still staring at her.

'Tell me your other name,' he said, quickly, and not attempting to even think about the gate.

'Beryl Warde; and mother's Helen.'

And in the silence that followed she turned after the cow up the slope to the little white house.

'Wait!' Hope called out. 'Come here.'

She came, very willingly and very childlike.

'You're used to obeying, aren't you? Well, listen to me. You can come into my ground when you like, and sit under the blue wattles and listen to the river; but you're not to talk to me unless I speak to you— do you understand?'

'I understand.' she said slowly, 'and I don't think I shall want to.'

Then she went up the hill, and Hope started to make the small gate.

JUST at sundown Beryl passed along the grounds, and found the sapling fence rebuilt, and a small doorway inserted in it wide enough for her to pass through.

She went across the potato patch and up to the house. The old woman came to the door.

'I brought this,' said Beryl, quietly showing a small brown egg in the palm of her hand, 'and would you mind saying it's the first that the brown hen has ever laid, so it's sure to be good.'

'Bless you,' said the woman; 'is it for the gentleman, you mean?'

'It's an egg for him; but you needn't say too much about it when you give it.'

Then the woman took the little brown egg and went through the house. The child was nearly through the gate when she heard Hope's voice calling her.

'I want you— come back!'

Beryl turned as willingly as ever.

'I don't eat eggs,' he said quickly.

'Then perhaps you'd like to blow it and keep the shell. It's the first the brown hen ever laid.'

Hope began to laugh; then he grew stern again. 'You'd better come inside,' he said. 'Have you had your tea?'

'Oh, yes,' she said; 'but I think it would be nice to see inside your house.'

Then when they got inside she found so much interest that she stood amazed.

'Why, you've got a piano— and a mirror, and a stuffed sofa!'

'Did you think I had kerosene boxes and tin pannikins?' he asked, crossing the room and watching her standing in the centre staring about.

'I thought you were only a gardener,' she said, surprisedly.

'That's good enough,' said Hope. 'But can't I have a few extra things about even then?'

'We can't,' she said slowly. 'We sold all our best things to get the cows.'

'But—' Hope shot forward and caught her by the arms. 'Where's your father?' he asked suddenly.

'My father's dead,' said Beryl. 'Dead years ago! Why, even Helen has forgotten him.'

'Forgotten!' Hope stood upright.

'Oh, yes; because if I ask many things about him she says she can't remember.'

'I see.'

It was Hope, then, who weat silent. Then they went in to the next room.

'The dining-room,' said Hope mechanically. Then all the blood flew into his face. The child was walking round the table to a picture over the fireplace.

'That's— Helen!' she said, joyfully.

Then Hope began to talk excitedly.

'Yes— I— I knew her long ago.' Then again he caught her arm. 'Listen to me. She wouldn't like you to know me. We're— we're not good friends now; and you're not to say a word about me.'

'Not about the piano and the stuffed sofa?'

'Tell her, only, I'm— I'm— a sort of friend of yours, and don't say any more.'

'I'll tell her you're the gardener if you like.'

'And tell her I don't have time to make friends here; but— but— that anything she wants doing about the place I'll send a man along.'

'You're quite good, after all,' said Beryl.

'Quite!' said Hope, with colour in his face, 'and, you'll understand, what I say I mean. You'll not mention the pieture.'

'I'll be most quiet about it,' said the child. 'Good-night.'

She stood at the outer door.

'You can come to breakfast if you're up in time,' said Hope, walking past her along to his room.

'I should be talking to the blue wattles before that,' she said, going across the yard.

And Hope sat down in the darkness, later on holding the small brown egg, the first that the brown hen had laid.

IT WAS long after breakfast next morning that Hope and the child sat in the garden. Beryl had picked out a spot under the blue wattles, and already had it measured by him into proportions of garden and grass plot.

'Don't cut them into stars, whatever you do,' she said. 'I can't bear that sort of garden.'

And Hope worked joyfully, taking heed of the child, and following out her instructions very carefully and deliberately. Once or twice he stood wondering, and his eyes rested on the gate he had cut in the fence. When he turned to his work he felt the sensation of someone watching him from there. It seemed to be burning through him every time he bent over the spade, and finally he moved round and dug with his face to the fence. Presently in his brusque way he spoke.

'Why don't you go? Don't you know you've been here far too long?'

'Must I go?' said Beryl, getting up off the ground and looking up into his face.

Hope passed his arm over the garden quickly. 'You— you saw her come, didn't you? She stood at the gate. It's evident you're wanted over there.'

'I'll come back,' said Beryl, starting for the fence.

When she had gone Hope walked round the grounds. He was much disturbed. Gradually he went to the fence that divided the grounds, and even as he waited Beryl came bounding along.

'I've got a letter,' she said joyfully.

'Isn't yours?' he almost shouted.

'Oh, no,' said Beryl, 'it's for you. Then standing there he tore it open.

'Helen wrote it,' said the child.

But Hope was reading on, standing by the gap in the fence, with the hot blood in his eyes and his mouth set.

*'I'm very happy,'* it read, *'because I've seen you with the child. I came here so that you might come into contact with each other, because for four years my health has started to break up, and I am thinking about her future very much, and it seems only the right thing that you should carry it on. To-day I am determined to go to town, and make arrangements for the last few months that I have to live, and I want you to keep her with you, so that she won't feel things too much. Let her be happy. It is the only way to rectify the mistake we made ten years ago.— Helen Warde.'*

Then when Hope had finished reading he forgot to move away from the fence. Through the opening he watched until the years seemed to link out in a chain in front of him, and he could see every incident as they had developed then.

Up the hill before him the woman passed, her back towards the gate, and it seemed like yesterday. She had walked away then, in just the same quiet way, and he had not called her back. The space in the fence was narrow, but Hope had wedged himself there, and was going through when Beryl's laugh at his back shot into him like cold steel.

'You'll never get back if you go through,' she said with childish glee. Then he jerked his shoulder backwards.

'Go!' he said, suddenly; 'go— and tell her— tell Helen I want her to come back. Tell her—' he was pushing the child roughly through; 'tell her not to go— that I say— I want her.'

While the child sped after the woman up the hill and through the dried bracken of the field, Hope held on to the fence like a palsied man.

'You can't make the same mistake twice,' he was saying; 'it's sure to be right this time.'

Then the pale woman, the mother, whose dark eyes were dimmed with the mist of a fading life, came and stood by him. Only the narrow space of gateway was between them now.

'You've known all along,' she said quietly.

And Hope was very calm now.

'Only yesterday,' he said, not dropping his eyes from her soft face.

'She's not like you,' said the woman; 'she has no haste or speedy anger in her. Perhaps it is the years, that she has put in with me alone; or, perhaps, it is the better part in her.'

Across the grounds Beryl ran, and the woman's eyes followed.

'She is the saving grace of both our lives,' she said, very quietly.

Then Hope found his voice again.

'Once, years ago, you said it was a mistake, our marriage. You went away.'

'We were unsuited,' said Helen; 'and there has been peace apart.'

'Peace!' Hope almost shouted, 'when every year has lost so much of its savour that I am loth to live them out. Helen, the mistake was when we parted— you can see it now. Look at me— I'm hard, and there is nothing—'

She interrupted. 'There is the child.'

'There is, thank God, but I never knew,' he said searching into her eyes for something that belonged to the years. 'And there is another chance.'

'You mean—'

'For us— Helen, if you had only understood—'

Then Helen met his eyes, and there were tears between them.

'The chance is for her— for Beryl. Mine is not here.'

'It is!' said Hope, putting out his hand, 'I know it is. You won't go away, because I'm going to search the earth for the best chance for you, and— I know I shall get it.'

'You will not find it round the world,' said Helen, leaning towards him, 'It has been so cheerless, and— I'm tired.'

Then Hope with his strong hands wrenched out the post that held the narrow gate, so that no barrier was between.

'Here is the chance,' he said, with the old hope in his face and voice. 'Come into it, Helen— my heart shall work the remedy itself.'

And through the broken fence the woman went to him.

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## 18: As One British Subject to Another

*Punch* 7 Dec 1915

A LONG sweep on the tide was beating up to the shore. The corrugations and the broken water at the reef sent a spray-drift high enough to hide any schooner or man-o'-war vessel entering in at the lagoon entrance.

The boom and thud and the crash of the big tide slamming right to the flat surface of rocks below the higher level of the island came like intermittent bursts of a grand artillery, the insistent shelling of the land fortifications by the monster warriors of the deep.

A whale-boat manned by natives rose and fell between the hills of water just inside the reef, and in the bows, standing skin-wet from the splash of spray and the beam waves that rushed on him, Lieutenant Sergeant prepared to take the half-submerged landing stage that ran shimmering beneath the cocoanut palms fringing the path to the house.

He was very young and fresh coloured, and in his face there was confidence, assurance and expectation. Balancing there on the nose of the boat, he watched the shore spread out before him in a straight line, took in at a glance the depth of water over the landing-plank, and prepared to jump it in his water-soaked knee boots.

A few minutes afterwards he was alone, scrambling up the slippery path to a house sheltered by the Pandanus trees and palms growing between it and the spreading tide.

Even with his eyes keen on his stepping, he managed to see the woman standing there in the wind-sheltered doorway, and to touch his service cap with one finger in a hearty, pleasurable salute. There was respect as well as stern duty in his swinging movements towards her, and presently he climbed to the verandah in boots that ran water at every step, and stood before her—a veritable warhorse snorting satisfaction, and smelling the fresh fire of a battle somewhere near.

The woman receiving him looked flushed and uncertain. She also was young, but with something in her manner that was steadfastly mature. Though it was apparent that she was pleased to see him, she had a reserve and a calm coolness about her that perhaps gave it the suspicion of a lie.

She observed with womanly grace his wet condition. "Will you change, Redmond? Of course, you have come to lunch?"

The young lieutenant swept off his cap, and beat the water out of his thick hair.

"Of course I am lunching, and— other things." He met her eyes , and smiled.

"Other things ?" said the woman, as if she had expected this.

"Other things. I am here, Mrs. Steinmetz, to arrest you as a prisoner of war."

Just a faint line of white began to run into the beautiful colour under her eyes. She put her hands behind her, and with the tip of her tongue moistened her lips. The young officer was mirthfully observing her.

"Strange are the ways of war. To think that I, of all men, would be appointed to the— the honour of taking one of my very best friends prisoner. I think my chief, Gattman, knew what he was doing when he sent me along. Anyway, I *was* coming, wasn't I?"

The woman spoke cautiously, "Seriously, Redmond, what underlies all this?"

"The fact that you are married to a man who— well, who isn't exactly safe out of custody."

"But I am British horn." Her fingers worked behind her. Her eyes were steady.

"That point loses some of its hearing from the day you married Steinmetz. A woman takes her husband's nationality in a crisis like this."

"Even though she has registered as a British subject?"

Redmond Sergeant stamped the water from his boots on the fibre mat at the door. "Even though she has registered as a British subject, and— her— husband— is— not— with— her."

He said every word deliberately, and with meaning, and Mrs. Steinmetz relieved her lips again.

"Let us go in," said the officer. "I am cold. This weather is enough to drive even duty out of a man's head."

They went into an inside room. It was square and low-roofed, and daintily arranged after the manner of European simplicity. The woman turned to him again.

"That last remark of yours, Redmond, needs explaining. Did it ever strike you that my husband's disappearance on this island may mean— that he has done it out of kindness of heart for me, instead of fresh disaster?"

"Hardly." The young man was severely outright. "When a chap creates nine kinds of trouble for the authorities at war time, especially if he is of the enemy's brand— his manner of deserting and leaving his wife to face the consequences— does not look to me like kindness."

Marian Steinmetz flushed scarlet. "But— what consequences? Surely the authorities do not think I could be— responsible?"

The lieutenant helped himself to a cigarette from a box near him. He had always been at home in this island house, ever since the Victory had taken to calling there periodically.

"The authorities, my dear Marian, are as hounds on a discovered lair. The fact that you absolutely refuse to say where Steinmetz is, together with the knowledge of your apparent happy marriage with him, makes certain evidence—"

"Evidence?" Marian was very nearly shouting. "I never heard such nonsense!"

"Marian!" The young officer came and stood near her, and looked right into her blushing, sweet face. "Because you are such a good little woman, with good and noble ideas, we are bound to suspect you."

"You mean— you suspect me, Redmond?"

"I mean the authorities— of which I am part —suspect you."

She did not answer, and he walked to the window, talking as he stood there. "A woman with your ideas of loyalty to her husband is more likely to defend him— in a time of trouble— whatever he may do against the right of a country, than hand him over to the na'val or military authority looking for him. Also, it is not likely, after creating a rebellion in the German section of the community on this island; that Steinmetz would depart into hiding without giving certain confidences to his loving wife."

His eyes flashed signals of certain incidentals in this remark, and he went on slowly: "I use the qualifying word, because it is a well-known fact in this group that Karl Steinmetz and his wife are practically undivided in the things that go to miake a domestic, union a perfectly happy one. That is my point."

Slowly the woman went over to him. "Redmond," she said. "Turn round. Look at me straight. As one British subject to another— do you believe that?"

"I do." Though he turned and said this right into her face, his confidence gave slightly, and he wavered ever so little by deliberately turning back to the window.

"And you really think that I am shielding my rebel husband from proper punishment, wilfully secreting any knowledge I may have of him— because of my marriage vows?"

Redmond answered without looking at her. "It is because I respect— and admire— you so, Marian, that I believe it."

The long roll of the sea beat onward. A stinging wind beat over their heads into a frenzy of shivers. Neither noticed it.

"Redmond!" Her voice was as warm as a child's. "I want to tell you something. It is a thing that I should never have thought of disclosing— to you

least of all— if this sudden passage had not come about. I want yon to know, and to know truly, that— that I have never really *loved* my husband !"

Like the turn in the blast of the singing storm outside he wheeled round. "Marian!

'Great and Gracious God! If that were only true."

Her eyes were as cold as crystals, her body shivering. "Never from the day I married have I loved him."

"Marian— girl!" Redmond was shaking, too. As he took steps to her side, so she retreated.

"I thought you knew; oh! I thought you guessed it!" She nearly screamed in her agitation. "Redmond, I made sure that you knew."

In her eyes there was sufficient accusation to make him mentally distracted.

"God help us, dear woman, I never knew! And it is true, or you would never have said so."

Instantly she laughed. It was a mild censure on his calculations, almost chiding him for something she said bitterly. "How wonderful, how deep are one's feelings when— when *duty* hides them so conclusively!"

Just for a moment he nearly missed uer meaning. "Tell me— you love someone else ? It has been in your face so often, but I dared not— Marian, I am a coward. I am afraid to even think it out."

Steadily she met his eyes. Hers were schooled to an absolute calm. "I love someone else, of course."

"And the confession will save you, dear woman." He waited.

"I— think— not." With a quick movement she clapped her hands, and the house-boy came stealing through the door even as a shadow does.

"I think not, Lieut. Sergeant. Yours is a duty whichever way we look at it. War is War. I love my country's greatness, its mighty power fascinates me. I would die for the honour of it if I could, but there is one thing more. My husband loves me with the best God given love possible in foolish creatures. Oh, don't speak yet. Even a German spy creating havoc in a group of islands in a vast, cold sea may be pure in heart. And because of that love I have got a duty to him as well as to my country. I do know where he is, and I will never tell you— no, not even to you, Redmond. The greatness of all our lives comes in giving, and he has given me the best in himself always. There is another King, Lieutenant Sergeant, who may expect certain loyalty from me. That is God."

There was a softer note still in her voice, and she put up both her hands to ward of the approach of the officer.

"I am not your prisoner yet, Redmond. There is one thing yet. I love you— and I thought that you knew it all these months wihile you have been visiting us. I love you in the same way as my husband loves me, and because of that I claim your protection. I am true to my country, and you can't take me, knowing that."

"Marian, dear woman!" His eyes were hot, and his hands beat the air to take hold of her.

"I give you, Redmond, such love as good women you spoke of just now give, and that same great King of Men will hold you responsible for that love. Your duty is to Him as well as to your chief of the man-o'-war vessel and the authorities."

Scarcely able to help it, he gripped her by the shoulders.

"Every word you say is true, Marian. I have felt the depth of the God-given love between us."

Suddenly he shook her almost roughly.

"Great God—there is something wrong in it! We can't take this happiness. I can't allow it. No— no— no! A thousand times rather the honour to our country. You must tell me where Steinmetz is."

"That I will never do. Oh, can't you see I have a duty to him as well? The years he has protected me, housed me, loved me. Never in my whole life have I given him a thing worthy of his great consideration and kindness. My husband has been more true to our vows than I, for I have loved you, thought of you, dreamed of you. He has given me the greatest gifts of God on an island like this— fidelity, trust. Don't— oh, don't, Redmond, ask me to look back on that! Let me at least be faithful to that trust if I cannot love him."

"I do ask it, Marian." Lieutenant Sergeant was suffering as well as she was. He caught her in his arms.

"Because of the purity of the love between us— because there must be no thwarting of the authority of these in command over the island, and because it is right for you to do so— I do ask you where Steinmetz is."

She pulled gently from' him.

"You say it is right for me to give him up. Then the King of Love shall judge. Respect of persons shall be the first measure. I will stand by my husband in honour and faithfulness to his love and his respect for me. You shall abide by your duty and take me prisoner— at four o'clock this afternoon."

"Marian, reason this thing out. You are asking me to do a base thing, remember. Think of the love you are sacrificing."

"I am thinking of it. But there is no contract between us. The love of your country and King is greater, and you must stand by it. I am your prisoner— at four o'clock."

He went forward to plead with her.

Something in his respect for her action stopped him, and he turned abruptly away.

"At four o'clock," he said smartly, walking out into the smiting wind and rain.

"MARIAN!"

The woman looked up suddenly. She had stayed in the house watching the circular belt of grey land-level where the surf beat against the shore for two hours, and the first break was her name called somewhere— distinctly near. She answered the voice tremulously:

"Lieutenant Sergeant has gone. It is quite safe for you. Where are you?"

From a false punkah arrangement in the roof Steinmetz swung to the ground.

He looked at his wife, then touched her gently on the hand. "Marian, I heard."

The woman never flinched, but she felt the sudden shame of her words, with Redmond.

"You had no love for me; but this— this sacrifice is greater."

"Hush!" The woman put up a hand and looked across at him.

"Marian, to give myself up would be of no service to you. As a prisoner I would still be an obstacle in the way of your happiness."

Again she tried to stop him, knowing how little her part had been to his in the domestic environment of that island life.

"Give, me but your forgiveness, Karl, and your understanding."

"Understanding— yes. At four o'clock he comes to take you as a prisoner of war."

"Which means that I shall remain here, under supervision possibly."

The haunted face of the German came near her own. "The house will be under patrol until I am safely landed."

"Then you had better go to the swamps. I will help you somehow later."

"Even— loving him?"

There was no accusation in the tone, and the woman never answered. The minutes passed; and only the pulse of exterior things beat softly into a gradual change. Up the Pandanus walk Lieutenant Sergeant came, still in his soaking clothes and his head bent.

"Karl, you must go." The woman clutched at her husband.

"Yes— it would only make it worse for you if—"

"Make your way to the swamps, and hide in the excavations of the peninsula. I will communicate with you— somehow."

But yet the man never moved. Twice he moistened his lips to say something— something that came like an appeal to his hungry eyes.

"Marian, I am going to try a last chance."

"Don't wait— Go!"

He looked quietly at her, and the officer was coming nearer every moment.

"You— who would die for your country as I know you would. You— who love so dearly the man about to take me perhaps to my deathhow Wonderful you are when you tell me to go. Why, it means your whole life if I were to fight now!"

She swept round on him hysterically.

"Why don't you go? Go— go ! Can't you see that I am trying to justify your cause against my own? Can't you understand my homage to ; ?"

"One minute." Deliberately Karl Steinmetz stepped to the window, where he could be seen by a line of advancing men who followed behind the young officer.

Marian darted forward to drag at the flax blind there.

"What are you doing ?" she said, almost voiceless. "Can't you see that the Lieutenant and his men are even now surrounding the house?"

But the Rebel was drawing a pistol into the open quarters of the window.

"My last chance to— to serve you," he said, and shivered as though the cold were piercing him through.

Up the palm grove the officer was still walking casually, with head bent. He carried no weapon. This the woman knew, and she saw her husband deliberately lean out and raise the pistol he carried—slowly.

"You are not going to fire?" She seemed to be losing her breath now. "Karl— not after— after my— my—"

"My last chance to serve you," said Steinmetz, and took a steady level with his right hand. On came the young Lieutenant with his line of men behind him. Every inch of him looked like stern duty not to be overshadowed by reckless liuyry or over-authority. He had not seen the Gerth hpsmiling at the window, and the woman had lost count of things. Her husband's attitude was strange to her. She thought that perhaps his mind had warped under the strain of things.

Not for an instant did Marian Steinmetz take her eyes from the man holding that weapon. Not a flicker of the lids told of the strain— the awful tension that was turning her to stone. She only knew that she was ready to spring with all the force of her physical heina if

At that very moment the young officer looked up. With straight, keen eyes, unafraid, he looked at the German.

Steinmetz smiled.

Redmond Sergeant stood like a rock, and waited, with just the slightest perceptible hard line drawing the corners of his mouth down, and Steinmetz, with the same smile, raised the weapon a hair's breadth higher.

Though the movement of his hand was scarcely noticeable, three people knew it— the Lieutenant, the woman, and one of the men carrying a service rifle behind the officer. The woman was the first to act. Like a thing let loose from a trap, she bounded right into the window opening, and the long-restrained breath from her body broke instantly through her shut teeth. Instantly two shots were fired togetherone which spat in a clean-cut line from the service rifle of the man in file, and the other which Steinmetz had fired— into the roof.

A shower of splinters from overhead told its own tale, and Steinmetz, reeling back against the woman, was laughing as he choked with the blood in his throat.

The young lieutenant rasped out a quick order to the men to stand back, and dashed into the house. Marian Steinmetz was trying to lift her husband to a couch, and the Rebel was saying his last few words :

"I— thought— the fools— would never fire —and it was— the last— chance— to— serve— you."

Three minutes afterwards, in the silence of death, the woman dragged the Indian rug from the floor and put it gently over his face. Then she turned round to Redmond.

"You see— 'greater love hath no man'. He has given his life for me."

The young Lieutenant took off his service cap reverently.

"I knew that when he fired into the roof above my head."

"So that your men might fire on him." She stepped out from the couch, and pointed to the clock. "It is four o'clock, Lieutenant Sergeant."

Redmond stepped close to her. This time his hands did not beat the air without reason.

"My— prisoner," he said, ever so gently, as she went gradually into his arms.

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## 19: A Lonely Man

*The Native Companion* 1 Sep 1907

TWO people alone remained in the gallery though the best light of the afternoon had gone— a woman with an earnestly expressive face, and a man whose hair was grey.

He passed along from the east end of the room, holding tenderly a flimsy silk roll that he had taken from a chair.

"I think you left this," he said, quietly.

The woman just turned her head from the picture in front of her, and smiled with bright eyes.

"I was so interested that I forgot it," she said, without taking it from him. "Don't you like this picture better than any in the gallery?"

He held the parasol very gently, almost as if it were some tender thing, and his solemn face never altered as he said— "Yes— I like it best of all."

She leant on the brass rails again, and let her eyes rest silently upon the picture. It was that of a man, in the late years of his life, sitting in a book-lined room, with bent head, staring into the fire— and it was called "The Lonely Man."

She laughed.

"I can't see that the title is consistent with the picture at all. He seems to have every comfort and luxury, and yet he is lonely."

The man smiled very slowly.

" Do the expensive things of the world feed and warm the soul?" he said. " One may have friends and books; one may have bodily comforts—but " His face was drawn, and his eyes sad.

"There is always loneliness where the touch of the woman's hand— or where the questioning chatter of a child are absent."

She turned round slowly.

"You must have studied this picture well," she said, earnestly.

He smiled again.

"I did— madam."

"Do you come here often?"

"Mostly every day."

She was silent.

"Does his loneliness appeal to you so much?" she asked, presently.

"It strikes down into my heart," he answered, turning his sad eyes on to the man in the frame. "It is my life— I painted it."

She stood before him, watched his face change, and showed no surprise whatever.

Then he quickly turned round, and held out the parasol.

"You won't need this now— the sun has gone down."

She took it, and smiled without a word. She wanted to ask him a hundred questions about his life. The idea that he was an entire stranger did not affect her in the least but she did not know how to begin.

"You have never come across 'The Lonely Man in your life before," he said. " Perhaps you may never again— he is apart from you— and in your presence he would lose his individuality, perhaps catching a glimpse of the brightness of your nature, and the warmth of your soul —madam."

She spoke at last—

"Why didn't you marry?"

"My childhood was morose. When I grew up I poisoned my ideas of men and women with cynicism and suspicion. A woman did come once, and I— l let it pass until too late; I tried to recall what I had put beneath my foot. The years have told me what I feel— that worldly hopes are dead ashes of a fire that once had kindled brightly. Shall I take you to the door?— I see they are preparing to close."

She walked with him along the polished floor, swinging the parasol.

"I think you are a very great artist, she said, earnestly, looking up into his grave face. "You have a way of making one see the truest side of things, as you paint them. It was awfully good of you to explain the picture to me— and—"

She paused on the top step of the outer door, looking down on him three steps below.

"I'm sorry— you're lonely "

He took off his hat, and she observed his grey hair waving across his high, white brow.

"I had— forgotten that," he said, with a smile, that seemed to come from the years behind.

"Then do not ever remember it— when you do—" She was holding a small card out to him.

"When you do— it will be an excuse for you to break through the veneer of your life, and come and talk to me."

He took the card. She passed swiftly down the stone steps into the busy street. His eyes followed until even the flimsy pinkness of the parasol was lost in the throng of the city. Then he boarded a tram, and went home.

Before the bevelled glass, above the mantelpiece, "The Lonely Man" stood staring He touched the wavey greyness about his forehead almost reverently.

"I'm old," he said; "but not in years— perhaps— she mightn't think so— with her kind, sweet eyes.

"There may be yet a spark to kindle in the ashes, if they were fanned— gently. With her there would be no 'Lonely Man'— just— happiness."

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## 20: When Dawson Died

*The Lone Hand*, Aug 1910

THE Dawson family consisted of eleven members, and nine of these were proportionately male and female progeny of the type that bars adequate description. They had all emanated like fungus, and thrived somehow in a land of sleek cattle and heat waves. Education and civilisation in the main were as satellites revolving in the distance, and never touching or troubling them. Mrs. Dawson was a woman who worked hard with a strong arm and a strong tongue.

One day old man Dawson took to his bed and refused to budge even when the tongue of his wife oscillated at double the usual swing. He said he was going to die; so, after arguing the point with him, she said he could; and daily the family waited, believing that the old man really meant to do as be said. They knew by experience that he seldom went back on his word; and the novel situation of having him do a thing that was altogether foreign to them held them in an excitement worthy of a more stimulating cause.

Two of the girls used to stand over the skim-buckets and commune as to the future development of things. They wondered if Mum could run the show without Dad, or if Will would be deputed boss. They felt certain there would be fire somewhere— Will was wayward and Mum always did rule the old man. Annie, the elder girl, was not bad looking— someone had told her that four years ago at the local show; Annie remembered that day because it had never come again— and she felt she deserved a better fate than the daily fowl-run and the skim-buckets. There never was enough water to wash the buckets properly; and the old man said the yard dam wasn't to be used for waste water. Perhaps when he'd been dead a bit they might use it when they liked.

Mary thought perhaps they might sell out and go to the town; and the chance of seeing a bit of life like that pictured in the colored catalogue that a through traveller had presented them with two years ago was a moment of exquisite pain to them. That day the buckets looked different; they had got twice the amount of slushing during the debate; and Mum was sleeping off a war that she and the old man had had that morning over changing the mattress. The old man wouldn't move for a moment, and the woman had howled in grief at the unturned straw bed.

One of the boys who attended to the special department of pigs suggested at dinner that the doctor had better see the old man, whereat the woman smashed two plates over his head in passing.

"D'yer think old Mill's goin' inter harness again to-day?" she said wrathfully.

"I kin ride the Yonk for 'im," protested the small attribute.

"No, yer can't," bellowed the woman. "Wen I was bad with Flora he was twenty minutes too late. D'yer think we want 'im cornin' late again?"

"Is father goin' ter die ter-day?" came from the end of the board table, where the second last edition of the family was blowing bubbles into a cup of yesterday's skim.

"Go and ask 'im!" shouted his mother in return. Then she slapped the nearside of her fourth, who was dabbling fingers in a flat tin of milk and pushing the dead flies under to see if they would rise again, "Take yer dirty 'ands outer that dish. If yer father did die, all that milk'd be wanted for the comp'ny cornin' round."

"Kin we invite Jack, Mum?" This from the promoter of the milk bubbles, with wide eyes on his parent.

"Can't invite no one!" snapped the woman. "And don't you go talking about it, neither —he mightn't go for years yet; I don't want no bakin' and things for nothin'."

Annie looked at her confidant of the milk-buckets; and a telegraphic anticipation shot in a telepathic way from mind to mind. After dinner the two girls looked out their Show dresses of four years ago, and decided that if company came to call there would be something doing, and maybe that Mr. Walker, of Horse Gully, might come along. They had passed him on the road once, and he had said good-day; and they had giggled fit to kill themselves.

When the eldest of the tribe got home that night he was told to "swaller his tea quick 'cause the old man was dying and had some work he wanted doin' before he died."

Also the last three numbers of the male portion of the family were instructed from the depths of the blue-grey blanket bed, where the head of the family lay sunk in his own iniquity, to fetch home some of the cattle which had strayed into a paddock ten miles away. The old man said he didn't want a summons before he died— the brutes better be branded or earmarked in the morning— he'd like to see it done at once. And so it was— with the pruning knife and a jab of kitchen salt to stop the blood.

About five o'clock next day the general family had assorted themselves round the place. Some of the boys had gone to the paddock dam to wash. The woman had thought it wiser, in case of anything happening; and after consulting the old man he had agreed to allow them to use the dam water, and the boys had raced there, shouting with the inflated lungs of young Australians well in condition.

The second eldest boy was nailing the prop-roost in the shed where the fowls shared a rest with the milk cans. A board served as a protecting lid for the milk, and some of the older birds roosted there in a crouched attitude, and

squawked tones of melancholy into the coming night. Will, the elder, w'as secreted with his father. The old man spoke from the uncovered pillow of faded dress material:

"What'd yer do? Did yer catch Miller?"

"Yes. I got 'im. Fourteen quid for the bull. "

"That's a better deal— gimme the paper. Did he sign it?... And the bull's gone?"

"I'm thinkin'," went on William, "that them young heifers could go this next trip. No good keepin' them—"

"What's the price?" wheezed the old man.

"Dunno'," said Will. "I'm puttin' a lot on Johnson's chance there. I'll see him ter-morrow'. "

" Maybe," said Mr. Dawson from the bed-well. "I'd like to know what's doin' with them before I'm under."

"Yes, I'll get fixed for Narragoon ter-morrow. Ye'd better have a sleep now."

When he had gone out, the old man turned his face to a slit of window where the blind had been looped aside and nailed tight. The blue vapor was settling on the hills right out, and to him looked like white mists. He rubbed his hands over his eyes, but still he saw it; then he called suddenly to the woman, and she came in with a light.

Half an hour after, the dark had come. The boys hadn't returned from the bath in the dam, and the two girls were down at the sheds still talking. Across the yard the voice of the woman burst like a cannon on the right. She called the entire family by name, and, getting no answer, wailed in a mournful tone that ended in a break of bad temper:

"Carn't yer answer, Will? Where are yer? Yer father's dead! Annie, Annie!"

Across the paddock the shriek rent; and animals that sought to sleep raised languid eyes towards the house. The girls came from the shed as Will turned in the door, rushing past the woman roughly. She waited.

"Yer'd better go down and bring yer brothers out've the mudhole," she said in a flurry. "Tell 'em their father's dead; and they'd better hurry if they want to see 'im warm."

The girls began to run, and the woman lit the kitchen lamp and began tidying up the place a bit. Presently the general troop rushed in, breathless.

"Is 'e in bed, Mum?"

"Did yer think 'e was in the fowl-house?"

Then they pushed into the bedroom and an awesome silence dropped over everything.

Never before, in their mean existence, had they known such a thing! Absolute calm was on each face, calm that was due to a great wonderment. The lamp shed a weak sort of glow that reached across the old man's face so that it was outlined against the coarse pillow. It was ghastly in the half-light; and round the room the family stood, waiting as if some great phenomenon was about to burst upon them.

"Better put out the lamp," began the woman, dropping into a frightened calm after her storm of temper. "No good wastin' kerosine."

Will was hanging half over the bed. He was sorry the old man had gone before he had fixed up about the cattle. He'd have liked to have brought that bit of business off first.

"Get outer here," said the woman in a stifled, strange voice. "He ain't going to do nothin' more."

One by one the family turned in the silence; but a sudden disturbance from the bed, together wdth a shriek from the woman, brought them back with a turn, and a new look in their faces.

" 'E's movin', I declare!"

Will came again to the bed; and the eyes of the old man suddenly blinked in the dim light.

"Ain't gorn yet?" said the woman, bringing the lamp nearer, while the family climbed about the bed with wary whispers.

The old man sat up. He stared at his fourth child quite squarely.

"Take your dirty feet off the bed," he said in a strong, vibrating voice.

Then he turned to Will. "Not this time, son; I'm going to get up. Want to look at them heifers— think— they're— worth more'n Johnson will— pay for 'em. Where's me boots?"

In the interval, when the family simmered down into their normal state, the old man could be heard giving Will a hundred injunctions about the place. In the kitchen the woman and the girls were putting up an amount of hurry and work in preparation of the tea. The woman's tongue got loose again.

"Just as I said. 'E never knows 'is own mind one minute; put that bacon back in the pot, Annie. 'E's sure to be fit for a big feed after dyin' so long. Lord! I never seen 'im so white in 'is natural before. Just as well 'e never died ter-night; them heifers wants fixin' up, and Will don't understand— besides, it ain't good buryin' in this hot weather— no rain fer a month by the look of things."

The old man shuffled through the kitchen, his bootlaces trailing on the floor.

"Joanna, where's the tin dish?" he said, turning at the outer door; "ain't 'ad a wash since I took bad."

"Annie, tip that milk inter the bucket an' give your father that dish," said the woman, glaring dubiously at him. "Hurry up, too; he wants to wash the death off of him before we sets down."

And old man Dawson, well washed, sat down once more at the family board and discussed the profits of the coming season.

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## 21: The Life Sentence

*Weekly Times* 9 Dec 1916

"MORE WAR marriages." said little old Miss Pretty, as she turned the whole of the morning newspaper inside out with a flourish of her shapely arms, and became submerged for a moment or two in the width, breadth, and circumference of the thing. Miss Pretty having never taken part in any kind of marriage whatever, war or peaceful unions being much the same thing to her, always felt qualified to give an opinion.

The day was as mellow as the round, bright face of a full grown healthy I child, and little, old Miss Pretty sat on the little balcony handling the day's news with her tongue, as well as with her beringed fragile fingers.

"Do you hear me, Sophie?" she said sharply, though Miss Pretty's sharpness always made one smile. Any excitement always gave the precise amount of color to her cheeks that was necessary to show how much better looking an old maid can be at forty-five than she knows.

A young girl, daintily dressed, and rather more serious, turned from where she watched the Cremorne ferry boat dart out from the shadow of the wharf. She was more interested apparently in observing a gentleman in khaki who had disembarked from the boat, coming slowly up the narrow, stone, serrated passages to the harbor flat. However, she took her aunt's stare with much respect.

"Why, yes. I heard, aunt, but I was watching Clarence coming off the wharf. He looks so much better since his return: one would hardly guess—"

She paused. The returned officer was swinging slowly along, one hand encased in a brown kid glove, just lying slack at his side. The other one bare and brown skinned, lifted and saluted the girl, fully three hundred feet below.

Miss Pretty left the newspaper a mangled, heap in her haste to lean over the balcony and take a look at her favorite friend. Clarence Pett had been her ideal in masculine humanity ever since he had been a baby boy. She tapped Sophie on the shoulder.

"Isn't he perfect, Sophie? One would never guess he'd been through so much." There were real tears in the dear old lady's eyes. "To think that— that left hand isn't there."

Sophie had to smile, though she scarcely felt like it. Her aunt, had always been of the most original type of the soft sex ever likely to be made Into an old maid twice by a mere man's early caprices. But that is of course another story, to be told another day.

"I am always pretending that Clarence has his hand still, dear," chirped Miss Pretty. "It is much easier to pretend— because as long as he keeps that glove on we can't see the wood."

"No." That was all that Sophie felt she could say. There were other men in her thoughts, perhaps only one other man; fighting his way through Flanders with his comrades. Fighting— she could see him daily; though somehow lately she had been given to looking forward to Clarence Pett's daily visits, rather than reading the latest news from the western front where that other man was.

As the young officer came nearer, he smiled. Almost hurrying up the grassy walk to Manor Flats, he called out something, of no special meaning. Sophie turned to her aunt.

"What were you saying about war marriages?"

"Oh, the paper is full of them," snapped Miss Pretty. "Why can't a girl wait till a man comes home, before marrying in that way. I don't approve of it— more than likely he will come home . in half; or perhaps— not— at— all."

The side glance that the girl served her aunt told. Both ladies felt the strain of the moment, then Miss Pretty laughed.

"You will be thinking, Sophie, that, perhaps, that was my case; and so it was; but I never bother my head now with what happened years ago. It was not war either— far worse. I think he sent me word that a tiger got him in the African exploration business. Anyway that tiger happened to be a lady, as I found out afterwards."

"And— you never married, aunt?"

"Well, no, I don't think I did," she laughed. "My dear Sophie, he— the only he— wanted me to marry him before he went out with the expedition. I never I did— thank goodness."

"Why?"

"Because if he was that sort to prefer somebody else after— after— me, then I think I saved myself a whole lot of bother by refusing to marry at the time. That's why I don't approve of these war marriages. Marry in haste— you know the rest. Unless you're happy, it's what I call a 'Life Sentence.' "

A slight change come over the girl's face. She seemed as if she was troubled with a tooth, but she said I nothing. Miss, Pretty went back to her chair, and signalled to the maid inside the little salon that she was to go down and meet Captain Pett.

"Oh, the unhappiness after the war, Sophie. Mind you, the uniform has a lot to do with it. I've heard of a girl being thoroughly fascinated with a man who was a plumber, not knowing, of course, because he looked so clean and

nice in uniform. She would never have dreamed of looking at him when he plumbed for a living;"

"But perhaps he was a really nice fellow in khaki."

"Indeed, he might have been, though I don't know why a man can't be a really nice fellow when he is mending the bath. I am afraid though, Sophie, that a girl loses her head over a service cap in the same way as she does over a man who runs an ocean liner. I've heard of women marrying stewards even."

"Of course, why not?"

"Simply because women are vain creatures. I was one myself once and I know. But I never ran after a uniform—"

She was even then preparing to run after, or run towards, her favorite friend, Captain Pett, who wore every inch of uniform he could carry.

Sophie felt a little depressed as the officer came on to the balcony. She met him smiling and with her hand out.

"I'm giving Sophie a lesson, when a woman should marry, and when not," said Miss Pretty. The Captain laughed outright.

"And when is that, Miss Pretty?"

"Not before a man goes into battle. A shrapnel bullet or— or another woman makes all the difference."

The young fellow, carrying his wound encased ina a brown kid glove, looked right across at the young girl.

"I thought that, too; but somehow, now I'm sorry."

"What for?" The little old maid took up the paper and began to put it together, though it was hopelessly massacred

"Because if a man makes sure of the woman he -wants for his wife, he might find it better to ask her— when— he is— intact, not afflicted." He held up the kid gloved member hanging to his left wrist. Sophie drew in a deep breath. His the tension of many weeks had snapped. She was a little pleased, but ever so much sorry. The Captain was smiling and absolutely making his meaning clear, to both women. Miss Pretty, however, was not so sure or what he meant as the girl. The little, old woman pursed her mouth.

"Nonsense! You've only got to go right up to any woman you love, Clarence, and hold up that wooden hand, and she will jump into your arms.

"I don't think so, because I don't think it would be quite fair—"

"Why?"

His eyes still pressed tender glances oil the girl.

"Well— she may not prefer a man without both his arms and—"

"I never heard of such a thing." Miss Pretty was so sure about things that she really was a little overpowering.

"Take my advice. Clarence, and go and ask her the very first minute you see her."

Captain Pett turned a pair of hot, brown eyes upon her.

"Very well. I will," he said, "but you will have to leave us together." Smiling right at her, he looked up Just for a minute Miss Pretty looked amazed then, with good grace she mumbled something, and flushing a little; made some excuse and left the balcony. Sophie fell into a chair in utter exhaustion.

"Don't," she said; and the Captain simply stood near enough to he able to touch her if he wanted to.

"I won't," he said, "but you know, Sophie. I wish I'd made you marry me before those battles. I don't like asking you now—"

"Oh— please, Clarence—" she turned a palpitating body towards him and let her eyes rest at his feet. "If you only had," she went on.

The young officer bent down.

"Dear— I wanted to, but was afraid I might come home worse than this." He held up the wooden hand. "Sophie, I love you too much... to take risks like that. You see that is how I thought about it then. If I had come home—an invalid for life— or blind—?"

She put out her hands to him.

"It would have made no difference, Clarence."

"Really— dear little girl? I knew that, but— I would never take the risk some fellows take."

"I would have— if you'd only asked me, Clarence." Her face looked so sad that he stooped and kissed her on the forehead.

"I simply couldn't, Sophie. Not even have asked you to marry me or tied you in any way. Some men, loving you as I do, would have chanced the risks—"

"Yes. I know one that did."

Just for a moment the Captain thought she was going to cry, then he noticed a thin, hard line run across her brow.

"Who?" he said quietly.

"The man— I— married. Jack St. George."

It was then that little Miss Pretty came back to the balcony, followed by the maid with the tea service and table.

"Have you done it, Clarence?" she said, then taking the look on Sophie's face she quietened down.

"Not yet," came through the Captain's lips harshly. "But I am going to." Then he wiped his forehead and sat down.

"Sophie?"

For a month the Captain had been trying to say this, and now he was determined.

"Love is the only law in a marriage of this kind. You don't love him."

"I thought that I did."

"Sophie— what a fool I was. You must tell him. You have never been his wife."

Sophie was ready with her answers.

"In name only. He left that day to catch the train to Melbourne. I have never even told my aunt— somehow—"

"Knowing now your mistake, Sophie, you can't— go on with it."

"No— not to be really honest."

"You will write at once and tell him. Sophie?"

"I think not, dear. I will wait—"

The same thing was In both their minds. Then the Captain flew into wild words.

"—and to think he let you do it, knowing that a man comes back, nine out of ten chances, either maimed for life or permeated with fever— he did not love you as I do, Sophie."

There was a little silence, and the girl looked along the water edge. They had strolled along the point of land nearby, and little Miss Pretty watched them from her balcony.

"If she refuses him." said the little, old maid. "It will be worse suffering than a man deserves. Worse— but nothing as bad as I have suffered— through his father."

Sophie did not look at her companion as they sat on the rock fringed with glowing, wild hybiscus and clematis.

"You can't accept him as your husband, Sophie, should he come back— with love for me in your heart. I know Jack. He is a decent fellow, though I'd like to break his head—"

"Oh, hush," said Sophie. "Even now there are battles raging. He might be— "

"Sophie," The Captain's voice ran dry. "I'm not that— you know, don't you? I mean I don't want the death of a man like Jack St. George, so that we may profit—"

"Oh, no— neither do I— but—"

"Just one thing, Sophie. Promise me that you will tell htm the truth and see what he suggests. If he is the fellow I take him for, he will get out and desert— I know I would— and then—?"

"And then—?" Sophie felt the words pressing into her brain. The future seemed so close at that moment. In it a really good man was sacrificing his whole life and love so that she and her love could participate in that which he had given up. Somehow it hurt her as much as it gave her hope.

"And then?" Clarence did not even touch her hand. "We will leave it at that, Sophie— Then it will be time to think about ourselves."

THEN came the day that Jack St. George was sent home wounded. He was actually now waiting in the little salon over the sun-kissed harbor— wounded. That was all his wife knew, and that was all he had told her, as he strictly forbade her to come to the boat. Somebody had escorted him in a taxi to the quay, and from there across in the punt, and to the door of the flats. Now he was alone, waiting with anxious, dry lips for his wife.

Clarence took the girl gently by the arm and led her to the door.

"Do the best thing possible, dear," he said. "Don't hurt him— a man has suffered enough out there and I'm sorry for him as if— if it was myself about to hear the truth. Sophie."

"You will go with me, Clarence?" the girl begged.

"No— this thing is between yourselves, dear. Remember that in telling the truth he must be spared as much as possible; and do the only thing you can— be a true woman to yourself and—" He stooped and kissed her lightly on the wrist; then ran into little Miss Pretty as he tugged away his hand from the girl.

Like a great, big boy he blurted some of the trouble to his little, old friend. He looked so sad and soft about the mouth, that the good little woman forced some of the truth out of him.

"Boy, you are positively crying under your eyelids. It's Sophie, I know. She must be sure. dear, that it is the right man before she marries— you see, if your own father had not made, certain I should be suffering now. It's always the life sentence, boy, for the woman who makes a mistake— she has to stick it. out— grind down the trials and face out the years—"

"But you are suffering, dear Miss Pretty," gasped the man as he saw her face.

"Nonsense— nothing to what I would have if your father had married me. He found your mother afterwards and they were happy— think of the trouble if he had married me. And in the same way, think of the trouble if Sophie marries you and finds out that it's this young Jack St. George she wanted—"

The young Captain could stand no more. He fled to the little dining-room and shut himself behind the door there to wait— wondering how far this other man was wounded.

And after interminable ticking of the little clock on the side table. Sophie came slowly into the room. It almost seemed as if she had known where her love sat waiting. His very thoughts seemed to draw her.

The Captain stood up. He did not touch her. Her face seamed with the pain of crushed back tears.

"What is it— Sophie? Have you told him—? What is it?"

The girl put out her hand and took a chair, and let herself down, into it, as one aged and pain-ridden.

"It is what Miss Pretty calls a Life Sentence. I have told him nothing because— he— is— blind."

Something like the sob of a person suddenly stabbed, came from where the Captain sat. Then he leaned forward and touched the girl with one shaking finger.

"Sophie— I'll help you— dear— the sentence is mine as well."

And on the balcony little Miss Pretty cried all by herself, because she had told her favorite boy a lie.

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## 22: The Eternal Softness

*Weekly Times* 5 Aug 1916

MISS LUCY swung a heavy hammer, and brought it down with a resounding crash on the head of the nail sticking out of the packing-case she was working upon. The nail sank fully an inch and a half into the wood, and the elderly spinster turned to me as I sat there, wondering.

"I often think," she said, "that it is a pity women are so useless in the world at such a time as this. That we have to pander to the eternal softness in us."

She gave the nail another whack, and it sunk a point or two more. "Seems to me we ought to be born more like our brothers," she went on, lifting a tendril of snowy hair from her eyes with her free hand. "I can't help feeling it."

"Why?" I asked, because of the something so lovely in the deep womanly face before me.

"Why? Don't you ever feel what it is to be left but of things at such a crisis in history? Not to be able to help on the ultimate victory attached to our great endeavors wherever Britain has planted man. Don't you feel—"

She paused, and I felt in some way that she was trying not to be unkind to me. I was as much part of the eternal softness prohibited from taking part in the great fighting schemes as she was, but I had the only small advantage possible over her of having been able to offer my country my services and of having been refused with thanks, on account of my yellowing years, together with an uncertain vision even with the aid of eye-glasses. The fact that I was a man evidently struck Miss Lucy, and she stopped speaking.

"I mean," she said again, swinging the hammer, "that there is so much a man can do. So much strength he can offer. So much reserve force of will and brain power he has stored up all his life, that now comes uppermost at a time like this. If only women could be considered something as willing and eager—and capable."

I took the direct aim of her sweet, brown eves, and I shivered at the thought of her home-made furniture and my perfectly comfortable, shop-upholstered, maple-veneered bachelor quarters.

Knowing the goodness of this earnest looking woman, I said, nothing, and she went on talking while she manufactured a kind of food cupboard out of a packing case she had just towed in from the yard.

"If the Lord had only given us something else but, our eternal softness," she complained, as she wrenched an ingrowing rusty nail from the side of the case. "Something... we... could... be... *proud*.... of."

The rusty piece of iron round the box came off with a jerk, and I could not help thinking how much I would have thought of myself, leaving out the eternal softness, if I had been able to wield that hammer as she was doing.

"There is Ben, now," said Miss Lucy. "He is only ten years younger than I am... and he seems so capable... you know Ben, don't you? He often appears a little delicate, but really he is so able..."

Yes I knew Ben. He was her brother, and she was his sister, mother, father, and all kinds of relations to him at the same time. In fact, she was housewife, housekeeper, charwoman, sewing-woman, nurse, doctor, carpenter, plumber, and general servant.

Oh, yes, I knew Ben. Everybody knew him in the little suburb. He was a really nice chap, with a desire for fresh laundry everyday, and his hot bath every Sunday morning served in cans carried up from the copper in the kitchen; He was also a splendid fellow among his friends. They liked him because he was good to his sister. Always went home to dinner unless he had said he would be dining in town. Was considerate about her knowing his friends, and took them home to a meal occasionally, when she said she had something special from the six o'clock market she had waded through that morning.

Moreover, he never did one thing that counted out of his ordinary work at the office, that he did not make a special feature of when he came home at night. He was frequently entertaining, sometimes eloquent, often brilliant, when it came to a certain point about his good luck in having pulled off a special bit of business. Miss Lucy simply ravished for these hours... it was so much to her that Ben was sufficiently brainy to do things that showed, and that made him appear lofty among his office comrades.

Yes.... I knew Ben. But more did it count as good to my life that I knew Miss Lucy. Miss Lucy, who wanted to be rid of the eternal softness of her womanhood, and to foe able to do things as well as a man. As I looked at her I smiled in the crevices of my own mind.

White-haired, possibly aged 48, slim, brown-eyed, wide-eyed, kind-eyed, and with the eternal softness breaking through the hazy iris of those same brown eyes.

"My goodness," she said, stopping a moment and adjusting the shelf she was fitting into the box. "My gracious goodness, when I think of what men have done in this war, what they are doing— what they are going to do yet— and it makes me mad to think that Ben is one of the lot who have to wait till he can get his commission. Do you think I'd wait for a commission if I was even half a man?"

We both laughed. Then Miss Lucy rounded her arm and bent over the screw-driver, frantically endeavoring to make little holes to fit little nails into.

"Whatever are you making out of the box?" I inquired. She stiffened while she surveyed her work.

"Just furniture," she said. "I don't want Ben to put all his savings into this little house. I love hammer-work and pulling boards about."

She had pulled some of the boards in that room, I knew, a block further than the next street corner, because it had saved the sixpence she would otherwise have had to pay the man she had bought the timber from.

"I've always been thankful, you know, John, that I was made ready at least to take up whatever came along; but what's the good of it?"

I could not answer. Possibly somebody who may have looked into this woman's life earlier may have been able to answer. Possibly he did not bother to.

"You have just created this room," said, looking round at the cupboards, settees, covered stools, and other home manufactured comforts,

"Well, if I had not, I wonder where we would have been. You see, Ben is likely to marry, and I want him to have every penny saved that is possible."

"Did you make all these little things alone?" I inquired.

She laughed.

"All but the piano. My goodness, the place is poor enough; what with packing-case sofas wand ; music cupboard made out of oil-cases; but, thank the powers, we have more comforts than we deserve at such a time. John, do you think Ben will be sent to camp soon?"

"Are you anxious?"

"Very. If he does not get called soon I think I'll go myself. Oh, if only I could— if only women had been made as strong—" She lifted the entire packing case, and carried it to the place where she was building a pantry— "or as capable." She placed the case into the corner, and mentally observed just where it fitted to a precise angle. "Or even— as level-headed in a national crisis ."

My smile broadened behind her back.

Ten minutes afterwards, Ben, her brother, came home.

Immediately he reported that which this good woman had been longing for. He had received his papers. He was to join his comrades in camp. He would require everybody's assistance to get his things ready in the shortest possible time; and he was going to get married before he went.

This last frail piece of information at first caused. Miss Lucy to dilate with enthusiasm; then it threw her a point or so back on her own mental reserves.

I felt ready to burst with something that had never yielded so quickly to my tongue before. I grew feverish and shaky to the finger-tips. I sat there saying nothing; and, being one who had not the rights to get up and chastise Ben for his selfishness, even with his great effort to assist his country wipe out an enemy, I simply listened, and made mental notes— to be studied afterwards.

Miss Lucy had forgotten the carpentering. She was rushing all over the place. Only once she stopped to explain to mo that dinner was going to be a matter of just what was in the house that evening, and perhaps I would not mind going home. I went home unsatisfied; and I slept the same way, perhaps a little more justified in being thoroughly angry with myself that I was the incapable one, with enough of the eternal softness to positively revel in my exclusive bachelorhood.

And Ben went to camp as second Lieutenant. He looked well, fed well (when at home on leave), slept well, and took his matrimonial duties well. As his sister had said, "He was so able."

I don't think I ever knew a man as able to cope with positive soul-luxury as Ben did.

For a little while Miss Lucy had forgotten the weight of the eternal softness that was ever goading her to discount herself as anything practical or necessary in the great world crisis.

Then Ben brought his wife home to settle with the good woman, who, by the way, was entirely dependent on the bounty of her brother for the three meals a day she took in payment for her services. Ben's wife was a nice easy going girl, with womanly ideas. She certainly treated Miss Lucy in the best possible way, though It was rather the respect of a daughter for a mother on whom she was reliant for all major attentions, and with whom she would never quarrel in case it might prove against her good benefits.

I understood that Ben still paid for the upkeep of the home, allowing his wife a nice little sum for dressing, and handing her the housekeeping allowance, which she in turn handed to Miss Lucy, and which, in its own turn, was handed to the butcher, the grocer, gasman and other valuable tradesmen who called regularly. It just about covered the lot, allowing for a few extras in luxurious fodder when the man of the house happened to be on leave. But I did not know how Miss Lucy managed to get her own boots mended, nor how she still was able to pay her fares into the city when she wanted to buy things, only procurable there, to suit the two relatives she was boarding.

However, when it came to the time of Ben's leave I knew then just where this woman stood in regard to any annuity should her brother be carried off on an enemy bayonet or buried at sea by the treacherous sinking machines of the enemy. She just stood where she had stood all the years she had kept house

for him, with this additional bogey. She would be entirely reliant on her brother's wife, and would even be shriven of her Samaritan goodness should Ben's wife choose to take unto herself the entire pension supplied by the Government to wives of deceased officers.

But I bided my time and watched. Miss Lucy meantime carrying that same eternal softness into every action she put forth.

ONE DAY the inevitable change came. Ben was reported wounded, then the blank of government slackness in which nothing could be ascertained about him at all.

Miss Lucy encouraged the little wife, supplied excuses for Ben's not writing, made plans for all their futures should Ben be overtaken by the Greater Silence, and went on with the housework— with the eternal softness exuding from every pore.

Then came more disturbing news. Ben was to be invalided home. He was not really an invalid, but he was not quite right. The Government said, he may recover his balance, but it was likely that he would have to be watched, nursed, and put up with for a number of years before he would even be himself.

The little wife rushed to Miss Lucy (I heard it all later, word for word from the good woman's lips).

"Lucy .... I can't bear it," she said. "Don't you see what it means? Ben is a lunatic.... "

"Oh, hush," said Miss Lucy, "The fight has only unsettled his mind. Hundreds of men come back a little nervy..."

But the young wife, spoiled all her life, could only see It as a kind of dangling skeleton.

"I could not bear him... nervy," she said. "Lucy... would It matter if I went... away?"

"Desert Ben," gasped the elderly woman. "You mean for a little while of course. You take a holiday, dear. I can manage quite well without you.... but don't dream of...of..."

The rest was too horrible for the elder woman to think about. The little wife cried outright,

"I... hate to tell you, Lucy, but I don't want to come back. I don't care as much as I did, and it would be a sin for me to say I'd return and be his wife again when... when..."

"You... don't love Ben?" gasped Miss Lucy.

"I could never face a man not quite right in his head," sobbed Ben's wife. "I'm a coward, I know, but I've never been used to it."

"As for that... none of us have been used to it, but we've got to do our little bit, dear... My God, child.... that is all we've got to do, with our eternal softness and our ladylike ways...."

Whatever happened then, passed only to the higher power of discernment, but the little wife went her way. She refused to touch another penny of her husband's money. It almost seemed as if she thought that might be balanced the wrong way, too. She had never seen him again, nor mentioned his name.

I CALLED on Miss Lucy as she had stowed her brother away in a comfortable, bedroom with the key turned in the lock on her side of the door. He was a harmless simpleton, inclined to wander again through the war paths of the Gallipoli Peninsula; but otherwise no more trouble than a creaking gate. I could see that he would never recover, and that the woman who had been mother, father, sister, nurse and general servant would have to go on being those things to him for quite a number of years. I did not let her speak till I had got my own words forward.

"You could have married years ago, Miss Lucy?"

"Why, yes... but isn't it a good thing I did not. Think of Ben— who would have put up with him at such a time.? Think of the small pension and the amount of things he will require for years and, years... it's just as well that— somebody changed his mind once long ago. I might possibly have had to change mine— as Ben's wife did."

Then I had to go carefully. I wanted to marry Miss Lucy. I wanted the eternal softness of her eyes, her wide eyes, her brown eyes, her hazy, kind, discerning eyes, which could conquer all doubts, all fretfulness, all bogies of the future. But I was over fifty, inclined to be irascible at breakfast, subject to sciatica, nervy about my things being left untouched by a duster when I had them handy. I was not an easy job to handle. My temper was as bad as any other old retired bachelor; but I wanted to make up something to Miss Lucy that some other fool chap had stolen out of her early life. So I went carefully.

"Miss Lucy," I said, horribly afraid she might take me; and as fearsome that she might refuse... "you're so able—so capable—so—"

"Why, John," she gasped, "whatever has taken you? I don't really think you are quite right in your head, also. Do you think you are eating well? Sleeping? Taking enough exercise?"

Big motherly eyes were holding me fast. I drove home my words as if they were the rivets of my whole happiness. "Hang it, Lucy," I broke forth. "For months you've been throwing bricks at yourself for not being able to do more in the great national crisis."

"Don't bring that up, John— I can't bear to speak of it."

"But I can," I shouted. "You spoke of the many things a man could do in this war, of the things he had done and of the things he would yet do. Why, bless me, don't you see that this eruption of military relations has altogether compromised the domestic world as well? Don't you see that if there were no women like you that the fighting crowd might never have been able to stick it out? Don't you see that you are the little soldier woman fighting in your own private war zone; and a harder, better, more earnest battle no woman has ever put up? Don't you see—"

"That's kind of you, John." Her eyes went into circles of softness, and partly I was feeling myself a fool. How could I expect such a great big spirit as Miss Lucy had to recognise her own worth?

"Very kind of you, John," she smiled. "But I am afraid that it is only the eternal softness..."

"Of course, it's the eternal softness," I choked out. "And it is that which has made you the only really all-round capable person I have ever known in my life. Oh, my dear, don't you see that with that great womanly asset you can take a fellow In hand and make him feel his real manhood... you can cure his ills, put up with his weaknesses, manage his house, his life, his happiness, love him for his own stupidity, and— be the only woman he has ever wanted to marry..."

"John— you don't mean that?"

And then I kissed the hem of her sleeve.

"Be— wife and mother to me, Lucy," I murmured. "With your eternal softness help me to fight the dragon old age that is creeping upon both of us... It means rheumatism, gout, selfishness, temper... but I feel I can't face that enemy alone... with your eternal softness help me to keep my feet in the creeping cold years when a man wants understanding..."

"Why, of course I will, John," said Miss Lucy, and that week saw her, the little soldier woman, leading her small army of subordinates through the entanglements and over the pitfalls of common ordinary domesticity, and fighting for the happiness of all with her only weapon, her eternal softness.

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## 23: A Miss in the Mails

*Australasian* (Vic) 8 Feb 1908

DAN was a honest, strong-faced man, who had worked for four solid years on a small run alone. He had first built a slab hut, and added thereto bit by bit— cutting down the timber with a man's strength and a man's hopes; and through it all he had taken his reward in a weekly letter— the letter of a girl called Nell.

In all his work she was before him, every time the hammer rang a forceful clang upon the place it repeated in his brain her name— "Nell! Nell! Nell!"

The muffled clod of his horse upon the beaten track to the general store and post-office echoed again to him— "Nell! Nell!"

And this— for nearly four years.

"It won't be long now—" said Dan one day, trailing a string across the verandah post for a creeper before the bedroom window. "It's jolly small— but then Nell's small an' sweet— an' with time an' together we'll soon feel as big as any station-owner hereabouts."

It was a daily joy to Dan, this place, because he had done it all himself; even some of the furniture he had knocked together, handy as he was with a bit of board and some varnish and paint.

From the store in the bank he had taken, perhaps, more than was wise— but then, as he said—"Nell must have some things that looked as if town was not so far away." Just the bed and a few curtains, some white tableware, and a couple of bright tin pots. They made a lot of difference, and the matting, all new — nothing secondhand for Nell— he thought it had a touch of the Oriental about it, and, overjoyed, he laughed like a boy. There was not much time to waste in those four years— clearing the land and fencing it had filled in the main portion— but when Sunday came Dan had considered that as his own, to spend on Nell— and so he had gradually built the house.

When he rode to the store this week, lighter-hearted than ever, because lie had written a letter to her—naming the date for her to come. It was hidden just inside his shirt, next to his warm, hard-worked body— and the feeling of it gave him the happiness of the knowledge that it meant the beginning of great things. Soon he would ride to meet her, at the station, nearly thirty miles further on.

He hailed the man behind the sacks of potatoes and piles of boots on* the counter—

"Good day!"

"Day, Dan."

"I'll have some bread and— some flour— and— a— letter!"

His face was lit with a dozen emiles. The storeman lurched across the shop, and picked up a sack of bread fairly stale.

"Some bread— some flour— and your letter— eh? Oh, yes. I say, Dan." He leant on the sack of potatoes, and faced Dan seriously—

"There weren't— no letter, Dan!"

Dan took off his hat, and rubbed his hair. "Whew!! It's hot! I s'pose yer jokin', some," he said.

"No joke!" said the man. "I says to old Benson to-day, 'Why, there ain't a letter for Dan this first time in years.' "

Dan slowly took up his goods and tramped out without a word.

'Not on— purpose," he said presently to himself. 'There's a miss in the mail— first time in four years " And the horse slowly took him back.

"There'll be two next week—" he consoled himself when he got home; then the place took hold of him again, and in the shining pots the girl's face seemed to reflect his words. "Yes two next week," and half in happiness, half in misapprehension pf it all, he laughed sadly. He weut into the front room— the large bed, ready to be made up, wit., sprawling pillows and blankets thrown across, was changed. He almost fancied he saw her lying on it ill— and dying. He left the house and walked down to the creek, where some few head of cattle belonging to him stared at him with big eyes. "It will be right as rain next week," he said.

When on the following week Dan arrived at the store, he had a bag wittt him, and a better suit on.

"Where to Dan?" asked the storeman.

"To town, said Dan, "if there ain't a letter."

The storeman coughed a bit; he was fond of Dan.

"There's lots o' letters goes astray," he said. "Maybe yours is with them."

Dan started, then said huskily, "Ain't there a letter to-day?"

The storeman shifted his feet uneasily. "None for you, old man. Guess you'd better go to town, eh?"

Dan pulled his hat right over his eyes without a word, and the storeman watched him ride away in the direction of the station with the bag in one hand.

DAN shuffled up the stairs of a small brick villa in Sydney, and stared at the door knocker— his head seemed to be rapping instead— so he just waited.

Some voices in laughter came to him through the open window near— he let the knocker fall once.

Up the hall he heard hurrying feet, and a light laugh— then the door opened, and the laugh died suddenly— choking back like a sob. It was Nell—

Nell— standing speechless before him— clasping the door-handle behind her with both hands.

"Dan!"

He stood— nervously fingering his hat— with the, perspiration standing out on his forehead in large drops.

"I— I— didn't get no letter— this last two weeks— and— so— oh, Nell— I've come for you!"

His face was tragic in its suspense—his body shaking.

Nell still clung on to the door-handle with both hands behind her—quiet and breathing deeply.

"I'm— sorry—" she said, so that her voice would not reach back into the house.

"I— can't— go, Dan!"

"Well, I'll wait a bit " said Dan, putting on his hat. "I'll stop in the town for a week, and— Where's—your—ring—Nell—?" He was suddenly calm.

She had put one hand to her face, and Dan saw—that she only had on a thick band.

'Are— you— married?" His voice was so calm that Nell thought it didn't much hurt him.

She laughed lightly.

"I tried to tell you, Dan— long ago. Then I thought I'd better just stop writing—and— and— that's all."

Dan looked into the sunshine on the garden path, and saw the little home away in the north, ready for her. He looked back at her, in her loft, long-skirted dress, with its fine white lace, and then the shining pots came into vision before him— and he moved uneasily.

"This ain't Nell!" he said within himself, and put out his hand.

"Well, I'm going on further a bit, and I mayn't see you for a time, so I'll just wish you— well, by the way, good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Nell, speaking in a whisper, almost, "and— and— I'm sorry!"

"Oh— that's alright," said Dan, almost cheerfully. "I'll get along— now— you'll be— happier here," he added, half to himself, as he slowly went down the path.

Next day he went across to the other side of Sydney. He hadn't seen his brother for years, and so he thought he would now.

When he got to the house, a man jovially stretched out his hand in cordial welcome.

"By Jingo! is that you, Dan?"

Dan couldn't stand much of the soft kindness offered him here— it made him feel childish, and inclined to he a bit feminine in his present state.

"I'm going away again," he said. "I thought you might like a change, and tberes my place up north going to waste; there's plenty of work, and perhaps a bit of money out of it by and by— if you'd like to take it on. I'm goin' a bit further out— maybe South Africa Way."

His brother stared at him. He felt quite certain that Dan was in sound mind, but— then a Remembrance came to him of a letter that Dan had written some years ago, about a girl or something, and he shut up. Something told him not to question Dan.

"Well now," he said, "that just what I would like. It 'ud be a rare chance, and I could work it up for you while you were away; eh, Dan? We could go halves some day."

"Some day!" said Dan, though he knew full well that the house for Nell would never see him again.

"I couldn't face it out!" he said that night alone— "not without her. You've changed a bit, Nell, old girl, from when you was a ragged, climbing tomboy at the old school."

Then he laughed shortly.

"I muster bin a bit of a duffer-headed coon to think that that Nell would sorter fitted in with those pots and things."

And the remembrance of the work of years came to him vividly in a flash, and though he was a strong man, there were the soft tears of a woman on his pillow that night.

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## 24: Hoofs and Horns and Hyacinths

*Weekly Times* 5 July 1913

LARDEN rode down a track of sun-smitten gully and took to the iron-rock shelf that hung over the level plateau. Cuddling down between the boulders were hyacinths that were as blue as the sky, and Larden dismounted and curled the reins round his wrist while he picked a bunch of them. Somewhere, someone crushed and spattered sandstone and soil nearly into his eyes, and he stood back holding the blossoms tenderly, and avoiding any more of the failing sand by throwing one arm before his face.

"Steady," he called, as a little sharp-eyed "towner" led his bush pony down the pinnacle to the left.

"Guess you heard me coming," said the Barabbas of the district, and Larden with particular dislike in his face, undertook to hold himself gripped while he answered him.

"I wasn't out to guess anything about you— Mr Moses— Barnes! I was thinking someone with your size in boots was trying to kick the mountains to pieces when I got the first dose of mother-earth In my face— that's all."

The towner drew his whip through his fingers, but he sat calmly on his pony and observed the flowers in Larden's hand.

"My name isn't Moses to start off with," he began, and the small stock breeder turned his eyes from him.

"No; I beg your pardon. I was a bit hasty on the prophet when I called you that. Thinking over what I learned at school, Moses was sort of generous-kind to the young— concerned maybe about old people who live out of the way of things."

"You mind your own business," said Barnes in flames of indignation. "Seems to me you're a fine hand at spending time playing with flowers and leaving all your other chances. Miss Guller's worth having a try for now, I believe. I'm thinking of making myself a little wedding present of the Marsden run, seeing that they can't pay me the bill I've renewed four times. You go on picking flowers."

The money-lender laughed and cut his pony across the flank. It reared and towered over the rocks, and the man tore at the curb and brought it down on its feet with a curse.

"Yes," he laughed back to Larden, "I'm minding my own business; you go on picking flowers."

"They're the only things in the world without sin," said Larden, flashing back a hot face, " 'cept hawses."

Between the two men a splash of sunshine played peacemaker, and the silence seemed like a tender hand staying any further words. Larden returned the laugh and rode away with the hyacinths in his hand.

"Seems to me," he said later on to himself. "Seems to me sometimes there ought to be fewer men growing in these parts and more flowers. I could find enough company in a horse— to last me a few eternities; but I don't reckon I could put in half a day without wanting to rope that money-snatcher. S'pose he's up country hunting the quiet out of some of the smaller runs. The drought two years ago helps him there. None of the small men seem to have pulled up; and they are all chewing the cud about borrowing from this scab."

To ease his memory of the episode of the ride he spat far into the golden grass and arrived at his destination a few hours afterwards with the thing forgotten.

There at the little local general store he handed in his flowers. The girl who received them laughed, and the merriment sounded as if someone had slapped Larden in the face.

"You're getting slower and slower out your way, Hec," she said, leading on her side of the counter and letting her eyes roam round the assembled community of cattle men, who were all in the store for business and fresh chatter. "Given up growing cattle and taken to this kind of thing?"

Larden watched her eyes and felt the blood circulate a bit too furiously in his own.

"I couldn't very well bring you in a handful of cattle, Isa. These little sunshine faced things seems to grow in any kind of furious weather, and they're a change, I should say, from, what you've got to look at all day long."

The girl went further back into the shop and beckoned to Larden. He followed round the counter.

"You're not keen on being nice, today, Isa," he said gently.

"I'm not keen on sitting still any longer and letting you have first call to leave me like an unplayed ace."

The girl was hot to the eyebrows. Her eyes took depths into them that Larden had never seen before.

"You've had your chance, Hec, for three years and you've not played me very fair! There's others come along here, and—"

She stopped and Larden finished for her: "—you'd like me to hand over my stack."

"You're too fond of living a pretty life for me," came jerkily from the girl. "My father won't live for ever, and this place goes to my brother after that. I'm twenty-seven and I ought to have my way clear. Why don't you come in oftener?"

"I'm not picking flowers every day, Isa," he said calmly.

"No; but you could— well, it's hard to say what, you are doing all your time, and me sitting here like, something that's gone out of fashion, and no use to anybody. People tell me you're sinking post holes on your western boundary. You're not sinking post holes in the night time, are you Hec?"

"I'm often working in the moonlight, Isa," said Larden.

The girl stood with a dissatisfied look on her face; and while she did so she twirled a little opal ring given her by Larden three years ago.

"You've got something worrying you," said Larden, folding his arms tightly together so as to not be tempted to touch her at all. "Is it that little— hobble— you're wearing for me?"

The girl turned the ring further and finally spun it into the air. She had given way to the recklessness in her soul.

"Catch," she said, tossing it towards him. "We're only playing this, you and me— I'm not up to waiting any more birthdays for you to harness up with me. You've proved yourself about as unlike a man what's concerned about his girl as one of the blackfellows. I want to be free to—"

"Hitch up somewhere else?" Larden did not smile.

"Well, it isn't as if I hadn't other chances," said Isa, and went to serve a teamster.

When Larden got an opportunity he spoke again.

"Just one thing, Isa— I knew I was slow three years, ago when, I asked you to marry me and you said yes, but since I've seen that loose-minded Barabbas jerking himself round the country seven times a fortnight, I'm sort of glad I'm slack enough to stop at home working and keeping myself out of mischief. I'd be afraid to have a much money as he's got— a man, and a fortune are usually up against things as far as keeping straight goes."

The girl flashed a harsh light into her eyes.

"Barnes is a gentleman and knows how to make things go," she said, curiously calm. "He's taking up land here and going to breed stock.

"I beg your pardon," Larden coughed and smiled. "You mean he's stealing land and going to breed trouble. I knew all about his game. It's rough on the old folk who can't hold their chances much longer. I'm referring to the old Marsdens. The old chap borrowed from this Barabbas and topped that debt with several more loans. He thought that his son would help him stick to his cattle and what's left after the drought of two years ago, but the son seems to be like you— in the claws of this devil of Barnes, and has only increased the thirty per cent business. Only I'm not much of a hand at saying things about myself, Isa. To me actions count higher than shuffling words, but out there in my little two-roomed hut where I was building a brick frontage for a certain

little girl— names not mentioned, but understood between us— I suppose I also sit and wait and dream at times— hungrily."

"A brick frontage." Isa stopped very still to think.

"Oh, it will do to keep the saddlery in," said Larden. "For myself I'm happy with my two-roomed hut and my flowers."

Then he walked into the store and handed her the order he had brought in for his monthly stores. The girl tied up the bundles of soap and tea and sugar in silence. Presently she looked at him across the counter.

"Mr. Barnes had shown me what a fool I have been these three years," she said. "He's worked to get all the money you spoke about and he lends it to men who haven't a chance."

"And takes it back again at thirty per cent, or staggers the show," said Larden.

"That's only business." The girl was quiet as she said it. "Money makes money, you know."

"Sometimes it makes gaol-birds, like— like old Marsden's son. That chap's got into Barnes hand somewhere in the Town. The old folks can't rely on him now to pull them out of the trouble they're up against, with a bill served on them on account of this foolish boy."

The girl was silent.

"All the same, Isa," Larden continued. "Perhaps we've been stretching the string of our affection a bit too tightly lately, and we've got ourselves rather knotted up. Here's an end to the tangle anyway—" He threw the little opal ring through the door, where it fell into the horse trough. "You're welcome to Barnes if you want to keep him out of a nasty eternity. Don't let him come my way, though."

"He's a man, anyhow," Isa jerkily remarked. "He can make things go and offer a girl some sort of a future. I can have a house in town and a place out in this country as well if I like."

"You might live in jewelled palaces, and have diamonds in your pudding, but you had better see there isn't folks nearly over the edge of things, likely to starve before you take it on."

"Jealous?" laughed the girl, and Larden took out the bundle of things to his horse. He had brought a rope for that purpose. When he was tying them to the saddle the girl followed him to the front.

"Hec—" she was sightly more reasonable. "If you'd only do something to show that you cared—"

Larden looked back, immovable, with one hand on the neck of the animal.

"I see— It's some sort of outward and visible show you're wanting to have as a sort of hall-mark of the goods! I will remember, though it's a bit late after

this talk... Would you prefer me to rope Barnes and string him like a calf, or commit suicide myself so as you've got the laugh over me."

"There are other things you can do," said Isa.

"Well, the best thing to start on might be to save you if possible from that money-beetle."

He rode away as it was getting dark, and the girl stood looking after him.

"Hope I don't make a mistake," she said mentally, "He does seem as if he has some sort of manliness in him after all."

A DAY OR SO afterwards Larden threw himself into the saddle and again took the green hide rope.

"There is a fresh kind of beast out in these parts," he told the horse, "and it's worse than a scrubber or a straggler, and it isn't fit to be called by the name of cattle of any kind. We'll take a track down to old Mrs Marsden, seeing that her son isn't here to fight the case."

Before he reached the home paddocks of the land belonging to the old couple he sighted the "towner."

"Hullo, there," he called out, "going to buy up the whole of Queensland?"

The money-lender took him quietly. "Perhaps I am later on," he called through the scrub. "I'll start with the Marsden run and maybe take on yours when the cattle overrun the paddocks."

Larden played with the greenhide rope.

"I understand that this bill you're presenting the old couple with does not fall due till to-morrow. I'm putting myself into the place of the boy you've got messed up in the city. It's no good the old couple relying on him, so, as I'm pretty well next door in the heart of his mother, I'll undertake now to question you."

"You can't pay the bill," laughed Barnes, "when you couldn't even stand a marriage ceremony for your girl."

"I might be able to do both, Mr Barabbas, before you're a day older," said Larden.

"Well, I'm not standing any interference here," said Barnes. "I'll settle with the old man this instant if I want to. It's easy to frighten them, as I've got a bill over the boy more than they'll pay even if they save this cattle shed."

"We'll save the cattle shed all right between us," said Larden. "You'll take three hundred down and let the rest be till I communicate with you."

"Three hundred," said Barnes. "I'd like to know where old Marsden could put his fist on three hundred even with his boy— outside of things."

"That's our business," said Larden. "You just side-step, Mr Barabbas, and this minute I'll post you a cheque tomorrow on account of Mr Marsden."

"I don't trust you," said Barnes, and laughed as he turned away to take out the slip rail a few yards from the home paddock of the run. But Larden was not a man of mere words.

"Very well," he said, "I came out to catch a bird worth having and I've given you your chance."

He ran the green hide through, his hand and flung it wide across this space where Barnes stood. The wreath coiled round the money-lender's body and he caught one edge of it in his hand. Larden did an upward twitch and it had caught the man by the throat so that he swung round and tottered in the sand of the bridle track.

His shout brought out old Marsden, a decrepit veteran of the bush, whose eyes were rimmed with the trouble of life and whose face was scored with the fierce fight of many seasons.

"Seems we got trouble knockin' right up against our front door these days, since the boy went bit,  Mr. Larden," he said, and stared at the bounding man at the tether end.

"I'll want a hand with this particular bit," said Larden. "Take that piece of hide I've thrown there, Mr. Marsden, and secure that bird bit closer. I can't hold him like this without either spoiling his plumage or killing him by choking."

"Barabbas" stopped wriggling, and showed blood-rimmed eyes and a gaping mouth. Larden loosened the ligature slightly and told him to keep still and do as he was told if he wanted to still feel alive. Barnes's hands were tied behind his back, and Larden started the horse forward.

"Barabbas was a robber," he said with a mock salute to the sky. "Wasn't he hanged, Mr Marsden?"

Before the old man could answer a circle of dust behind the scrub to the right showed a girl riding hastily. It was Isa— the daughter of the storekeeper. She turned her horse to trot right alongside of Larden, and her face glowed with a new spirit.

"What are you going to do?" she said, panting and holding her hand to her throat.

"I'm just thinking," said Larden, twitching the rope so that Barnes had to trot alongside of the horse or be strangled.

"You've brought him to heel, Hec," said the girl, "but you can let him go now, can't you? It's only a game I've been having with you—"

"It's another sort he's been having with everybody," said Larden. "There's a fine ant-heap near the station where men pass only in four days. I think I'll put him head downwards to, give the insects a chance."

The girl shuddered on her pony, and kept up the trot alongside of the men.

"You can't do that to a man without swinging for it, Hec."

"Maybe the cause is worth it," answered Larden.

"I'll promise to give him up."

"That's a bit late, my girl, seeing he's got to hand over his wedding chances from the moment he reaches the ant bed."

"It isn't that I really care," she pleaded. "It's you I'm wanting, Hec— only— only— let him go. You're taking risks of the rope yourself, and I could not bear— that—"

"I thought that you wanted me to do something to show you," smiled Larden. "Here's the ant heap, and that's the identical tree the last bushranger— poor chap— was strung up to. See, there's a dip in the roots where they buried him. Wonder if there's room for another—"

The girl swung off her horse and stood under the tree.

"I won't let you do it, Hec— Hec— this man is nothing to me, but I plead for his life because it means yours. I don't want you to die for me."

Harden shook his head, standing there still holding the green hide round his wrist and hand.

"Sorry to break up your little fancy story," he said, measuring by a glance the height of the tree trunk, "but it looks as if there is the whole country to be saved by this man's exit. I s'pose I'm doing this on purpose to put that old couple right first of all. There's that boy to be got over; he's trouble in Brisbane through this course of a money grabber." Again he looked up into the tree, and Barnes allowed a sudden cry to escape from his parched throat.

The girl shrieked with all her strength. "You're killing him slowly," she said. "It's not a thing any man would do—"

She tore at the green hide in Larden's fingers, but seeing that this only increased the trouble and made the victim suffer more, she let go and dashed into the bush.

Harden laughed long into the depth of sun and scrub, and turned to the wretched Barnes.

"Perhaps you'd better be left till another time," he said, getting back to his horse. "Come to heel again and we'll catch the train at the railway siding. There ought to be one in for the drovers going through, to the City."

He towed Barnes another hour's journey, and reached the siding as the cattle trucks jangled and jarred into the platform.

"Here, the toughest piece of— country fed— ever sent out of the district," he called to the man flagging the engine-driver. "He's got to be sent down, same as the rest."

"He's been kept too long," laughed the railway man; and helping Larden throw the money-lender into an empty truck, they locked the barred door. The green hide had been taken off, but Barnes still remained with his hands tied.

"Good afternoon," laughed Larden. "If you're calling this way again Mr Barabbas, we'll take a look at the ants' heap and the big tree. Keep yourself cool for the sale yards, and you'll find a market there for sure."

Turning away he met the eyes of the girl who had just galloped into the siding.

"Sorry to spoil your wedding, Miss Guller," he said.

She rode round and trotted by his side.

"I was only playing with him, Hec."

Larden looked very sober.

"Don't think it was such a good game as mine," he said.

"I thought that you meant to really—" She could not say the words, and Larden shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm reserving that, case he turns up again, Isa. You keep up your playing with anyone you like, but anything with a purpose like that money-beetle goes to the tree before I let you marry him."

Miss Guller looked delighted.

"Oh, then, you do care, Hec— you do care—?"

"I haven't been making my place turn somersaults in my brain night and day just to— to— make a circus of things for my own happiness. That brick frontage has stopped half way now, and there are other things to be done with the money... I tore that little fancy story out of my book a few days ago, and I'm keeping the remembrance of what it was like to entertain me of an evening when I'm not concerned building up the walls."

In his eyes a blurred light took the place of usual clearness.

"I turn off here," he said. "And that track way between the palm scrub leads to your house. I'll just go along peacefully if you don't mind. I've got to pick up things, and maybe I'll do a little prospecting in flowers instead of anything else."

The girl put out her hand. "Hec— let me come with you— I care—"

But Larden shook his head with his hat in his hand. A circle of sun-light made a halo round his face.

"I'm not going along picking up gold-bricks, Isa... I'll let you know when I do." He threw himself off one side of the horse and scooped a small pale hyacinth into the palm of his hand and then sat back on his saddle in an instant.

He rode off in the sunlight just holding it in his hand.

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## 25: The Claim on Emily Crow

*Sunday Times* (Sydney) 17 Dec 1911

THE very young man who had called on Emily Crow stood by the door munching Christmas buns and twirling his torn black felt hat to the rhythm of his mastication.

Emily Crow had known him since he had been born, and was not afraid to speak her mind out, even if it was on a subject rather distressing to her own heart, though no doubt, considering the difference of their ages, intensely flattering.

'I just got noo nest's up in the fowl house,' said Emily with firmness. 'I just put in the second lot of lettuces, and it ain't to be expected that I want to leave it all after I done the place up a bit. When me father was alive I never thought about gettin' married, and never since when I had to work the farm alone. I been thirty-seven years in the place, and every day as regular as the sun I gets up, and deserves me sleep at nights, with out no-one to say what's what.'

'Why can't you let me be, Ern Booth?'

The youth took another bun from the tray that she had put on the table.

'Look here, Emily. I got to marry whatever you says. I got the place up the road going fine now, and it don't seem natural that a feller spends his time workin' like that for himself alone. I don't want no-one but you.'

Emily Crow shook her head at the fire.

'That's only cos you been under my wing all your life; and your mother before she was took made you think she never understood you. I've been friend and all that to you all your life, but it don't seem as if I ought to be expected to wife it after this time.'

'Yer got to marry some time,' said the youth.

'I dunno,' said Emily. 'Some women is content to live it out with the fowls and the cows and the garden. I got enough to do to make it right for me old age without thinkin' about any one else's old age. I never thought of marryin' no-one in this place.'

'That's cos there ain't no-one to marry,' said the youth. 'I mean outside me. The place is chock full of old women and a few marriage dodgers. Yer not going to add up the line of old maids, are you, Emily?'

'I'm going to do me duty such as it pleases me, and to whom I please,' said Emily, pushing the tray of hot buns towards him. He took one. 'Talkin' of the place bein' full of unmarried girls, given they is a bit on the weedy side of

thirty, you might try them Bird girls. Mill's a year or two younger than Nan, and Nan's four years below me. They ain't had a chance, poor women. The bank clerk wot come here for a bit last year, he nearly did the ruination of Nan. She just give up her whole time and work to that man, and what'd he do? Just tell her in going he had a wife down Melbourne way. Nan, she near give up her life altogether when the doctor got to her.'

'Yer never eat Nan's bread or you wouldn't think I ought to take it on,' said the youth, who knew a little about the kitchens around the country. 'Mill's a nice sort, but looks older than you do, Emily. Sure as eggs I mean it. She talks, too. Oh, I couldn't stand her over dinner time.'

'Yer don't know what yer could stand till you tries,' said Emily. 'Yer don't know how I can rouse when I likes, or if yer does yer mighty stupid to think I would do fer to marry you. If it's hot cakes or bread makin' yer got on yer mind— well, I daresay I might send you down a trayful once a week. Dunno that I'd have to make the buns if you didn't come along and eat them. I made yer treacle tarts when you was in flannel petticoats; and I dressed you, too, when you fell, in the water cask once when yer mother got disgusted with you. Here, take home a few of these buns. Yer not forgetting it's Christmas termorrer?'

'Tain't yer buns I'm after, Emily, and you knows that as well as yer knew me when I was yer baby friend. I tell you I said yesterday I was going to marry Emily Crow, and mean it. Yer can believe me or not.'

'Don't get upset over it, then,' she said, quickly. 'Have another cake and I'll have to think about it. Dunno what we can do. Never thought of takin' a man on here when me father died. I got used to workin' and sleepin' sound after it, with no-one to interfere. Who's that passin' over the side of the road now?'

She ran to the window, and the boy followed.

'That's the girl from Binney's store. She come up for the Christmas holidays, they tells me last night.'

'She's mighty high stepping fer Mrs. Binney's niece,' said Emily. 'I'd like to ask her in and introduce meself. I'd ask her what she thought about marryin' at my age. These townies always has a word to say different to what you might think yerself. She wouldn't give up her home fer no man by the look of her walk. Yer better go home now, Ern. I got business to do before to-morrow. Yer can come to tea in the afternoon if yer like; I'm making treacle jumbles and a few things fer the day, seein' its Christmas.'

'I'll be here as soon as the tarts is ready,' said, the young man laughingly, and went away without even saying good afternoon.

Emily immediately put on her big mushroom hat with the imitation flowers and grass on it. She hurried to the store to interview Mrs. Binney.

'Yer got a niece stayin', I believe,' said Emily,

'Up fer a rest,' said Mrs. Binney. 'She's hard worked in the drapery in town, and I give her the chance of a holiday with me. No use askin' her to help in the store. She can only trim hats and make baby jumpers. She's a good girl, though. I want her to have a nice time.'

Emily shot her first bullet.

'Let her come to tea with me to-morrow afternoon. I got a visitor what might interest her, seein' she's young and not inclined to want to talk to us old women all the time.'

Mrs. Binney looked across the counter.

'That's right,' she said. 'I guess Lily'l be glad to come. This place ain't much in a young girl's line when you think it's full of old maids.'

This remark was shot over the counter as Mrs Binney put together twopence worth of cocoanut ice that Emily had ordered towards her party. She shook her head.

'And when you comes to think of it, Mrs. Binney,' said Emily, 'some of us, as has married, seems worse off when it comes to takin' orders every day as to the way things has to be served. Yer niece might be better married than in the drapery, and yet she might be better off if she had a bit of a place like me, for instance. No bother; and ask who you likes to dinner. Good evening. I shall expect her.'

Emily went out of the store after examining a bit of dress material near the door.

'Good enough fer a weddin' dress,' she said mentally. 'I might get a dozen yards out of the egg money now the fowls are layin'. I must get Ern to match first, and see that girl too. I might promise the dress.'

NEXT DAY the boy came along. Emily had the girl from town in the front room with the blinds down so that it would be cool. She had a glass jug handy with lemonade in it, and was talking fit to excite anybody into wanting to listen for a dozen hours on end.

'It's the rest you want,' she was saying to the girl. 'Country life for a time and a bit of the town every now and then to smarten you up so that you can lead the fashions in a place like this. Have a bit of ice. Cocoanut ice is about all Mrs. Binney's store allows unless you buys bull's-eyes. Didn't think you would care for them. Oh, here comes a gentleman.'

The gentleman was Ern. He had put on another suit, different to the one he wore when he knocked round this place. He wasn't usually so careful about his collar, too, but then it must be remembered that he had come a-wooing,

though he had not expected that it would be any but Emily that he was going to woo.

'This is one of our young men,' said Emily when the girl had stared at the youth. Ern said something, and then asked Emily for a drink. It was hot walking down the road.

Emily poured out a glass of the lemonade and smiled at him. 'Ern works so hard,' she said to the girl. 'He's gettin' together the nicest place a woman ever could wish for. He's hopin' to be married.'

Ern blushed and dragged his feet together. The girl from town smiled and said 'Really?' and then looked at Ern rather nicely. Ern looked out of the window, and Emily suddenly remembered that she had let a hen off the eggs for a spell and wanted to get it to the nest again.

'You young people can easy talk a' bit while I attends to the chickens,' she said. 'I never lets the fowls or the cows go even when it's a holiday.'

When she had gone Ern put on his hat again. He didn't know what else to do.

Lily said quietly that she would like to see his place.

Ern said sharply, 'So yer can — it's only way up the road. Look out of the window.'

'Is it that beautiful little green painted, cool looking, house with the staghorn ferns growing on the trees?' said the girl, craning her neck behind the blind a minute.

'No, it's got a drain pipe on the top of the chimney,' said the boy.

'How sweet,' said the girl, and went back to the sofa.

'Yer stayin' a bit?' ventured Ern on his own behalf.

'Well it all depends,' said the girl. 'I ought to have a thorough rest, but I don't think I can afford to stay away from work.'

Ern did a succession of shakes with his head.

'Yer look real towny, too,' he said, and there were no more words between them.

Emily came in with a tray full of things, cakes and scones, and a big enamel tea-pot.

'Move the dog off the table,' she said to Ern, who placed a red and pink china mongrel on the floor by the praying stool. Emily began to set out the tea, and in her heart she was hoping many things.

'You and Ern can sit on that side,' she said. 'I'll stop here at the end, so's I can get to the kitchen easily when we wants more hot water.'

Ern noticed two things at tea time. One was that the girl from town had eyes that he didn't want to meet; and the other, that Emily went out for hot water five times.

ERN BOOTH looked in at the kitchen door a week after Christmas.

'Emily, I want to tell you something,' he said.

'Don't want to hear it unless it's an invitation to your weddin',' she said.

'How can I give yer an invitation till I get a weddin'?' he said, crossly.

'Yer been about with Lily for every day in the week,' said Emily.

'That don't make a weddin', said the youth.

'Than get away from the door or I'll throw out the dish water,' said Emily, and the boy moved off and kicked his feet angrily.

'She's the hardest thing a feller could shift,' he said to himself. 'Won't listen a moment. I'd better get up to the store, I s'pose.'

Two days after that Emily was milking her favorite cow and singing. Her song was interrupted with the shriek of the departing railway engine for the south. The young man, whose affairs were of so much moment to her, suddenly sprawled over the fence near her, and it was apparent that he was on his way from the station.

'Emily,' he said, shaking with mirth, 'I got—'

'You don't tell me you got that girl away without—'

He interrupted her. 'I got her away with a promise. Leastways—'

Emily Crow rose up with the bucket.

'A promise ought to have, been made good be fore you let her go, stupid,' she said. 'I'll be real wild if you let her go back to the drapery without even as much as a temporary ring on her finger.'

'I never took on no ring business,' said the youth, with the hurt in his face. 'She wanted me to go with her and have it settled with the parson down there. I said I might— after a bit. I never made no promise, though.'

Emily stared hard at him.

'Then you better go and pack yer things this very minit if I has anything to say about it. You can catch the second train this evening, and I gives you my word to her, that I pays for the weddin' dress if she sends the bill at once.'

The boy met her eyes deliberately.

'What? You want me to get goin' after her now, when— when I took all the week to get her back to town? Not me. I come to ask you, Emily, what I asked you before—'

'Yer not startin' that again, are you?' said Emily with a sudden rising flush in her face. 'Haven't I done me best fer you all these years, and now that I arranges things fer yer future, good—'

'It ain't good,' said the boy quickly. 'If you was expectin' me to grab partners with that delikit bit of town flesh— well, all I can say is you don't care much, Emily— you don't even love me for me own happiness.'

Emily held the bucket as if it was something that needed gripping hard.

'Yer the most incorrigible—' she began, and then walked to the step of the kitchen.

She held the door open with one hand and looked at him.

'I can't do nothin' with you. What did yer think of doin' with two places if I was to be silly enough to marry you? Did yer think I was goin' to give up me father's land that I been on all me life? Did it ever, strike you that you'd have to sell yer own place just as you got it goin' fine now? You'd have to sell it out and put the money in the bank fer yer old age when I'd be under. You can't work when you're old, and I couldn't look after you when I'm dead.'

The boy made a hurried movement towards her.

'Don't mind what I done, Emily,' he said. 'So long's you—'

'Oh, shut up about it now,' said the woman. 'I'm that disgusted when I thinks about Lily, and me thirty-seven years—'

'Don't care if you was a hundred,' said the boy joyfully, as he tried to get hold of her hand that was resting on the door.

'Leave off,' said Emily, hastily. 'You get home. I don't want to have, no more of this, this morning. You can come down to-night, and there might be somethin' more than my temper for you if I got time to bake this afternoon.'

She banged the door in his face, and the boy turned away with an unsettled look in his eyes.

Emily Crow went up to the store an hour later. She was mentally conversing with herself on the way.

'It's not only unbefitting but it's beyond me altogether,' she said. 'Can't have the boy unhappy all the same, and I s'pose I understand him as no-one ever done in his life.'

She looked across the hills surrounding the district. They were the same to her as when she had looked at them with a younger, brighter outlook years ago. 'Might just as well have been his mother,' she said as the hills reminded her of things gone. 'Might just as well have been his mother when— when his father asked me to marry him when I was sixteen.'

She went into the store and nodded to Mrs Binney.

'Some of that material at the door at ten pence halfpenny a yard,' she said, opening her purse. 'How much would you think would be needed for a weddin' dress, Mrs Binney?'

Mrs Binney smiled in her own way.

'Eight yards for a ordinary sized girl,' she said. 'And twelve if it was fer a lump of an old maid like yerself.'

Emily Crow counted out her money carefully.

'I'll take twelve,' she said, quickly, and went out of the shop leaving Mrs. Binney standing staring after her.

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## 26: An Office Derelict

*The Native Companion*, 1 Aug 1907

NANCE ran up the office stairs and pushed the swing doors at the top open.

"I'm late!" she gasped.

A girl was taking off the cover of a typewriter, and laughed.

"Only ten minutes!" she said.

"The 'boss' isn't in yet— so what does it matter?"

Nance ran her fingers through her hair and sat down at her table.

"I wasn't thinking of him," she said gravely. "But all those letters from last night have to be got away by first post this morning. By the way, you'd better do three copies of each."

The "typist" yawned.

"Oh, dear! It's such a lovely day. I really couldn't hurry. A friend of mine invited me down the river, and of course I couldn't go— didn't dare ask 'off ' with so much work behind. Do you ever feel as if you couldn't face it out, Nance?"

Nance was lost in a labyrinth of figures, and did not answer. The girl commenced a series of clicking movements on the machine. Presently the manager and chief of the department came into the room. He hurriedly nodded

"Good morning," looking at Nance, and wholly ignoring the girl at the machine, then he plunged into a whirlpool of business, asking questions about work done on the previous day, and frowning the while in acknowledgment of the information she gave in reply. His manner suggested irritability and hurry but one might almost have imagined that he had kept considerations of the previous day running in one long mental string through the intervening night, so ably he picked up the thread.

While he spoke he sorted out a number of papers from a basket on his table, and threw them carelessly down by Nance.

"I should like you to attend to those as early as you can. I don't know why they've been allowed to collect on my table. I thought I gave instructions some time ago that they were to be entered up to date."

Nance did not even look at him; she calmly put them on one side and went on with her figures.

The "chief" stared.

"What's that you're doing now?" he grunted. "Why don't you get to work and have them out of the way first?"

She raised her eyes and looked at him squarely.

"You distinctly said those entries were always to be put on your desk, and not to be invoiced until you had seen them. At present I'm doing the monthly totals of the sales in the country, which you wanted to have in hand by to-night."

He blinked both eyes very quickly.

"You seem to have a peculiar way, Miss Thorpe, of carrying through the work in your own particular style; now what I want is my way." He drew himself up. "What I said was— er —that I should like the monthly totals in hand each week before Wednesday; that did not imply that I desired the other work neglected so that they may be done."

She knew her position in the office only too well. "What is it you wish me to do now?" she asked calmly, resigned as she was to his whims and inconsistencies.

"To do?" he blurted out.

"What I want you to do is to follow my instructions, and not—"

"What are your instructions— *now*?"

Nance's voice was calm, with a tone of veiled sarcasm in it.

The manager, with a handful of papers, was preparing to leave the room.

"To see that those 'entries' are done as they come in, and not left to collect on my table as they've been doing "

"And— the country totals?" Nance's face was set.

"Well— you can easily get those in after, they shouldn't require more than a couple of days to get through. I shall want them by to-morrow afternoon by the way, so you'd better get them finished now, as you're at them." He went quickly out.

"That man's mad!" said the little typist— "quite mad!"

"Oh, no!" said Nance, coolly, "only a smart business man— up to date!" she laughed a little hysterically. "I suppose it's all in the game."

"What game ?"

The girl's face hardened.

"The game of Life!" she said.

The clicking continued, and Nance once more started the column, silently entering each total at the foot of the paper.

Sometimes a sigh or a hasty "Dash it!" from the girl at the machine as she made a mistake, and had to stop and rub it out, or the glass door banging as someone went out from the opposite room, would break the quiet of the office. But the girl went on with her tedious work.

Presently a band outside below the window began to play a lively aria from the last opera.

With an almost melodramatic movement she jumped up and went to look into the street.

The sunshine poured upon her head, yet she shivered. The tram-bells and the rattle of passing wheels jarred on her nerves. The voices in the street formed a confused echo in her brain.

She wondered if this was really Life? Why was the living of it so hard—the golden hours of the daylight sold to her employers for bare existence, and the silver hours of the night given up to kindly sleep which prepared her for the morrow and the work of the morrow? The hours when one could think and do— ah, the dreams when the sun shines— and music. All these thoughts and others filtered through her mind as she stood at the open window. Her drab days came and went on heavy wings— days of work— the only break lunch in some muslin-draped, cheap-mirrored, underground cellar of a room, where she ate with a book propped up against the sugar-basin in front of her, munching a cheap snack of unnutritious food. Then, after all the worry and brain-fag, what compensation? A few hours for sleep so that one could go on— on— on through to-morrow and to-morrow

She turned away from the window.

Her face was set in a heavy frown as once more the figures multiplied themselves in her brain.

Someone in the next room was arguing on the telephone over a mistake in a contract.

The voice grew louder, and became confused in the other voices in the main office across the passage. It was almost impossible to keep up the totals with such continuous and irritating distraction.

Then the "chief " came into the room again with an armful of papers and a pen behind his ear. He seemed in the usual hurry.

"These letters—" he began.

"By first post to-day," Nance took him up.

"Why didn't they go last night?"

"You only gave the matter to us at four o'clock."

He shook his head quickly.

"They ought to have been attended to earlier; however, see they go out at once, and— oh, there's a couple of thousand circulars just come in— get the boy to send up one; see if they're all right, and have them sent out by to-night— most important."

He rushed out again, leaving the impression of one of those spiral dust-storms which whirl down the street, sweeping up a host of miscellaneous objects in the vortex— and are gone as suddenly as they came.

By and bye the little "typist " rose up with several half-smothered yawns. " Isn't it lovely to think it's one o clock I'm going down the street for a walk after lunch— will you come?"

Nance raised her head. "There's such a lot of things to , t .. she sa id. " I think I'll stay in to-day. You might bring me back threepen'orth of biscuits or something— will you?"

The typist knew the responsibility of the work, and after a few minutes went out alone.

Throughout the afternoon Nance worked on in silence, broken only by an occasional incursion from the chief, who issued fresh orders and went out again. As the afternoon shadows fell she got up, and stared once more into the street.

"I wonder what I was intended for?" she thought.

Across the highway was a great moving picture of men and women passing and re-passing each other on the "block," smiling acknowledgment of other smiles, and then moving on with just a word or two. It seemed all part of a dream to her, in which her life had no part. The incessant ringing of tram-bells, the whirr of the motor-cars, and the rumble of vehicles passing below filled her heart with indefinite longings and desires.

A jolly party of well-dressed men and women came out of the "Vienna " and laughed and joked, and then generally separated with much rustle and talk.

Nance trembled. "It must be nice to do what one likes," she said to herself.

The typist coming in from the other room stopped suddenly.

"You seem to be amusing yourself!" she said.

Nance shut the window down with a bang.

"If you've nothing particular to do to-night, let us go and have a shilling's worth of the 'Blue Moon'," she said. "I'm afraid I might be forgetting how to laugh!"

"That means tea!" remarked the typist demurely.

"At my expense," said Nance, slapping the books together on her table. "We'll imagine we're like the rest of them out there— until to-morrow."

When she turned the cold water on her hands at the office tap a shiver ran over her, and a half-choking, half-suppressed sob woke her to her true feelings.

"I'm getting nervy!" she said quietly. "It's just as well we're going... it's what I want— what I always wanted all my life ... the Blue Moon!"

**End**