C. J. DENNIS

DENNIS STARPOOL'S WINDFALL

AND OTHER SHORT STORIES

FIFTEEN OF C J DENNIS'S FORGOTTEN SHORT STORIES

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C. J Dennis

Edited by Terry Walker

The stories in this volume have been collected from newspapers and magazines. Most were first published between 1905 and 1915.

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Introduction

C. J. Dennis was one of the group of late 19th-early 20th Century Australian poets and writers who used the Australian vernacular and slang in their work. Irish-Australian Dennis is best known for his "The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke", a series of poems by a working class young man about his love, Doreen:

'Er name's Doreen... Well spare me bloomin' days!
You could 'a' knocked me down wiv 'arf a brick!

Rarely mentioned is the fact that he wrote a small number of short stories, which are very hard to find. Some are humorous, some serious. He also wrote a regular column of short (say 600 or so words) comments in the form of "fables"; another in the form of very badly spelled letters from a country man; and another featuring a rural character Bill Bowyang. These all seem to be comments on issues of the day, most of which have lost their point when the context is no longer known to the reader. Some were as by "Den".

He was working as a journalist at the time, as his verse, best selling though it was for a period, wasn't paying well enough to support him.

1: Letters of Un-patent

Punch (Melbourne) 2 Dec 1913

TO the truly sympathetic there is no sight more pathetic than that of a bashful man in love. Young Dr. Armour, whose fortitude and steely nerve had been a byword amongst the students in the operating theatre, became a nervous wreck beneath the scalpel of Cupid, and shrunk from laying bare his secret and tenderest feelings before the object of his adoration.

Adoration, indeed! but mildly describes the attitude of poor Jack Armour towards that sweetest of her sex, Susan Wiggs.

It is regrettable that, for the purpose of this romantic story, the lady did not bear some other, finer name; for the homely Susan, and, alas! the plebeian Wiggs surely but ill-befitted the beauty, the grace, the wit and the truly patrician charm of that altogether delightful girl. But for Jack Armour "Susan" was as music to the ear, and "Wiggs" the appellation of a goddess.

Susan was an artist, whose delicate paintings had already won for her at least some local fame; and Jack had begun by admiring her pictures, and continued by worshipping the painter. This is the history of the third chapter.

Many a bold lover, fretting at his lack of opportunity, would have envied Jack his chances. At week-end parties, at dances, at social gatherings he met her often, and spoke with her alone of everything but love. Once he had sat out a dance with her and talked eloquently on the shocking unreliability of the modern motor car. Once— O heaven-sent opportunity!— he had her alone in a summer-house at a garden party, and had spoken for twenty minutes of the great advantages of frequent vaccination.

Talked shop, ye gods! when the girl and the hour were his. What girl is there who cannot sympathise with Susan? Far be it from us to suggest that Miss Wiggs acted in any unmaidenly fashion in this affair. But she was not blind altogether, and— well, girls will understand. Whenever he was alone with her Jack's courage ran down to his boots, and, at the slightest hint of sentiment in their conversation, he shied like an unbroken colt.

Indeed, her studio was just over the street from his surgery, and it would have been the simplest matter in the world to have walked across on some fine spring afternoon, when he could plump down on his knees, and say "Susan, I love you! Be mine!" But not lie. He would sooner have given himself into the hands of the rawest, clumsiest student at the hospital for a delicate operation.

Love finds a way, 'tis said; but Jack's way was not remarkable for its startling originality. He wrote to her— poured out his heart on three sheets of rather common note-paper, and, emulating the militant suffragette, dropped the burning missive into a prosaic pillar-box.

We are no psychologists that we should attempt to analyse Susan's feelings upon the receipt of this letter. Since she was more than passing fond of Jack Armour, we may assume that she was glad. But that he, who saw her at least thrice a week, should use the post as vehicle to express his love, filled her with righteous anger. What natural girl likes to be cheated of her sacred right of hearing— at least once in life— the tender voice of a beloved lover pleading his cause, and of knowing the thrill of that ecstatic moment that follows the softly murmured "Yes"?

Now, Jack Armour's hand-writing at no time resembled copperplate. I have heard there are doctors who write a yet more illegible fist— but I have never known them. It was ten minutes before Susan got even an inkling of the purport of that letter. When she did, she sigh happily once or twice (with no one to he her), then sat and brooded darkly.

"It's a wonder," mused Susan, "that he didn't telegraph. The cake!" And she set to work to puzzle out the whole of that impassioned scrawl.

"I'll make him ask me properly!" she declared, "or he will never have me at all."

Then, with a most unloverlike expression on her pretty face, Susan sat down and wrote her reply. Rather, to say that she wrote it would be hardly correct. She deliberately filled two sides of her best note-paper with utterly undecipherable hieroglyphics. The date and the name alone were legible. Susan sealed the letter with a determined little frown, and went out and posted it in full view of Jack's windows. She didn't know if he saw her. She did not care, but she rather hoped he did.

Jack got the letter by the late delivery that night. He opened it with trembling fingers, but as he looked through it his eagerness gave way to utter consternation. He sat down and puzzled over it for a full half-hour, and at the end of that time he had deciphered no more than the date and the signature. Sometimes he thought the letter began with a formal "Dear Dr. Armour." At other times it bore a vague resemblance to an address more friendly and familiar— but he could not he sure. As for the body of the letter, he could make nothing of it whatever. He examined it under a lens without result. He held it before a mirror in the vain hope that there was some trick about it which he could discover. Finally, he flung it aside in despair, and sat, with his head in his hands, reviewing his intolerable position. Here he was, an avowed lover, who did not know whether his suit was accepted or refused— whether

he should he living, in the seventh heaven of delight or sunk in the depths of despondency.

He laughed mirthlessly, as a compromise, and went out to do what was Utterly distasteful to him: to consult another in a matter that concerned his own private affections. Of course, he should have gone straight to Susan and demanded an explanation; but he was not built that way. He went, instead, to his friend, Ned Dixon, whom he found in his rooms, spread out before the fire, smoking prodigiously, and deep in the latest sporting news.

"Hullo!" was Ned's greeting. "Been backing a stiff'un, or has a rich patient snuffed it?"

"Don't be be flippant, old man," said said Jack. "I'm in trouble— rather peculiar trouble. In short, I'm in a deuce of a mess."

"Why," said Ned, sitting up with a start, "I thought your practice—"

"Oh, my practice is right enough," answered Jack. "It's worse than that."

"A woman!" diagnosed Ned promptly. "My dear chap, don't let it get vou down. There are plenty more about, you know, even if she has thrown you over."

"But," stammered Jack, "I don't know whether she has thrown me over or not. You see, that's my trouble."

"You don't what?" asked Ned, in amazement.

"Read that, said Jack, handing over the precious letter.

Ned look it through with a puzzled frown on his brow. Then he came to the signature, and whistled softly.

"Is this a new puzzle?" he asked, "or has Miss Wiggs been learning Chocktaw?"

"It is her answer," confessed Jack, "to my letter to her, asking her to marry me."

"Then her answer seems to me to be distinctly ambiguous," said Ned. "But why You see her often enough, you write to her, don't you?"

"Yes," admitted Jack; "but, then, you see, she is the sort of girl that one can't very well put such a question to— eh!— verbally, so to speak. It would be— well— rather difficult. So I thought I'd better write."

"Well, you are a cake!" exclaimed Ned, unconsciously repeating Susan's chosen epithet. "And what are you going to do about it now ?"

"I thought, perhaps, you could advise me— if you can't decipher the letter," said Jack helplessly.

"Decipher Sanscrit!" cried his friend. "It is my shrewd opinion it was never intended to be deciphered. As for my advice: go to her, put your arm around her waist, and say: 'Susan, you little devil, what do you mean by it?' It will be all right, you take my tip."

"You don't know what you are talking about," said Jack somewhat stiffly. "You don't seem to appreciate my position. I don't know where I am. That letter might he a request that I never speak to her again. How do I know she is not offended?"

"Because," replied Ned, "being a woman she would take a great deal more pains to say so if she were. But if you won't take my advice—"

"But, listen," said Jack; "couldn't you— couldn't you—"

"Ah! now we're coming to it," said Ned. "You've funked it, and you want me to pump her. Isn't that it?"

"Well, something like that," Jack admitted. "But, of course, it would never do to let her suspect that you came from me."

"Trust me," promised Ned. "I know how to manage 'em. I'll see her to-morrow."

Next day Mr. Edward Dixon called at Susan's studio, ostensibly to inspect a picture. But that astute gentleman had not been talking for five minutes before the astute Susan had devined the secret purpose of his visit.

"Oh! Dr. Armour," she said, when he had, by very subtle diplomacy, introduced that gentleman's name. "Why, I haven't seen him for quite a week. I suppose he is very busy?"

"Very," said Ned. "Gone in for a new branch of study. When I saw him last he was trying to read Chocktaw."

"How interesting!" said Susan, without a tremor. "What do you think of this landscape?"

And Ned went away quite unsatisfied.

"It's no go," he said, after he had reached Jack's surgery, by a circuitous route. "She's as close as an oyster."

"Was there nothing in her— eh!— manner," pleaded Jack, "to indicate how she—"

"Not the quiver of an eyelash," declared Ned. "Cool as a cucumber, and politely inquisitive as to the state of your health."

"What am I to do ?" asked Jack, dolefully, gazing at the windows of Susan's studio oppoposite. "I daren't see her. I simply daren't."

"You'll simply have to, in the long run," said Ned. "Get it over, man."

"I wonder," mused the doctor, "whether she will be at the Patterson's dance to-night?"

"No, she won't," lied Ned promptly. "Told me so herself. She has another appointment." Now, as a matter of fact, Mr. Dixon had quite other information. Susan had told him distinctly that she intended to be at the dance; but, seeing that his friend seemed quite helpless in the situation, he

had made up his mind to play the cards "on his own," as he expressed it, and leave the rest to Providence— and Susan.

Jack Armour went to the Patterson's dance with very mixed feelings. He did not know whether he was glad or sorry that Susan was not to be there. He knew that an explanation would have to come some time, and at the back of his mind was a vague hope that Fate would, in some way intervene and force him to do what he had not the courage to do of his own accord. One gets rather a poor opinion of Dr. Armour in the circumstances; but many allowances have to be made for the bashful man, and he was, after all, a very estimable fellow, as Susan was quite ready to admit— when she got a chance. Trust Susan.

Jack arrived rather late at the dance. His state of mind had rather delayed him in his dressing. And almost the first person he saw k e came j nt 0 room was— Susan. She greeted him without embarrassment, quite in the old, friendly fashion; and, as he marked her programme, chatted gaily, and appeared to be quite unconscious of his very oblivious confusion. Then a partner claimed her, and Jack breathed freely again for a space. His mind was perfectly blank as to what he should do or say when the time came for his first dance with her.

Susan pleaded fatigue, and suggested that they should sit it out. There was no reason, really, to believe that Susan was not fatigued, or that there was any ulterior motive in her very natural suggestion. And I refuse absolutely to admit that it was Susan who later maneuvred an adjournment to the conservatory. Once there, Jack felt that his hour had come. He braced himself for the shock.

"You got my letter yesterday?" asked Susan, in a voice of sweet and charming innocence.

"Er— yes," said Jack, "I got it."

"Well?" said Susan. And in the pause that followed Jack stopped thinking— absolutely. "Well— eh!— as a matter of fact," he stammered at length, "I'm afraid I couldn't read it. You must have written hurriedly, you know, and—"

"Oh! this is too good," cried Susan. "You mean to say you couldn't read my letter? And here's the one I got from you," she added, producing it. "That's not very well written, either. Is it?"

"Well, no," admitted Jack. "I'm afraid I don't write very distinctly. But do you mind telling me— eh!— what your answer was?"

"No," said Susan. "Let us play fair. Here; you read your letter first, and then I'll read my reply."

Jack held the letter— his first love letter— in his hand very limply. "If— you wouldn't mind," he said lamely, "I would much rather you read yours first. I did not understand a word of it, you see, and—"

"It isn't fair," protested Susan, "because yours was written first, you know. But just as you wish. And," she added to herself, "don't flatter yourself that you are going to get out of it that way."

Then she read:

Dear Dr. Armour,

I received a letter from you to-day. I know it is from you, because it bears your signature, but the remainder of the letter I am quite unable to understand. Why do doctors write such awful hands? Please write very carefully, or employ a secretary, and let me know what it is all about. I am just dying of curiosity.

Yours truly,

Susan Wiggs.

"I really don't see, said Susan, "what difficulty there is in deciphering that, It's perfectly plain to me. And now," she added brightly, "play the game, and read yours."

"Really," stammered Jack in an agony of nervousness, for he was fairlv trapped. "Really— I— I—"

"Why, what are you doing?" cried Susan. "Look, you are crumpling the poor letter all up. You won't be able to read it yourself presently."

"Susan!" cried Jack suddenly, and with startling vehemence. "Susan, I love you! I have loved you for months! Life would be a blank without you—

"That was in the letter," murmured Susan, unguardedly.

"Then you did read it?" exclaimed Jack.

"Oh, only parts of it," said Susan hastily. "Go on, Jack."

"Susan," continued Jack. "I love you more than anything in life. I want you—"

But need we go on? Surely it is sufficient to say that Susan won the right that is the due of every honest maid. She had her thrill. As a matter of fact, she had quite a succession of them— all distinctly pleasurable— before the pair, flushed and happy, returned to the ballroom, with the tale of their blessedness writ plain upon their beaming faces.

Finally, it may be of interest to record that in the list of wedding presents appearing in a report of the wedding, which happened a few months later, was an item that excited not a little comment and some curiosity. It was: "Mr. Edward Dixon, a typewriter."

2: The Prodigal Calf

With a Few References to the Fatted Son

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 1 May 1915

MR HENRY CHUBB and Mr Barney Doyle, both of them dairy farmers, sat in Mr Doyle's kitchen and talked business earnestly.

"I'm tellin' yeh, Chubb," said Mr Doyle, "I wouldn't be partin' with that calf for twice iv three pounds if I had the manes iv kapin' her. But 'tis short, iv hands I am, an' that young son iv mine, bad cess to him, will not do wan hand's turn that he can scheme his way out of."

"Thirty shillings is me price," answered Mr Chubb in a monotonous, sing-song voice, that, in him, denoted a stolid obstinacy. He was a stolid man, was Mr Chubb, heavy of mind and body; but it was said in the district that there was no keener hand at a bargain for miles around, unless it was, perhaps, his neighbor, Mr Barney Doyle.

" 'Tis tearin' me sowl out to part wid her at all, at all," said Mr Doyle; "but not wan penny piece under two pounds tin will I take for the baste. Shure, yeh'll not be finding a better heifer in the district, Chubb, an' it's dirt chape I'm lettln' you have her. If 'twas n't for that good fer nothin' son iv mine— I wonder where he is now, be the Same token!"

Mr Doyle went to the door and put his head outside.

"Mickey!" he yelled.

On the far side of the straw stank an extremely fat boy dozed in the shade, and out of sight of the house. He wriggled uneasily at the sound of the voice of authority.

"Mickey! Mickey yeh loafin' varmint!" howled Mr Doyle.

"Wot's ther matter?" said Mickey, hastily picking up a pitchfork, and appearing around a corner of the straw stack with as much appearance of bustling energy as he could muster on short notice.

"Are yen kapin an eye to them, calves, Mickey?" shouted Mr Doyle. ''Did yeh put up the panels whin yeh come in wid the dray? Kape a close watch on that red heifer of Daisy's; Mister Chubb here is after namin' a pice for her, an' maybe he'll be takin' er."

"Orright," answered Mickey, and disappearing around the stack he resumed his broken slumbers.

" 'Tis like pullin' out me eye tooth, Chubb, to be partin' wid that heifer," Mr Doyle resumed. "Did I hear yeh say 'twas settled at two pound tin?"

"You never did," said Mr Chubb. "You heard me say thirty bob. That's the price, an' there I stick."

"Now, listen here to me, Chubb," said Barney, beginning all over again a long catalogue of the calf's marvellous attributes.

Meantime Mickey slumbered peacefully in the shade. In the paddocks below him half a dozen calves wandered amongst the short grass, and, close to them, the forgotten panels lay on the ground. After a while the red heifer, more adventurous, than the rest, sauntered through the panels and stood on the roadway looking about as though undecided which course to take. It was the first time that she had ever been beyond the confines of the farm of her birth; and who shall say that a young, healthy calf, of adventurous disposition would not feel a thrill within her bovine being at the first taste of freedom?

Tempted, perhaps, by the sight of the low green hills in the distance, she decided upon the road to the right, and, with a low bellow of joy, made off leisurely down the road.

" 'Tis not for me to be sittin' here tringin' the praises iv me own baste," Mr Doyle was saying; "but I'm tellin' yer that yer might walk the day through an' not find the aiquil iv that red heifer. Would yer say now, that she might be worth two pounds five to yer?"

"Thirty shillin's I ses, an' thirty shillin's I sticks to," answered Mr Chubb, staring vacantly at an ornament on the mantelshelf.

Outside, in the pleasant shade of the straw stack, Mickey slept on and snored gently at intervals.

Leisurely, with a pause here and there to graze by the roadside, the red heifer pursued her truant way. New scenes of the hitherto unknown world delighted her. Strange cattle in the adjacent paddocks raised their heads to gaze dully at the wayward youngster, and strange dogs came out from the farms to bark at her. It was all so new and delightfully adventurous to a calf of tender years. But the green hills seemed still very far away.

"Mind what I do be tellin' you, now," Mr Doyle was admonishing his neighbor. "The mother iv her is the finest cow in the district. A bucketful she gives night an' mornin'; an', 'tis a sore trile to me to be partin' wid so fine an' promisin' a heifer. Two pounds aiven I'll take for her, an' not wan copper more can yer bate me down, Chubb."

"When I ses thirty bob," growled Mr Chubb, "I means thirty bob; an' you kin take it or leave it."

Attracted by the snores and strange gurglings of the fat boy, the farmyard fowls came near and craned their necks as they gazed with curiosity upon the sleeper.

Grown weary of the monotony of the road, the red heifer now sought for an opening in the wire fences that stretched endlessly on either side. But most

of this slip rails were up, and she looked in vain upon the zealously guarded fodder on the other side.

At last, however, she came to an opening. The entire Brady family had driven into town, and had carelessly left the panels down after them though, having taken their horse, that impoverished family, the Bradys, left behind no animals to guard, excepting a few pigs; which, at this season of the year, enjoyed the freedom of the farm, and, incidentally, of the neighborhood. Those pigs just now were enjoying a species of mud bath at the edge of a dam in the middle of the paddock.

The red heifer explored the paddock, not so much now in search of adventure as of something sweet and succulent to eat, and something cool and refreshing to drink. But the paddock of the Bradys was not rich in fodder, and had already been carefully prospected by the pigs, and the truant calf listened in vain for the cheerful rattle of milk pails and the welcome call of "Sukey" that proclaimed the evening meal.

" 'Twill squeeze the heart iv me, I'm tellin' yeh, Chubb, to be losin' that red heifer," Mr Doyle still argued. "Would yeh be splittin' the dif'rence now, an' take her for wan pound fifteen?"

"Thirty bob," replied Mr Chubb, briefly, still staring fixedly at the ornament on the mantelshelf.

"Well, well!" sighed Mr Doyle, rising. "Let's go an' have a look at her anny way. Maybe the sight iv her will be soft'nin' yer heart."

The two men went outside, and instantly Mr Doyle's eye fell on the open panel and the herd of calves, from which the red heifer was missing.

"Mickey!" howled Mr Doyle.

Mickey put a tousled head around a corner of the stack, and asked sleepily what the trouble was.

This exhibition of apathy caused Mr Doyle to dance up and down with suddenly increased ire. For a full minute he was incapable of speech. He waved his arms frantically, and, judging by his pedal exercises, it seemed that the ground beneath him had become suddenly red hot. Then, with a bellow of rage, he snatched up a picket and rushed at the fat boy, whose mouth and eyes were slowly opening to their full extent.

Mickey did not wait for the charge, but dodged behind the stack, around which Mr Doyle chased him in futile fashion for five minutes. Then Mr Doyle paused for breath, and, having regained it, delivered his ultimatum to his son, who received it from a respectful distance.

"See here, yeh young thafe iv the world!" thundered Mr. Doyle. "If that heifer is not found in wan hour I'll have the life iv yeh!"

Mickey waited to hear no more, but turned and went down the paddock, and out through the panels. On the roadway he paused, and after brief hesitation, waddled off in the oposite direction from that taken by the calf.

Two miles away in Brady's paddock, unheard by either the irate Mr Doyle or his sulky son, a plaintive bellow disturbed the pigs that wallowed about the dam.

The red heifer was becoming very uneasy. A search of the paddock had yielded little in the way of food. She approached a small heap of "cocky chaff" that had been left there for the pigs. This she sniffed hopefully, but without reward; then, urged by the pangs of hunger, she sadly ate her fill, and looked about for something to wash it down.

The pigs seemed to hold possession of the dam, but, made brave by necessity, the calf wedged her way amongst them in the mire, and approached the waterhole. The sides were steep and treacherous, and as she stretched forth her head to drink, the bank gave way, and with a bewildered bellow, she went head foremost in to the muddy water.

Up at the Doyle homestead the owner paced the yard muttering alternately lamentations and threats, while Mr Chubb stood impatiently by and made pointed remarks about getting home.

"If that son iv mine," growled Mr Doyle, "comes home widout me red heifer, I'll skin him, so I will."

Mickey, returning from a fruitless quest, beheld his angered father from afar, and deeming approach unwise, sneaked away and hid.

" 'Tis like givin' me life's blood, Chubb," declared Mr. Doyle at length, "but if yeh do be wantin' that heifer so bad I'll give in to yeh, an' take the thirty shillin's, cash down, an' we'll say no more about it."

The stolid Mr Chubb was quite unmoved by this touching liberality, and continued to gaze dreamily into the middle distance.

"I'm not buyin' a pig in a poke," he replied calmly; "nor, fer that matter, a calf on the rampage. When you get 'er back we'll tork business."

"Where in the thunder is that fat, lazy, loafin' son iv mine, an' what detains him?" asked Mr Doyle of the unechoing spaces around him. "See here, Chubb, I'll take wan pound down now, an' the heifer's yours."

Mr Chubb slowly shook his head. "Wot's the good of 'er bein' mine when I don't know where she is?" he asked very reasonably.

"Fifteen shillin's!" urged Mr Doyle.

"Not fifteen pence," replied Mr Chubb, "until I sets eyes on 'er."

"Then come inside an' wait another hour," pleaded Mr Doyle. "Maybe Mickey has found her by now."

The two farmers returned to the house, and talked in a desultory fashion about crops and weather, and waited, and still waited.

With much cautious manoeuvring Mickey had managed to regain his nest on the lee side of the straw stack, and again dozed peacefully.

The sun was dropping to the low western hills when a very hungry, very unhappy, and sadly dishevelled red heifer regained the home sliprails, and, hastening toward the house, bellowed plaintively outside the door.

" 'Tis the voice of her, me darlin'!" cried Mr Doyle, jumping to his feet.

When he beheld the prodigal, Mr Doyle himself bellowed with joy, and, despite her unattractive state, with mud upon her sides, hunger within her, and sorrow, and disillusionment in her sad, sad eye, Mr Doyle flung himself upon her and embraced her in an access of uncontrollable joy.

With a quite regrettable lack of sympathy, Mr Chubb stood by and waited for Mr Doyle's loud endearments, to cease.

"Well," said Mr Chubb, "Wot about finishin' the deal? She don't look worth the half of it now, but I'm still offerin' the thirty bob,"

Mr Boyle looked up with indignation in his face.

"Thirty bob!" he cried. "Thirty bob! To Jerusalem wid yeh, Chubb, and yer dirty thirty bob! Shure, I'd not take five pounds for me beautiful heifer. No, nor yet tin. Have yeh no common dacincy at all, man?"

"An' do you mean to say," asked Mr Chubb, betraying emotion for the first time. "Do you mean to say you've, kept me, here loafin' round all the blessed afternoon just to tell me that? An' me milkin' waitin'!"

"Have yeh no heart, man?" asked Mr Doyle, still caressing his beloved heifer; "that yeh'd be askin' me to part wid her at all, at all. Man, yeh'd tear a child frum its mother to satisfy the avaricious sowl in yeh. Yeh haven't the money, Chubb, nor half the money, to buy me darlin' heifer!"

Mr Chubb said not another word; but with one glance of disgust at the pastoral idyll presented by Mr Doyle and his recovered calf, he turned on his heel and went home to his milking.

AFTER TEA that evening Mr Doyle carefully selected a stout stick and approached his son.

"Come here, Mickey," he said, in a voice that was all too suspiciously caressing.

"Wot cher want me for?" asked Mickey apprehensively, backing away.

Mr Doyle reached suddenly forward and secured a hold of his fat son's collar.

"I'm goin' to take you out into the barn, Mickey, me son," ha said, sweetly, as he carefully hefted the stick; "out into the barn, Mickey darlin', an' the two of us is goln' to cilibrate the return uv the prodigil."

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3: The Bookworm's Arms

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 14 Aug 1915

This short story is a uniquely Aussie slant on the Bacon/Shakespeare controvery.

A TRAVELLER sat outside the small public-house in the small back-block town, up among the wooded hills of the Australian timber country, and gathered information on local topics from the oldest inhabitant.

When one says "gathered" it is not to be implied that any strenuous effort was necessary in the process; for the oldest inhabitant was so willing, not to say eager, to supply the information that the attention to small facts and wealth of wordy detail was at times almost embarrassing.

The traveller had brought it upon himself through an innocent and casual remark intended rather to open conversation than to extract any precise or deserved information; and thereafter the traveller's share of the discourse was confined mainly to nods and shakings of the head.

The simple remark that heralded the deluge had reference to the quaint name of the public-house before which they sat. The oldest inhabitant looked innocent and harmless, and the traveller being of kind heart, hazarded the remark that touched the bigger of his companion's loquacity; but, like many another before him, he did not know that it was loaded.

"Isn't that rather a queer name to give a country hotel, the 'Shakesbacon Inn'?" asked the traveller, pointing to the sign above the door. "What is it supposed to mean?"

The oldest inhabitant eyed him keenly from cut a maize of uncombed white whiskers, and shook his head sadly.

"It's a compromise; that's what it means," he said very soberly and mysteriously. "And it was that, an' nothin' else, that saved this here town from bloodshed an' sudden death."

Still the guileless traveller toyed with fate. "I don't quite understand," he said.

"O' course, you don't," replied the oldest inhabitant. "Nobody do understand till they're told. People come to this here town, an' look at that there sign, an' scratch their heads, an' all of 'em ses like you, that they don't understand. How could anyone understand a name like that, the 'Shakesbacon Inn,' 'less they was told? Now, you listen to me a bit, an' I'll tell you.'

NOW, in the first beginnin' (went on the oldest inhabitant) in the first beginnin' the name of this pub was the "Railsplitters' Retreat," an' a nice

'propriate sorter name it was, till George Tonks come on the scene an' took over the licence.

George wasn't nohow cut out for an hotelkeeper— edicated, he was, an' full up to the neck with learnin', an' big words, an' all sorts o' *ologies* an' '*ographies*, an' sim'ler knowledge. But the pub had belonged to George's uncle, an' when he died he left the house to George on condition he looked after it himself for a year, an' give up his job at the bookshop in the city.

There was a sort of nasty spite about that ole uncle's will, because him an' George was always havin' disputes about the valyer of edication, an' books, an' them sorter things; so by makin' a publican of him he reckoned he'd cure George of his readin' an' studyin' habits. So George took over the hotel, an' began right away to study out how he could euchre the dead hand, so to speak, that had redooced him to sellin' beer.

(Just here the patient traveller tried to wedge in a remark about bedtime, but the oldest inhabitant was off and away again before the other had finished clearing his throat).

Howsomever (continued the storyteller) first thing, George ups an' changes the name of the house. I'll never fergit how the chaps stood round and stared when they first seen his noo signboard. He got it done in fancy letterin', an' hung it right across the front of the house; an' there it stayed for close on twelve months starin' us in the face ten times a day— (them that wasn't teetotallers)— an' at first none of us could make head nor tail of it—

THE BOOKWORM'S ARMS

Stan's to reason, any chap 'ud be a bit puzzled first time he bumped up agin a name like that. It was bad enough, in the first place, to call any pub be sich a name as "Bookworm"; an' I never yet heard of a bookworm, or any other worm, with arms; or laigs either, fer that matter. Howsomever—

(Again the traveller sought gently to interpose; but again the oldest inhabitant was first off the mark.)

Howsomever, that there signboard was only the first step, as you might say, in what George called his "campaign of culcher" in the district. Next thing, he turns his bagatelle room inter a li'bry, an' then his bar-parlor inter a readin'-room. There was books and papers all over the place. Even in the front bar there was shelves containin' the "Immoral Works of Shakespeare," as ole Bill Waddell called 'em, an' even on the bar counter was the "Inkline an' Fall of the Roaming Umpire," an' the "Mortal Discourses of Markis Oreelius."

I tell you, George wasn't a chap to do things by halves.

"Beer I sells," he ses, "because I got to; but books I has because I likes 'em. An' the man who comes to my house to drink my beer I expect for to read my books. Any'ow, he'll be improovin' his mind while he's roonin' his stomach, an' that's somethin'," ses George.

Howsomever, it didn't take no Sherlick Holmes to know whether the fellers liked the beer or the books best at first. It was generally one pint o' beer to three lines o' readin' matter, till George begun to threaten one or two of 'em If they didn't do a little more solid readin' an' not just lookin' over the picters he'd stop their beer.

Then, one day, somebody with an observin' mind found out that George was inclined to give more credit to the chaps that seemed to be takin' a deep interest in litrachoor. A quarter-hour's hard readin' of Markis Oreelius was generally good fer a pint on tick; an, if you knoo enough to ingage George in an interlechal argument whether 'Amlet was off his dipper or no, you could shout for the crowd, an' strap it up till pay-day.

After that a wave of high culcher seemed to come over the whole drinkin' population. You might walk into the "Bookworm's Arms" any hour of the day an' see old man Mackillican with his nose burled in a volume of "Paradise Lost;" an' the nearest thing he knew to Paradise regained standin' at his elbow in a mug— an' not paid for, either.

Then, when George got 'em fairly goin', he ups an' starts a Lit'ry Society an Debatin' Club, an' you'd be surprised how that thing caught on. Most men likes an argument; but when a man's had a couple of free drinks at the beginnin' of it, an' the prospect of a couple more at the end of it, an' one or two in between to keep him interested like, it's reely su'prisin' how worked up he gets before it's all over.

Them debatin' evenin's o' George's was a fair treat. There was old Ben Harker, who read all the driest books apurpose to work up a thirst; when he had one or two in he was always ready to emphasise his argument by aimin' the "Inkline an' Fall," one volume at a time, at the head of his opponent. He was a shinin' light o' literatoor, was old Harker.

In course o' time the boys come reely to enjoy them evenin's at George's. They took to discussin' eathen mythology instead of horseracin, an' had evenin's with Shakespeare instead of playin' cards or shakin' dice. As for George Tonks, he was so tickled with the idear that he was raisin' the moral tone of the town an' introducln' culcher to the masses, that he forgot to put down half the drinks we said we'd owe him fur. Why, I must have averaged two drinks a day meself that he fergot to charge me for. Ah, them was the good old times!

It was what you might call an ideel existence, takin' everything into consideration, an' everybody seemed quite content to let it go on for ever.

It would have g'one on, too— right up to this day, perhaps— if it hadn't been for young Peter Few, an' him fallin' desperit in love with George's sister Alice.

Peter was a chap who had some learnin' himself, an' him an' George got on very well together at first, talkin of books an' so on, until they fell out concernin' whether Dickens or Thackery was the best writer. An' when they did fall out they fell out proper. I never saw two men so bitter agin one another. You'd think it was a horse or a dog they was rowin' about, to see the way them two went on; an' I found out after that it was about two writin' men who'd been dead for years.

Howsomever, George got his back up proper, an he wouldn't have nothin' to do with Peter, an' wouldn't let him pay no attentions to Alice. Alice was fond enough of Peter for the matter of that, but she was a dootiful girl and was fond of her brother, too.

"No, Peter," she ses to him. "I'd be I glad enough to marry you," she ses, "but I ain't goin' to leave my brother agen his will, an' I mean to go on housekeepin' for him as long as he keeps a nice quiet house, an' respectable," she ses.

That set Peter thinkin'. Most men, I would have tried to smoodge round George an' make it up for the sake of the sister. But that wasn't Pete's way. He meant to get the girl an' he meant to pay George out an' get a score in for Thackery, all the one stroke.

"Look here, Alice," he ses thoughtful-like. "If this was to turn out a rowdy house after all, with me fightin' an' goin' on, would you stay here, then, or would you come away an' marry me?"

"I wouldn't stay in such a house half an hour!" ses Alice, very firm. "When that sort of thing happens, you be ready to take me away, Peter. But," she ses, sort of half proud an half regretful, "there ain't no fear of that happenin'. Why, If It wasn't for the smell of the licker and the smoke, an' old Harker throwin' a book occasional," she ses, "you might take the place for a church li'bry."

"I dunno," ses Peter, shakin his head. "It mightn't be always like that. I been noticin' things lately."

"What things?" asks Alice, sharp like.

"Oh, just little things," answers Peter. "Strors shows how the wind blows." And he wouldn't say more than that; just shook his head agin, an' said he hoped for the best. Which, I suppose, he did; meanin' for himself.

Next day Peter gets old Ben Harker inter a corner be himself, an' torks to him reel earnest. He was beginnin' to spread himself, Ben was, as a leadln'

authority on lit'rachoor, an' Shakespere was his strong suit; so Peter reckoned he'd be the man to serve his purpose as well as any.

"Look here, Ben," ses Peter, "I'm su'prised at a man of your common sense lettln' hisself be made a fool of by George Tonks the way you are."

"Wotcher mean?" ses Ben.

'Why," answers Peter, "who did he tell you wrote them works of Shakespere?"

"Shakespere, o' course," ses Ben. "Who yer comin' at? Ain't his name printed on the cover?"

"You're wrong, Ben," Peter' tells him, layin' his hand affectionate on his shoulder, and speakin' very serious. "Shakespere never wrote one single word o' them works; an' you been havin' your leg pulled."

"An' ut's you as is pullin' it!" ses Ben, gruff like. "If Shakespere never writ 'em, who did?"

"Bacon!" seys Peter.

"Pigs!" ses Ben.

"I ain't jokin' with you, Ben," Peter answers him very earnest. "It was Francis Bacon who writ them works o' Shakespere, an' I got a book here called "Shakespere 'Dethroned," what proves it beyond all manner o' doubt. Take it home, Ben, an' read it careful; then you'll be able to talk to them would-be scholars up at the 'Bookworms' Arms' an' show 'em you knows a bit more'n them. You wasn't born yesterday, Ben."

Ben was fair tickled to have a chance to take them other fellers down in an argument, an' show his superior learnin', so to speak. He took the book home, an' read it through from cover to cover that night; an' when he'd finished he was so savage with the way he'd been took in about them works o' Shakespere that he was ready to eat any man who said that Shakespere wrote even a copy-book headin'.

Meantime Peter had been pretty busy. He cornered old man MacKillican, an' gave him a book by a bloke named Sydney Lee, what proved, certin sure, that Shakespere's works couldn't have been writ be anyone but Shakespere.

Peter then went round to a couple o' dozen more o' the lit'ry lights, givin' one a Bacon book an' one a Shakespere, an' talkin' so fluent on both sides o' the fence that he had 'em fairly worked up about it.

Then Peter went to Joe Slinks, the coach-driver, an' told him to have a horse an' trap ready on the quiet near the "Bookworm's Arms," 'bout ten o'clock. Then he sat down to wait developments, as the sayin' is, what the night would bring forth.

Along about eight o'clock George Tonks was sittin' in his bar readin', as was his 'abit, an' waitin' for his usual readin' an' drinkin' party.

Sudden, old Ben Harker bust in on him, an', instead of arskin' fer a pint on tick on the strength o' quotin' a slab from Markis Oreellus. or O. Mark Hyam, as he generally did, he bangs his fist on the bar an' shouts

"George Tonks, tell me who writ Shakespere?"

George looks at him over his glasses in his mild way, an' ses, "Shakespere, o course. Who else?"

"Yer a liar," shouts Ben. "Shakespere never did. It was Bacon, an' I can prove it!"

While Ben was provin' it in a very loud voice old man Mackillican come in. He listened for two minutes, gettin' redder an' redder in the face; an' then he chips in, too.

"Yer an igerint fool, that's what you are," he ses to Ben be way of introduction An' then the two of em' went at it, hammer an' tongs.

By an by, the other members o' the readin club begun to come in by ones an' twos, an they no sooner arrived than each one took a hand in the argument, an' things begun to get pretty hot, I can tell you.

When George's sister Alice heard the noise of the lit'ry argument she popped inside the bar, an' quick pops it out agin, just in time to dodge a fat volume of the "Roaming Umpire" when Ben had fired at MacKillican, an' missed.

Then Alice went out on the verandah to get her breath, an' Peter came glidin' round the corner Before she quite knoo wot was happenin', he was holding her in his arms, an' she was sobbin' on his chest. She was so frightened, poor girl.

Meanwhile, inside, amongst' the lit'rv lights, things was gettin' pretty hot Old man Mackillican can lyin' on the floor, horse de combat, as they says, an' shot in the stummick be the immortal works of Milton. Pat Toomey an' Charlie Hides was standin' one each end of the bar fightin' each other with the "Complete Works o' Charles Dickens" and "Scott's Novels", respective. An' Ben Harker was standin' up on the counter, where he could reach the top bookshelf, and was bombardin' whole company with the Shakesperian Libry. An' every time he fired one o' them books, he'd let a yell out of him.

"Bacon writ that!" he'd howl, and land Bill Waddell on top of his bald head with a copy of "As You Like it".

"An' Shakespeare never writ that!" he'd yell, and smash George Tanks's spectacles with "Much Ado about Nothink."

Outside, Alice was still sobbin' on Peter Frew's weskit.

"Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do?" says the poor girl. "I can't stay in this house a minute longer!"

Then Peter sees his chance and begins pleadin' with her to run away with him; an' Alice was just sayin' for the fourteenth time as how she simply couldn't do it it, an' how she didn't dare, when "The French Revolution" comes bang through the bar window an' caught her fair on the side of the head.

It didn't take her above ten minutes to do what packin' she wanted to after that, and in a quarter of an hour hour her an' Peter was in Joe Slinks' jinker makin' for the next town at fifteen miles an hour.

Be the time when George Tonks got his lit'ry friends quiet enough to listen to reason, you couldn't see much of the bar floor for the roons of English literatoor, an' a good part of it was soaked in whisky and rum from the broken bottles off the shelves.

When George could make himself heard at last he gets hold of old Ben Harker.

"Now tell me," ses George, "who was it told you Bacon wrote Shakespere?"

"Peter Few," ses Ben, as soon as he got his breath back. "An' he gave me a book to prove it."

Then George turns to old MacKillican. "An' who told you Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare?"

"Peter Few," says McKillican, "an' he gave me a book to prove it."

"Where the thunder's Peter Few?" shouts George.

Just then Joe Slinks strolls into the bar.

"I think," ses Joe, "that you might find Peter, an' someone else that's missin', about five miles down the road in my jinker' lookin' for a parson."

Peter found the parson all right, an' long before peace was declared at the "Bookworm's Arms", Alice was Mrs Peter Few.

It took Geroge Tonks a good long time to patch things things up proper, because that there row Ieft a Iot bitterness in the district. One lot of fellers wouldn't go near his place unless he christened the "Shakespere Tavern" an' the other lot wouldn't patrise him unless he called the house the "Bacon Hotel."

Poor old George was losin' custom both ways; an' at the end of the year he got discouraged an' sold out. But the next man who came was pretty cute. He fixed up what he called a compromise, an' got all the custom back. So that's how the house comes to be called what you see it— "The Shakesbacon Inn."

"What became of Peter Few and his wife?" asked the traveller, with some show of tired interest.

"Ah!" replied the oldest inhabitant, shaking his head. "Poor old Peter. He used to be a great reader, an' his favrit work used to be Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Julier'; but larst time I seen 'im about two years later, he was studyin' very

hard outer Bacon's 'Tamin' of the Shrew'. Somethink seemed to tell me that Peter was gittin' sorry that he ever riz any doubt about who writ them Works."

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4: Mrs Dumphy's Send-Off

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 12 June 1915

A second dose of the "Oldest Inhabitant"

"WHEN I sees a man (said the oldest inhabitant, as he opened his pocket knife and began attentively to maltreat the palm of his hand) or a woman— pertic'Ier a woman— who gets sorter generous all on a sudden, after showin' no signs o' the milk o' huming kindness before, as the sayin' is, I begins to arst meself what, accounts for the sudden flow of milk into the cokernut. Now there was Mrs Dumphy—

The stranger, who had already listened patiently to five tales of the oldest inhabitant, mentioned casually, just here, that it was a nice cool night for sleeping.

I SAID there was Mrs Dumphy— (pursued the oldest inhabitant in a tone that carried mild reprimand)— Nobody in this here town would ever have said, or thought that Mrs Dumphy was fair bustin' with generosity. Fer the matter o' that, seein' as how she counted the logs on her firewood heap every night in case Ben Harker, who lived next door should, borrer one or two durin' the dark hours, she didn't seem to have no strong leanin's to foolish liberality. Counted them out loud, too, so that Ben could hear her, an' made remarks that Ben took as unneighborly. As if any man mightn't run short of a bit of wood through havin' business at the Shakesbacon Hotel, and fergettin' to cut any. Howsomever, from what I'm tellin' you, you can get a sort of inklin' of the character of Mrs Dumphy.

When the news went round the town that the Dumphy family was goin' to leave, I don't know as anybody was pertickler grief-struck. It put Ben Harker in sich good an' high spirits that he went so far to arst her if she meant to take her wood heap with her.

Ben meant it sarcastic, as you might, perhaps, gather from his words; an' he was very much taken aback to have Mrs Dumphy so sweet that he said it almost made him feel bilious.

"You been a good neighbor to me, Mr Harker," she ses, "an' I'll be delighted if you'll accept of the half ton or so of wood after we're gone," she ees. "An'," she ses, "as our kitchen table is far too big an' clumsy to take away in the waggon, I'll be very pleased to make a present of it to Mrs Harker."

Ben told me afterwards that he was so took back at them words that you could have knocked him down with a meat-axe.

Howsomever, he thanked her kindly, feelin' sorter sorry for past remarks he'd seen fit to fire through the back fence, an' went in an' told his wife about the mazin' change what had come over Mrs Dumphy.

"I expect," said Ben's wife, "It's a sort of home-sickness come over her at leavin' the town where she's lived so long. Talkin' of that, I've been told, there's a subscription list goin' around to give Mrs Dumphy a send-off party and a presentation."

"I never knoo." answers Ben, "that the lady was so pop'ler in the neighborhood. By the way, she asked me to keep it quiet about her givin' us the kitchen table, an' not say nothink to nobody till after she was gone."

"I shan't say a word," Mrs Harker told him. "I'm only too pleased to get that table, seein' I've wanted one or so long. I wonder what come over the woman!"

That night Ben an' Mrs Harker had a call from old Mrs Mackillican. She said she was collectin' subscriptions for Mrs Dumphy's send-off an' present, an' would Mr Harker please to give somethin! After calkilatin' a bit Ben shelled out half-a-crown. He told his wife after that it was about half the price of the kitchen table, so they had a bit to the good after all, not to mention the firewood.

"There's no doubt Mrs Dumphy deserves some token of our regard," ses Mrs MacKillican, pocketin the half-dollar, "For a kinder woman never breathed."

"Yes, mum," ses Ben, a bit faint-like, him havin' heard Mrs Mackillican herself say that Mrs Dumphy was the meanest cat in the district.

"Kind is no name for it," ses Mrs MacKillican, "an' so thoughtful for others."

After that the old lady stayed for an hour, talkin' mostly about the kind heart of Mrs Dumphy. And, while she was there, Mrs Joe Slinks, an' Mrs Bill Waddell, an' Mrs Pat Toomey all' come in together, an' all three of 'em was just as admirin' of Mrs Dumphy's good heart as Mrs MacKillican was. They just sat an' talked about that fine generous woman for another half-hour, eyein' one another in a funny sideways sorter fashion that made Ben Harker feel quite uncomfortable.

When they was gone Ben says to his wife, "It's amazin' how all them women has fell in love with Mrs Dumphy, seein' as how they never had a good word to say of her before."

"Ah, Ben," ses Mrs Barker, sentimental-like, "We never know how much we think of our friends until we're goin' to lose 'em. I just been thinkin', Ben," she ses; "that that kitchen table will just fit' nicely between our dresser and the door, an' we can use our old table for the washhouse."

"So it will," answers Ben. "I'll go an' get it first thing in the mornin', after they're gone. It was kind of her to give it to us, anyway."

They'll tell you around here yet that the send-off we gave Mr an' Mrs Dumphy, an' all the little Dumphys in the Mechanics' Institoot was one of the slap-uppest affairs of its kind that was ever held in this town; an' the present they gave to Mrs Dumphy, a fine big marble clock, cost near four pounds, an' had a prescription on it sayin' what a kind heart she had, an' how sorry we all was to lose her an' Mr Dumphy an' the little Dumplin's.

The only drorback to a otherwise pleasant gatherin', as the chairman put it, was that Mr Dumphy couldn't be present, or the eldest boy Dumphy, both of 'em havin' terrible colds in the head, Mrs Dumphy explained, and wantin' to take care of 'em so they'd be well enough to do the packin' an' get away next day.

Fer all that everyone had a good time, an' Mrs Dumphy's. eyes was full o' tears when they gave her the han'some clock, which she said she'd carry to her grave; an' everybody said how touchin' it was.

Then there, was sangwidges, an' cake an' froot, an' dancin', an' a drop of licker in the back room for the men as fancied it; an' Ben Harker ain't quite sure what time he got home, they kep' it up so late.

But Ben was up pretty early the nex' mornin', an' he ses to his wife, "I'll jist listen to hear when the Dumphy's go away, an' then I'll slip in an' get that table an' chuck the firewood over the fence. There's people in this town can't be trusted."

"Why, Ben," Mrs Harker ses to him a bit later, "I do believe the Dumphys must be gone already, it seems so quiet there. Now I come to think of it, I thought I heard a noise, before daylight this morning', like a waggon goin' down the road."

"I'll slip over an' see, anyway," ses Ben, "an' you clear them things away an' make room for the table."

Ben went round the back way an' run his eye over the firewood, an' he was just tryin' the back door, which was locked, when old man Mackillican came round the corner of the house.

"Hullo, Ben," he ses, cheerful like. "Up bright an' early, seein' what you can pick up, as usual. I don't think you'll find they've left much."

"Then what are you after?" ses Ben, rough-like, him not likin' the tone Mackillican used.

"Only somethin' that Mrs Dumphy was kind enough to give my wife before she left," ses the old man. "A kitchen table."

"A what?" ses Ben.

"A table," ses Mackillican," that she gave my wife."

"But she gave it to me!" ses Ben.

"We know all about that, Ben," laughs the old man. "She was always sich a great friend of yours, wasn't she? You don't come them sorter dodges with me, my boy."

"But she did give it to me, I tell yeh!" howled Ben.

When old man Mackillican seen Ben so set about it he began to get vexed, an' they was just enterin' into the beginning of a interestin' argument when Joe Slinks backs a dray in through the gate an' begins loading up the firewood.

"Here, drop that; it belongs to me!" yelled Ben.

But Joe Slinks was very dignified.

"Seein' as how," he says, "Mrs Dumphy was kind an' considerit enough to present the firewood to me before she departed from this town, I can only regard your behavior, Mr. Harker, as an attempt to come at your well-known practices." An' he chucks another lump o' wood into the dray.

That riled Ben so much that there might have been vi'lence there and then if Pat Toomey hadn't come on the scene an' sed he wanted a bit of help to shift a kitchen table.

Both Ben and old man Mackillican turns on him so sudden that Pat wondered if they was both gone clean off their dippers. He was gettin' ready to give 'em back a reel heart-felt answer, when his attention was distracted be Bill Waddell, who just come up an' seen Joe Slinks loadin' the firewood, an' called him a low down sneak thief, without any prelimin'ry perliteness.

It would take me hours to tell you in a proper sort of way all the things that happened, and the words that was said that mornin'.

It'll give you some sorter idear of the size of the disturbance when I tell you that before it was all over there was no less than fourteen excited men in Dumphy's back yard, some of 'em claimin' the table, some of 'em the firewood, and some of 'em the lot.

At last, after a free fight nearly starting half a dozen times, Joe Slinks managed to got a hearin'.

"Look here, men," he ses; "let me arst you all jist one question. Would any of you here have give a subscription to Mrs Dumphy's present if she hadn't promised you the firewood or the table?"

"We would not!" ses all the others in a chorus; an' I got no doubt whatever but their hearts was in them words.

"Well," ses Joe, "it's plain to me that we've been done. Mrs Dumphy has got her clock an' her send-off, an' all we got out of it is a kitchen table an' a pile of firewood between fourteen of us. Now, it ain't no use fightin' about it. That kind-hearted lady has scored a win. Question is, what are we goin' to do?"

"We can easy divide up the firewood," ses Ben Harker, "be takin' three or four sticks apiece; but I don't see how we're goin' to whack up the table."

"Let's draw lots for it," ses someone. After a lot of barneyin' it was decided that would be the best thing to do, an Joe Slinks went over to tho hotel to borrer the dice, which was considered a more gentlemanly gamble than drorin' strors.

Joe came back with the dice, an' also with the news that the landlord up at the pub was claimin' the firewood, it bein' left him by Dumphy to pay off an old licker score.

Then someone suggested that they may as well break in the back door and get out the table to shake the dice on. After some argument, Bill Waddell put his shoulder to the door and give it a shove.

"It seems a lotter rot, goin' to all this fuss," he grumbles, as he stepped into the house, "goin' to all this fuss," he ses, "over a tup'ny ha'p'ny table," he ses. "Here, who's goin' to carry it out? Because I'm, not!" he ses.

But he needn't have troubled himself, because the table wasn't there.

5: Spink

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 17 Jan 1914

MARTY SPINK is an artist— a very good artist I have heard, though I am not in a position to judge such things, being myself too busy in the city to spare much time for the study of art.

I say Spink is a good artist, because I have heard others say so— people who are judges of that sort of thing. Of his own work Spink talks very little, though I believe he does take a pride in it.

What he does talk about mostly— to me, anyhow— is business, and Spink knows about as much of business as does a cow that has never seen a milk bill. Be prides himself upon his business ability and commercial acumen, or, as he puts it himself, his "astuteness in getting inside these grasping commercial rotters who are always trying to take a man down."

Now, Spinks' "astuteness" amounts to paying eighteen-pence for an article that an ordinary business man could get for a shilling. But he always congratulates himself on the fact that he did not pay two shillings; so that, in the end, everyone is quite happy about the deal, especially the salesman.

I might also mention that my friend Spink is a man of enthusiasm— temporary, short-lived enthusiasms most of them, but while he does "enthuse," he enthuses for all it is worth, and is deeply hurt if his friends do not enthuse with him.

I trust that, through this brief description, you have come to know Spink passing well.

It was on the day before Christmas, not so long ago, that Spink rushed into my office breathlessly.

"Such a stroke of business, sonny! he cried. (Spink, by the way, calls every one sonny. I have heard him use the term to his own father-in-law). "Such a stroke of business, sonny. I've spoiled the Egyptians this time and no mistake."

"Who's been getting at you now?" I inquired unsympathetieally.

"Getting at me!" said Spink, "I tell you, sonny, I've made the best bargain of my life. I've bought a piano— Christmas present for the wife. What do you think of it, eh?"

"Then you have sold your big picture," I remarked, having a fair idea of Spink's usual financial state.

"You think so, do you? I haven't," said he. "But I've bought a piano and paid cash on the nail. Now, how much do you think? Guess."

"Well, a piano, I should think— even a fair second-hand piano— couldn't be got for less than, say, thirty pounds," I hazarded. "But, surely, Spink—"

"Thirty pounds!" he interrupted. "Thirty grandmothers! They'd have grot thirty pounds out of me if they could, you bet. But I'm one too many for these commercial brigands. That's where my business acumen comes in. I'm astute, sonny. Savvy! Astute! Thirty pounds! Bless your little heart! A fiver, sonny, that's what I paid. Five golden sovereigns cash on the nail, and ten and I to have it carted out home. Christmas present for the wife. See?"

"Five pounds?' I gasped. "Five pounds for a piano? You must be 'taking Snink. Where?

"Auction room," said Spink. "Hook's or Crook's, or Rook's, or something. Forget the name. Fine though. Semi-upright grand, by Bubblestein and Bohrs, rosewood, iron frame, real ivory keys, two pedals and a key to lock it with, all complete, for five quid, sonny. Oh, trust me. I know my way about. Happened to just drop in; saw the piano; no reserve I risked five pounds— no other bid. Auctioneer seemed to pass it in. I pointed out there was no icserve and my bid held good legally according to conditions ot sale. Had him there, eh? He gave in with very bad grace— wanted another two pound ten. Not me! Passed over the cash, got a receipt, all in due form, and the instrument is now being loaded ready to be taken home. Surprise for the wife. What do you think? You must come out to dinner, sonny, and witness the presentation. The little woman will be surprised. Didn't expect a piano this Christmas, I'll bet. But you mustn't say a word about it till the piano arrives. Keep it dark. Want to surprise her. I've timed the arrival for 8 o'clock, just after dinner, managed the whole affair beautifully. Wife knows nothing; van arrives; wife wonders; men descend and carry in large heavy case; I keep dark; wife still wonders. Then the case is opened and, hey! presto! piano revealed— wife delighted, and all is gentleness and peace. What do you think nt eh? You must come to dinner. Sort of acolyte attending the high priest of the presentation. You'll come?"

"Oh yes, I'll come," I said; "but— I—that is, I hope, it will be all right."

"All right!" cried Spink. "Of course it will be all right. What can go wrong about it? Stage-managed beautifully. The wife will give us a few tunes and a song or two after dinner. Sort of preliminary gallop for the old jigger, eh? So long; see you at dinner. We'll crack a bottle afterward and christen the music-box. Don't be late!"

And Spink fled out ot the office in his usual breathless fashion, intent, no doubt on further bargains in view of the approaching festive season.

Now, I knew Spink's wife was musical, a very fair performer on the piano before she was married. Her chief regret since had been that they had not been able to afford an instrument. That was one of the hundred things they intended to get when Spink's "big picture" was sold. Momentous things hung on the sale of that big picture— piano, horse and trap, carpet for the drawing

room, costume for the wife, sketching umbrella for Spink, and scores of other expensive items. In fact, judging by the number and cost of the things they meant to get, I should think that Spink would have to sell his picture for something like a thousand pounds.

But Spink had the piano now. Also, I had my doubts.

I arrived at Spink's house in good time for dinner. In fact, it was a little early, for my interest had been aroused in this new purchase of his, and I did not intend to miss the grand finale in case Spink's stage management went wrong and the piano arrived before the appointed time.

The dinner was good from a culinary point of view, but otherwise it Was hardly a success, for Spink was so fidgety, so distrait, when either his wife or I tried to make conversation that the talk was exceedingly jerky and spasmodic at the best; Yet all the time, I knew, he was congratulating himself on his air of perfect sangfroid, and believed himself to be quite at his ease.

"Morty, whatever is the matter with you?" asked his wife. "You're eating hardly any dinner, and you did not answer Mr. Rogers when he spoke to you just now."

Spink started guiltily, then recovered himself.

"Nothing, dear, nothing," he said. "I had a cup of tea and— some other things this afternoon. No appetite. Excuse me, old chap; didn't hear you speak. I was just thinking out a new composition that has occurred to me. Beastly rude."

We were about in the middle of the second course when there came a violent ring at the door-bell.

"Whoever can it be at this hour?" exclaimed Mrs. Spink, rising to go to the door. The Spink income did not run to servants.

"D—n!" said Spink, as his wife left the room. "It's those beastly piano men, and I gave them particular instructions not to come before eight."

We both rose and followed Mrs. Spink to the door.

It was the piano, sure enough, with three brawny men straining beneath the weight of it.

"Where'll yer have it?" grunted one of the carters.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Spink. "Whatever have they got? Morty, did you—"

"All right, dear; in a minute," answered her husband. "In here, men, in the dining room, Gently does it. Mind the door! That's it. Now we'll have it out of that case."

Chisel and hammer were procured, and the men proceeded to g'et the instrument out of the case.

"A piano!" cried Mrs Spink, as it was covered.

"Exactly, a piano," said her husband.

"But, Morty, where did you—"

"All in good time," he replied. "Over here against the wall, men. That's it. Mind the paint!"

"Paint?" said the man addressed. " 'Tain't paint. That's veneerin'."

"Exactly," said Spink. "That's what I meant. Good night. Here, have a drink at my expense."

The men departed, grinning, and Spink, seizing the hearthrug, flung it over the somewhat aged-looking instrument,

"We'll finish dinner first," he directed. "Etxplanations after,"

The dinner was ctold, of course; but we worried through on sweets and coffee, Spink eyeing the piano the while, and his wife watching him with surprised curiosity, not unmixed with a little touch of anxiety.

"Now!" exclaimed Spink, gulping down his coffee and moving towards the instrument.

We followed him. I admit that I felt rather nervous. I knew Spink and his wonderful bargains. Judging by its outward appearance I should have been surprised to find that piano perfectly sound in wind and, limb, so to speak; but I rather wanted to be surprised.

I think Spink must have prepared the speech,' It was a Very neat little speech and did him credit as a husband. Finally, with a very pretty peroration, he drew aside the hearthrug—unveiled the present, as it were, and, with a charming bow, handed his wife the key.

With a happy little cry she unlocked the instrument, and, sitting down, ran her fingers over the keys. Then she sat back.

"Oh! It's—it's—"

"What's up?" said Spink, and he tried the keys himself.

"Dear me," he remarked. "Some of the notes do appear to be a bit— deaf."

"Dumb," I suggested.

"Deaf and, dumb," said Spink mournfully; but the next moment he recovered himself. "I expected this," he said, looking round impressively. "I fully expected this. Pianos standing about in auction rooms are apt to get out of order; so I called at Mitchell's this afternoon, and told them to send out a tuner to-night, He'll soon fix it"

"To-night!" exclaimed his wife.

"My dear," said Spink, "I want to have that thing perfect to-morrow. It must be in tip-top order on Christmas Day."

"But, Morty, how ever did you buy a piano?"

"Ah," said he, gazing with pride at the ancient instrument, "that's it— how? A little surprise for you, my dear. A little business acumen, sufficient commercial acuteness to seize an opportunity, and, hey, presto! a piano! Don't

worry dear, it's paid for— cash down— receipt in my pocket. It shows you what a man can do who—"

He was interrupted by another ring at the front door.

It was the tuner— a heavy German, with a handbag, spectacles and a large moustache.

He was a very polite German— at first— and bowed elaborately to Mrs Spink, Spink and myself in succession.

"I attend to der bi-ano," he said.

"Right, go ahead," commanded Spink. The German looked around the room. "There it is," said the proud owner. "Tune her up."

The Professor took off his spectacles, and wiped them with a large red handkerchief. Then he put them on again and gazed earnestly at Spink's piano.

"My instrooctions say der vos a grand," he announced at length.

"Well, isn't it?" said Spink.

The Professor merely glanced at him sorrowfully, and, opening the piano, ran his hands over the keys.

"Ach!" he remarked.

He tried it again, lower down. "*Himmel*!" he exclaimed.

Then he closed the lid with elaborate care and took up his bag.

"Dot vos not a bi-ano," he said.

"Not a piano!" exclaimed Spink. "Then what the devil is it? A jew's harp?"

"*Nein*," said the German, reverently. "It vos a ruin. It cost, ter do him oop, den dimes as he is vort. Dey send a pill for my exbenses to come here. Goot night."

And he let himself out.

For many minutes Spink stood gazing earnestly at his piano. His wife eyed him anxiously, her own disappointment forgotten. But there was no need for anxiety regarding Spink. There never is. You can't disappoint him for long. In a few minutes he was himself again.

"I was prepared for this," he announced. "Fully prepared for this. The jealousy that exists between these piano warehouses is something scandalous. You see. Mitchell's don't stock the Bubblestein and Bohr's make; probably some of their rivals do. Consequently, they send a man cut to say nasty things about it, refuse to tune it, and, of course, try to make out that the make is no good. Trade jealousy. Rotten trade jealousy; that's what it is. I'm sorry, my dear," he continued, turning to his wife. "We won't be able to have it in order for to-morrow, but after the holidays I'll get another tuner, an independent man, and we'll soon have her going like a good one. Rotten trade jealousy!"

I left shortly after that, and it was some weeks before I saw Spink again.

One day I met him in the street.

"Well, how's the piano?" I asked. "Tuned?"

But Spink wasn't enthusiastic— about pianos. It was book-cases.

"It's a downright shame, sonny," he said. "Do you know, there's a ring existing amongst these piano people— a regular combine, and they've all boycotted the Bubblestein and Bohrs make— refuse to tune 'em. It's scandalous— restraint of trade— the Government ought to look into the matter."

"Dear me,'' I said. "That's unfortunate for you."

"Not a bit of it," he replied. "Not a bit of it. We're not troubling about pianos, sonny. Wife wouldn't have one. Neighbors on both sides have 'em anyhow, and they're an infernal nuisance. Besides, if she should want to play at any time she can always run out to her mother's. But, I Say, sonny, you ought to see my bookcase. I've turned that old musics-box into a book-case, and I'm going to make a frame for a sketching umbrella out of the wires. But the book-case! Real rosewood, and the quaintest, most artistic thing you ever saw. Quite aesthetic, Holds all my books, and room for more. I got a bargain there, sonny. If I could pick up another at the same price I'd turn it into a sideboard. Bargain? I tell you these commercial pirates have got to get up very early in the morning before they get the best of me. You must come out and seo it. it's the most unique decorative thing you ever set eyes on. It was an inspiration! Come out on Sunday and have a look at it, will you?"

I said I would. Spink was happy and quite satisfied about the quality of his "business acumen."

SO, I have no doubt, was the man who sold him his piano.

———————————

6: The Mother

Worker (Wagga, NSW) 7 Dec 1911

Most unexpected tragic tale from C J Dennis

IT all came of association of ideas, as usual. If Carson had not turned the talk on caterpillars, and if caterpillars had not suggested spiders, we should never have had from the silent bushman this story of the convict, and mother-love, and—

It happened this way. A small company of us— artists and writers— had pitched a summer camp back in the big-timber country. It is cold o' nights up there in those mountains, even in summer time; and, as we sat yarning around the log fire in the evenings, we were joined sometimes by big Jim Driver, who owned a selection nearby, and daily fought herculean battles with the giant timber. He would smoke silently and listen to our art jargon as though he enjoyed it; but Carson seemed to interest him mostly.

When Carson is not cursing his creditors he is talking about insects, which, he maintains, amounts to the same thing. For though Carson is allegedly an artist, and makes some sort of a living by painting things on canvas, he is, at heart, a rabid entomologist. In fact, it was he who had lured us hither, selfishly, that he might spend endless hours stalking the elusive saw-fly and tracking the white ant to its lair.

Carson had been telling us, at length and quite unnecessarily, of a wholly objectionable female spider who, in order to protect her young, heartlessly devours her lawful spouse at the end of the honeymoon.

'It is certainly tough luck for the bridegroom,' Carson admitted; 'but, for the protection of the race, that instinct is not uncommon amongst insects.'

'Why insects only?' demanded Britten, who, scenting argument, which he loved, was ever ready with a new-laid- theory. 'Why insects only? Isn't that protective, maternal instinct dominant in all animals? Why, it's one of the boss schemes of nature! Even a woman, in the same circumstances, would do the same thing.'

'Not uncooked, I think,' cried Carson, mildly.

'Don't be an idiot,' retorted Britten. 'You know what: I mean. What does Bernard Shaw say? "Any woman worthy of the name of mother..." '

And then ensued a pretty argument with which, however, we have nothing to do. At the end of it, Driver rose to go, and passed in his solitary contribution.

'I reckon Mr. Britten's about right,' he said, knocking the ashes from his pipe. 'When it comes to choosin' between the husband and the kids— mind, I

don't mean in little things, but in something pretty big — the man gets it in the neck every time. It's the children that count with her when it comes to the dead finish. I know what I'm sayin', because I've known a woman to choose—once.'

We could get no more from him then; but later on, when he found me in the camp alone one night, I managed to coax this story from big Jim Driver.

FROM her very school days little Mrs. Ralph had seemed to invite, if not exactly sympathy, at least a quiet sort of patronage. Her fragility of body, her mild manners, and her soft, pleading brown eyes had easily earned for her, amongst the hardy, work-toughened bush-women, the title of 'the meekest woman in the mountain.'

Any hint of the tigress about little Mrs. Ralph would have raised the laugh of scorn amongst her neighbors. She was a 'nice little body' to be sure, and when she married blustering, masterful Jack Ralph, the cattle dealer, she became, all too quickly, that 'poor little soul,' very much in need of sympathy indeed.

The domineering, boastful Ralph, brutal at the bottom, had been just the man to attract such a type of soft, moth-like woman; but at the end of four years' married life Mrs. Ralph had little to live for but her child.

The brutality of Ralph toward his wife and child was a prolific source of gossip in the little settlement, and many a sturdy, timber-getter bit hard upon his pipe stem, as, on his home-coming, his women-folk had some fresh tale to tell of Jack Ralph's violence.

'It's the way she stands between him an' that child,' said the women. 'You'd hardly think it was in her, to look at her.'

But the men said little that is printable, and their was some stern, quiet talk amongst them of lynch law, and a salutary ducking in the creek for Mr. Jack Ralph.

But the matter was taken out of their hands just in time by the sudden arrest of Ralph for cattle-stealing. Then, indeed, the gossips revelled in a luxury of tongue-wagging. Almost satiated they were; for, as the case proceeded, the mysterious disappearance of many a mountain steer, many a domestic milker was accounted for; and, in the end, a sentence of seven years imprisonment solved for the time the question of Jack Ralph's correction.

That matter settled, sympathy, thrice deepened, began to pour out for little Mrs. Ralph. Cruel and brutal as he was, he had at least been her bread-winner. Now she was almost destitute. Open charity is unknown in the bush; but amongst the hardly-worked the hardly-used ever find the sincerest and

most tactful friends, and in kitchen and cow-shed many a cunning scheme was discussed for secretly aiding little Mrs. Ralph.

Then, one day, came the news that left even the hardest gossips almost breathless. Before he had served a month of his sentence, Jack Ralph, with another convict, had broken jail, and a warder had been murdered. One prisoner had been quickly recaptured, said the paper, three days old, but Ralph had got clear away, and was supposed to have made for the forest country.

On the next day police arrived hot-foot, and, willingly aided by the bushmen, scoured the forest without result. After a month's useless search the reward for Ralph's capture was raised, and the excitement in the little settlement waxed high.

Ralph's home was watched day and night; for his wife's repeated refusal to take refuge with the neighbors had made the police doubly suspicious.

Then an official rumor that the outlaw had got away to another State drew off the police, to the voluble indignation of the settlers' wives. And much of that indignation was directed at Mrs. Ralph for her obstinacy in refusing another roof than her own. In every offer she detected charity. Willingly she accepted the sewing and other little tasks they could give her; but to live with neighbors, who, she knew, could afford no domestic help, she resolutely refused.

And through all those weeks the meek and timid Mrs. Ralph went through her daily tasks, and starved herself that her child might have bread. And every night she listened with dread at her heart for the footstep that she surely knew must sometime come. Yet, overcoming all her terror of the man, was a fierce longing that he would come, and come soon.

And there, were many others in that little settlement who thought frequently of Jack Ralph. Although the police had apparently given up the scarch in the forest, there were those who expected that, sooner or later, he would make for his old haunts; and many a bushman kept his eyes open and his rifle oiled expecting and rather hopinging for the convict's sudden advent.

With bushmen the hunting of men is not congenial employment. Indeed, their sympathies are more often with the hunted

But amongst this small community Jack Ralph had been a pariah and an outlaw long before the Government had offered a reward for his capture. The offer merely added zest to the chase. None had mentioned the outlawry, or the reward to Mrs. Ralph; but she had heard of it, of course, and when her thoughts first began to dwell upon it she put them from her as something unclean. But again these thoughts would come, and again, as she sat alone at night scheming vainly to earn bread for her child and herself.

Three hundred pounds! What would such a sum mean to her now— her child with barely enough to eat, herself practically starving. But of herself she thought not at all— it was the child, for whom her love was passionate. She had none to advise her, no relations that she knew of; and this was a matter that admitted the counsel of no stranger, however friendly.

So, one night the frail little woman had it out with herself; and, after a night of mental agony, she arose with a decision made for once and all. She had weighed everything, measured everything: her love for her husband, her anxiety for his safety, her love, for her child. And now she waited grimly, yet patiently, for her husband's coming.

And late one night he came, at last. She had just soothed her child to sleep and had taken up an interrupted task when she heard his step at the panels below the house. His voice, as he quietened the snarling dog, assured her that it was he, and, for an instant, terror overpowered her.

Then, with an anxious glance at the sleeping child, she braced herself for the encounter. She knew what she should do. For days she had known it, and now she prayed for strength that she might see it through.

In the next insiant he stood In the doorway, and, with a quick rush across the floor she threw herself wildly into his arms.

'Oh, Jack, Jack, dear Jack!' she cried. 'I knew that you would come to me!'

And there was no doubting the love that was in her eyes as they looked into his. She herself, even in that hour, knew that she loved him. And his answer was, worthy of the man who had won her love.

'Shut yer head!' he snarled, pushing her from him. 'Do yer want to wake the whole mountain with yer squealin'? I ain't come, to stay,' he added sneeringly. 'I want money— an' tucker.' Then, with an evil smile, as he watched her big, pleading brown eyes gazing into his, he asked: 'Ain't you afraid to touch— a murderer?'

'Jack!' she gasped, 'you didn't do it? Say it wasn't you!'

'Oh, it was me all right.' he boasted, his old assurance returning. 'I socked it into him good and hard; and he deserved it, the cow! Wonder I ain't afraid to tell yeh?'

He was so sure of her — this meek, timid, shrinking woman with the patient dog-like gaze. He knew the sort. Mentally he decided that his method with women had always been right. Treat 'em like dogs, and like dogs they come up whining to lick your hand. Now, when the whole country was hunting; him, hounding him down, here was his only ally— this woman he had beaten and abused.

And as she sat, gazing back at him with her pathetic eyes, she was thinking— thinking hard; her woman's wit evolving a scheme to carry out her end.

'Jack, dear,' she said, 'you must stay awhile. No one will know. The nearest house is three miles away, and when you have rested—'

'Chuck that talk,' he commanded. 'All I want's money an' tucker, an' I'm off. So fork it out quick and lively. I must have enough grub to last awhile.'

In the instant she knew how she must act.

'Oh, Jack,' she said, 'whatever will you do ? There's hardly a thing to eat. in the house. The supplies came up by the coach to-day, and they're still down at the post-office.'

'Damnation!' he growled; and for a moment stood regarding her suspiciously from under lowering brows. 'You'll have to get 'em,' he decided at length. 'It's me only chance. 'And mind you, me lady, no monkey tricks.'

'But you, Jack?' she said. 'What if someone should come and see you here while I'm away? I can't leave you here alone.'

There was strained anxiety in her voice, but, had he only noted it, her glance was for the sleeping child.

'Don't be anxious' about me, my little pet,' he mocked. ' They don't catch Jack Ralph in a trap like that. I'm goin' to hide in the scrub down the gully. If it's all clear when you come back, you give a call. Understand?'

Relief relaxed her features as he spoke, and again her glance travelled to the sleeping child, lying all unconscious of the scene, its little, wasted arm pathetically outflung across the bed-clothes.

Hastily she donned her shabby hat and threadbare cloak, and, as she stood ready to go, he suddenly grasped her arm so that the grip made her wince; and his savage, hunted eyes looked into hers sternly.

'Mind,' he growled, 'no crook business with me, or, by the livin' God—!'

'Jack, can't you trust me, your wife?' she said. 'Kiss me, Jack, won't you, just once before I go.'

Roughly his face brushed hers, and he pushed her towards the door.

'Get a move on,' he said, 'and get back as soon as you can. This place ain't healthy for me.'

A HEAVY mountain mist was falling as the woman hurried on her mission, and Jack Ralph, shivering amid the wet scrub, cursed his plight, the rain, his wife, as the minutes lengthened to an hour.

And then he heard her step by the slip-rails below the house, and, in his impatience, he joined her at the door.

'Well, how much?' he asked gruffly.

'You should not have taken such a risk,' she said, setting' her bundles on the table. 'Why didn't you wait until I called?'

'Curse it! I've waited long enough. 'What have you brought?'

'All I could carry,' she replied, her head bent low as she fumbled with the strings. 'Bread and meat. It's our supply for two weeks. You'll leave a little, Jack, for the child and me?'

With an oath, he wrenched the bundles from her hands

'By the Lord, I like your nerve!' he said. ' "Leave a little for the child an' me"? D'yeh think I just dropped in fur a dinner party, did yeh? I want all I can get, an' more. You an' yer flamin' kid! You can root fur more if yeh want it. Now I'm off.'

'No, No!' she cried. ' Jack, you can't go yet— not yet. Listen, you are not-fit— your boots— look at your boots. You can't travel in those. There are a pair of heavy ones in the bedroom. You must put them on.'

'Get them,' he commanded. 'I'll take them in the bag.'

'No, Jack, you must put them on.'

'Get them,' he snarled again. 'Good God, woman, d'yeh think— What's that?'

The sharp, metallic sound, as of a horse's hoof striking stone, came from without.

'Nothing, Jack, nothing,' she tried to reassure him. 'Wait; I'll get the boots.'

'Not me,' he said. 'I don't like it. I'm off.'

But, before he could move, her arms were around him, pinning his own to his sides.

'Oh Jack, dear Jack,' she cried, wildly, 'you can't go like this. You can't, you can't!'

But in a flash, in the very touch of her frantically clinging arms,' he felt her purpose, at last.

'Let me go, d—n yeh!' he whispered. struggling to be free; but her encircling, arms and the burdens that, he bore made him almost helpless.

'By God! I'll choke yeh; choke yeh like a cat when I get at yeh!' he muttered savagely, as other sounds came from without, and closer. For a minute they stood there swaying together— he, with fierce eyes glaring into hers, as he breathed deep, labored breaths of a straining man; she with her convulsive arms wound about him, her breath coming in little gasping sobs. Then, driven to frantic effort by the sound of an opening door behind him, he flung, her off, and staggered back— into the grasp of two sturdy bushmen. Before he could resist they had flung ropes about him, and bound him fast.

'All right, Mrs. Ralph. He won't trouble you any more, I kin promise,' said one of the men quietly.

She had fallen into a chair, and lier y. child, awakened by the noise., of the struggle, came whimpering to her knee, and her protective arm was about his tiny wasted form.

Thus, for a brief moment, the woman and the man looked into each other's eyes. But, if he looked to see the mask fall from her now, to behold the tigress in this woman who had sold him, he looked in vain. Those big, brown, pleading eyes gazed up at him full of unutterable pity.

'Poor Jack!' she said, at last, 'Poor, poor, Jack! God forgive you — and me!'

'So you've sold me,' he said, quietly at first, between his teeth. 'Sold me like a dog!... for blood-money. D'yeh hear? Blood-money!'

Then a torrent of blasphemy and filthy abuse poured from him, as he cursed and reviled this woman who had betrayed him.

Quickly the men seized him and dragged him from the house; but, through the closed door, as they bore him away, she could yet hear his hoarse voice shouting: 'Blood-money! Blood-money!'

And the woman, with the frightened child strained tightly to her breast, her pale, faded hair mingling with his dark curls, was sobbing as though her heart would break.

'My darling, my darling, I did it for you! Only for you!' she wailed. 'Heaven grant you may never remember this dreadful night. Oh my God! Blood-money!'

7: "Aigs is Aigs"— A Dog Yarn

(as by "Den")

Queenslander 5 Nov 1936

IN the wooden hut of the former, Pete Farraday, elderly pensioner, and Jerry, his dog, sat on a recent afternoon gazing pensively into the fire. Outside, the autumn winds, bending low sapling and scrub, tore through the forest with the noise as of angry seas. Suddenly and faintly above the racket of the wind sounded the hysterical cackling of an advertising hen, raucously publishing the fact that once again she had performed an appointed duty.

At the first whisper of the sound one ear of Jerry began to rise cautiously. Then, after a swift and secret glance at his meditative master, both ears became erect But Pete, though his eyesight might be dimmed by age, missed no move on the part of his well-loved, but wily, friend and only constant companion.

"Here, you!" he shouted suddenly; and Jerry froze. "Now, no shenanikin," protested Pete. "I might be half-blind, but I heard that hen as good as you, me lad. Come back here by the fire!"

Crouching low, Jerry crawled abjectly toward his master, his pleading brown eyes awash with pathetic appeal.

"Gerrout!" said Pete, unimpressed. "I know all about the blither an' come-hither with them eyes o' yourn. But who taught the old rooster to cackle by the fowlhouse when the aig was laid in the scrub, an' vicey vercy? An', when I was lookin' for that aig one place, who was eatin' it surreptitious in the other? An' then you lets me go an' kill that ole rooster for dirty double dealin' an' deceit, when, all the time, it was you as tort him. If it wasn't for the aig givin' you the glossy coat, I might never have' found you out, Jerry."

Jerry whined softly and wriggled a little closer.

"It's no good," said Pete sternly. "Didn't we make a pack. Didn't the agreement say, 'aigs is aigs,' an' aig for aig it is, fifty fifty between us'; but here's you with a glossy coat again, that looks mighty like double dealin'; an' you tryin' to sneak out every time you hears a cackle. Teachin' the hens tricks now, are you? Come on, now, an' we look for this together, as the pack says. Aigs is aigs, an' fair's far between pals."

Outside, the advertising hen was still shrieking publicly, and diligent search at last discovered a nest of bracken cunningly hidden in a pocket made by fallen logs. Over this Pete pondered judiciously while Jerry marked time with nervous forepaws.

"Circumsubstantial evidence," pronounced Pete at last— "Circumsubstantial evidence is dead again you, Jerry. Aig yolk on the bracken, aig shell scattered here and here. But there's two aigs in this nest, an' that ain't like you, who scoffs 'em as they come an' no leavin's. So I gives you the benefits of doubts, an' the pack holds."

Two eggs there certainly were: one gleaming white and obviously new-laid; but the other bore the dirty greenish tinge of antiquity that warned of lurking dangers in the dark interior. But Pete's old eyes heeded none of those finer nuances as, gathering the eggs, he returned to the hut, closely followed by the dog. There, Pete promptly broke one egg— the white one— into a saucer which he laid it on the floor before Jerry, and in a trice it was hot. Jerry licked appreciative lips as Pete spoke again.

"That shows you, Jerry, how a man like me keeps a pack. 'Aig for aig. we says an' aig for aig we has. You've had yours, now I has mine, but I prefers it fried."

So saying, Pete broke the greenish egg on the rim of the frying pan. With the agonised yelp of one whose keenest sense had been suddenly and mortally assailed, Jerry sprang for the door, and so out into the clean autumn air. Pete, with a dish-clotb presses to nose and lips, staggered back against a wall of the hut.

"Jerry!" he moaned, speaking through the cloth and the advancing billows of sulphuretted hydrogen and whatever other iniquities an ancient egg emits— "Jerry, the pack is off! Nest aigs, is it? Leavin' nest aigs, an' the same one every time to teach the hens to trick me. Aigs is aigs. I says. But they ain't— not when they're like that. They're assaults an' batt'ries! The pack is dead, Jerry, as dead— as dead as that there wot was once a aig!"

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8: The Man Who Missed the 'Bus

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 26 Dec 1914

IN THE little timber settlement of Tanglefoot Jim Kimpton was generally known as the "Man who Missed the 'Bus." His ill-luck was proverbial. In the early mining days at Dobson's Creek he had bottomed, as he thought, a duffer, and the next man who took up the claim dug out some hundreds of pounds worth of gold. At Brady's Crossing he had sold land for a song which a few months later increased three times in value owing to the advent of a railway. When he attended a race meeting the horses he backed almost invariably ran into second place. On two occasions the number next to his own won the big prize in Tattersall's.

In love affairs Jim Kimpton's ill fortune persisted. Thrice he had been jilted, and on one occasion a girl whom he himself jilted came into a fortune. Undoubtedly this persistent frowning of Dame Fortune had its effect on the character of James. Year by year he grew more gloomy and despondent, till, at the age of forty, still a morose bachelor, he earned a precarious living by paling-splitting in the mountain forest.

More than once in his despondent moments, thoughts of self-destruction crossed his mind during later years; but these Jim managed to over come, and looked ahead buoyed by the slender and slowly diminishing stock of optimism that still remained to him; vaguely hoping that the ill-luck that had dogged his footsteps through life would, as he expressed it, "kennel up and give him a show."

For some years the farm and person of the widow Quealy had occupied a frequent and prominent place in the thoughts of Jim Kimpton. He admired the widow for her plump and pleasing person and abounding good nature, and he coveted her farm for its smiling fruitfulness and promise of easy living in the years to come. But Jim feared to put his fortune to the test lest he should receive another rebuff from Fate.

"I'm a Jonah, and she knows I'm a Jonah," he reflected gloomily. "Chances are I wouldn't get her; an' if I did get her somethin' 'ud be bound to happen to the farm."

But after much hesitation and many false starts and pessimistic with drawals, Jim decided, on one summer night, to throw down the gage to hostile Fortune yet once again. He garbed himself in his most, splendid raiment, worn only on his infrequent trips down to town, and went forth on his love quest to the widow's farm.

Upon his arrival he was somewhat disconcerted to find Jobson, the mill manager, in friendly converse with the widow; but Jim seated himself, and partook of the proffered tea, and waited with bucolic stoicism for the departure of Jobson. It disturbed him to note the friendly, and, it seemed to him. almost tender glances that passed between the two during the spasmodic, and somewhat strained conversation of crops, and bullocks, and timber, and other matters of burning local interest. But Jim had already received what he considered quite obvious encouragement from the widow; and the fact that Jobson had a crooked eye and an aggressively bald head helped to put Jim at his ease in this regard.

For two hours Jobson lingered, but at last after taking a very friendly farewell of the widow, and casting an amused glance at the patient James, he left.

Having once made up his mind, Jim at once got to the point without preliminary, and with a rash directness that, might, or might not, have accounted for much of his alleged ill-luck.

"Mrs Quealy," he said, almost before the mill manager had gone out of ear-shot. "Mrs Quealy, will yeh marry me?"

For a full half-minute the widow Quealy stood gazing at Kimpton with a look of mingled pity and regret.

"Jim Kimpton," she said earnestly, "you always were the unluckiest man on the mountain. Yeh've missed the 'bus again, I've waited for yeh, and I waited for yeh to speak, and yeh've never give me hint or sign of yer intentions. This very night I've promised to be the wife of the man who has just gone out."

"Jobson!" exclaimed Jim.

"Jobson," repeated the widow.

"He's bald!" said Jim.

"He's not dumb," replied the widow.

"He squints!" urged Jim.

"He can see things quicker than you," retorted the widow.

"Ain't there no hope?" asked Jim pathetically,

The widow shook her head, it seemed regretfully,

"Yer luck's agin yer, Jim," she said. "Three hours ago it might have been different; but I've promised Jobson and he's not a man to be trifled with."

Jim took up his hat and sidled to wards the door.

"Good night," he said, with all the misery begot by years of Ill-fortune in his voice.

"Good night," said the widow, "I'm sorry Jim."

On his way home the thoughts of James Kimpton were of the gloomiest order. Not so much the widow's reluctant refusal as the knowledge that his ill-luck still persisted made him more than ordinarily despondent.

"It's the limit!" he reflected gloomily, "A man with my luck ain't got no right to be alive. This time I'm goin' to catch the bus fer once."

It is regrettable to have to record that Mr Kimpton's thoughts at this juncture were fixed grimly on self-destruction. But it may be of interest to psychologists to note that his first act on reaching home was to prepare his tea and eat a hearty meal before deciding by what agency he would end his ill-fated existence.

Jim Kimpton inhabited a hut that had formerly been occupied by one of the many cranks who find refuge in the bush. The hobby, or monomania, of this former tenant had been chemistry; and the shelves of the hut were lined with flasks and bottles which Jim had neglected to remove. Jim took down one of these at random, and gazed at the age-stained label. Most of the writing was not easily decipherable, but, in large red letters at the top, Jim's apathetic gaze encountered the dread word "Poison."

"It 'ud be as good a way as any," he reflected gloomily, "if" he added "if it don't hurt too much." And his gaze travelled round the hut in search of something equally lethal but less possibly painful.

From a well-lighted corner near the fireplace a glistening, beady eye gazed back into his.

Suddenly Jim sprang to his feet, with an exclamation totally unsuited to the lips of a man about to die; and his hand instinctively reached for a weapon with which to assault the intruding tiger snake; but in the act of striking the man stayed his hand.

"By gum'" he exclaimed. "That 'ud be as good a way out as any! And they'd never know I done it a purpose. They'd think I was just bit by accident."

Deliberately he bared his arm, and held the naked flesh to the snake, which struck viciously, twice. Jim returned the compliment with the poker, and the serpent squirmed to the centre of the room.

"That ought to finish me," said Jim quietlv; "but I may as well die in me bed."

In walking across to his bunk his eye fell upon the discarded bottle of poison.

"I'll make it dead sure," he said, and, drawing the cork, he deliberately swal lowed the contents. Then he lay down peacefully on his bed and prepared to die.

For some time he remained quite still, eyes closed, and breathing regularly. At the end of five minutes he murmured drowsily, "If this is dyin', I wouldn't mind doin' it over again."

At the end of another fivee minutes he said, yet more drowsily, "I wisht I'd thought of it, and I'd 'ave punched the face off that Jobson before I done this!"

Then consciousness left him, and he lay quite still. Without, in the still summer night, the note of a mopoke sounded dismally, as it seemed, the requiem of James Kimpton.

IT WAS broad daylight, and the whip birds were calling in the gully, when Jim opened his eyes and found him self lying fully dressed upon his bunk.

''What the thunder—" he began, gazing around the hut, bewildered; then there suddenly came to him recollection of the incidents of the previous night. He sat up and felt himself all over.

"Alive and kickin'!" he said. "After a double dose like that! This wants lookin' into."

Jim arose from his bunk, gingerly, as one who was not quite sure whether he was really alive or dead. He sur veyed first the mangled corpse of the serpent, that lay very surely deceased in the middle of the hut floor. Then he took up the bottle that had contained the deadly draught and bore it to the light of the window to decipher the writing on the label.

In faint and almost faded ink were the words

POISON
Antidote for Snakebite.
To be taken internally.
This mixture is poison to person in normal health, but in cases of snake-bite it will counteract the venom and have no ill-effect.

Jim dropped the bottle from his nerveless hand, and it broke upon the floor.

"By gum!" he exclaimed. "Missed the bloomin' bus again!"

Then there was a hurried knocking at the door, and a voice without that Jim recognised instantly.

"Jim! Jim Kimpton!" cried the voice of Widow Quealy, "Have you heard the news?"

Jim opened the door, and the widow Quealy stood before him.

"What news?" he asked.

"Jobson is dead! He was bit by a snake on his way home from my place, and died in his camp this morning."

"Gum!" said Jim.

"Why, there's another!" shrieked the widow, pointing to the dead snake in the centre of the hut. "Kill it! Kill it quickly—"

"You leave it alone," said Jim, "Snakes bring me luck. I'm goin' to have it stuffed. Will yeh marry now?" he added,

"I will, Jim," said the widow, quietly.

'Snakes bring, me luck,"Jim repeated. And he kissed her.

"Caught the 'bus at last!"

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9: Dennis Starpool's Windfall

Bullfinch Budget (WA) 31 Dec 1910
(credited to "*The Truth*", London.)

By odd coincidence, the newspaper I found this story in was that of the small West Australian mining town I grew up in, published 40 years before my time..—T Walker

I HAD always had a sneaking regard for Dennis Starpool, ne'er-do-well and waster as he was generally considered by the respectable denizens of the provincial town in which we both lived. There was really nothing bad about Dennis except his impecuniosity, and for that I could forgive him, having several years ago been guilty of the same sin myself, in their eyes to be hard up was to be disreputable, and Dennis Starpool found scant favor with them accordingly. If you had challenged any of these good people to his, or her, face, not one of them, probably, would have admitted his conforming to the pecuniary standard of social values. In Snobchester we don't give ourselves away like that, even to our own consciences, but there the standard is, all the same; and the fact was made tolerably evident In the case of Dennis Starpool.

When he first came among us, a seemingly prosperous young man, he had been generally taken up. The elect of the place pronounced him quite the sort of person to know; and, though the said elect were not by any means infallible judges, for once in a way their verdict was in accordance with the evidence. Everybody called on him. All the tradesmen were anxious to serve him. Other mercantile persons, in the shape of mothers with daughters to dispose of, betrayed a conspicuous eagerness to plant their wares upon him.

Chief among these matrons was Mrs. Pigspoke, wife of a wealthy retired draper and mother of Selina Pigspoke, the official belle of Snobchester. I say "official," because Selina's claims to pre-eminence in beauty were rather *de jure* than *de facto*. As the only daughter of the uncrowned social monarch of the town, her charms were accepted as an Article of Faith that it would have been blasphemous to dispute. Princesses, you know, are always beautiful. It is at once the natural consequence of their birth and the accepted creed of all well-disposed persons in regard to them. So Selina Pigspoke, the reigning princess of the locality, was *ipso facto* its reigning beauty.

The Pigspokes, father, mother, and daughter, began by being very civil to Dennis Starpool. They asked him there good deal, and made quite a lion or him. Indeed, everybody was momentarily expecting to hear an interesting matrimonial announcement, when one day Dennis's name appeared in a local newspaper as defendant on a judgment summons in the County Court. This of

course, altered the situation considerably. From that moment Starpool stood revealed in his true colors as a disreputable. The front door of The Cedars (Pigspoke's suburban mansion), as well the front doors of all other self-respecting residences, were closed against him. The local shopkeepers, also, at once became uncivil and disobliging. The manager of the local bank, where Dennis kept his small account, turned back his cheque for £3/10/- because there was only £2/15/9d to his credit when it was presented. In short, he found himself, at one fell stroke, cast outside both the social and commercial pale of Snobchester.

For my own part, however, I still remained friendly with Starpool,. partly because I have always had a fellow-feeling for lame dogs, having once been a lame dog myself, and partly also because he was an amusing and entertaining companion, as well as a really good hearted chap. It was therefore with a genuine sense of pleasure that I learned the news of Dennis's windfall. A handsome windfall it was, too— nothing less, indeed, than a legacy of £30,000, bequeathed to him by his rich uncle, Andrew Starpool, of Glasgow, whose whole estate was sworn at upwards of £200,000.

Dennis did not tell me this himself. He was always secretive about his private affairs. I was first made aware of it by reading the brief notice of old Andrew's will that appeared in my daily paper. I took the earliest opportunity of congratulating him.

"Dash it all! How the deuce did you know anything about it?" he ejaculated, with a certain air of vexation. "I have carefully refrained from mentioning it to a soul."

"I saw the report of your uncle's will in this morning's *Mail*," I explained.

"Confound it," he muttered, throwing away his half-smoked cigarette, with a gesture of annoyance. "Why the deuce can't these papers leave one's private affairs alone? What business is it of theirs whether my uncle has left me money or not, I should like to know?"

"But why should you object?" was my surprised rejoinder. "There's nothing to be ashamed of in having come into £30,000—"

"No. Nothing to be ashamed of, of course," he interposed. "But— well, you see what it means. I shall have to go through the whole of the beastly thing again."

"What beastly thing?"

"Oh, you know. The Pigspoke thing and all the rest of it. All these Snobchester rotters making up to me again, when I thought I thought I had done with the woman— and thankful for it to," he added, with some bitterness.

"Ah, I see," I replied, beginning to get an inkling of his meaning.

"I have a little of self-respect about me," he continued, "and I don't want to be courted and fawned on by those meagre brutes who chucked me when they thought I was hard up."

I replied that I quite understood his feelings, and that, in the circumstances, they were only natural.

"However," he went on, brightening up a little, "none of 'em may have read that announcement in the *Mail* after all, or, if they have, they may not have connected it with me. I am not the only Dennis Starpool in the world, I dare say."

"I shouldn't fancy you have many namesakes," I rejoined, smiling at the idea. "Besides, you may be sure it will be in several of the other papers as well. Someone who knows is bound to spot it."

"I hope they won't, anyhow," he answered. "And look here, Carruthers, don't you go talking about it to anybody, will you, as a favor to me?"

"Certainly I won't, since you had rather not," I promised. "Though I fear that my silence won't make much odds one way or the other."

Before I went to bed that night I had proof that my view of the position was correct. Dining out the same evening, I happened to meet Pigspoke. When the ladies had retired he came and sat next to me in the friendliest manner possible.

"By the way," he remarked casually, after a few desultory observations on the Budget, "seen our friend Starpool lately? Can't think what he's been doing with himself, keeping out of the way of all his friends."

Then I knew that Ephraim Pigspoke had seen the account of Andrew Starpool's will in that morning's papers.

A few evenings later I looked up Starpool again at his diggings. He made me cordially welcome, as he always did, and having provided me with cigarettes and whisky, proceeded to talk.

"See those?" he inquired, waving his hand in the direction of the pier glass.

I looked and saw a liberal assortment of cards and notes stuck all round the frame.

"Invitations." he remarked with a smile. "Twenty-three of them. It is astonishing how popular I have become all of a sudden."

Then he took a little morocco-leather case from his pocket and handed it to me.

"Open it," he said.

I did so. It contained a gipsy ring, all set with brilliants and sapphires.

"Where did you get this?" I asked.

"From Mullington's," he answered, naming our leading local jeweller. "The fellow seems to have made up his mind that I shall want an engagement ring

for Selina Pigspoke before I am much older; so he came round here with an assortment of them, and was so insistent that I had to take this to get rid of him. The price of the thing is fifty guineas. I told him he would have to wait for his money, but he appeared rather to like that than otherwise. Yet only a fortnight ago he wouldn't hand back a watch he was cleaning for me until I paid him the 3/6 due for the operation. It Is really a wonderful metamorphosis."

He paused a moment to light a fresh cigarette. Then he inquired with the same grim smile:

"How do you like this suit I'm wearing— eh?"

"Rather neat," I answered.

"It is polite of you to say so." he returned. "Don't think much of the cut myself. But I had to have it built. Wreford" (naming the leading tailor of the town) "positively insisted upon it. In fact, he wouldn't let me off under a couple of lounge suits, a frock coat and vest, and a new lot of dress clothes. Yet less than three weeks ago he was threatening me with a county court summons for a little matter of twenty-five bob. By the way, do you like champagne?"

"Very much, when I can get it."

"Then you must come round one evening and sample mine. I've just had my cellar replenished by that oily rascal Bayley, the wine merchant. He was here the other morning touting for an order and simply wouldn't go until I had reluctantly consented to his sending me in four dozen of Bollinger. He, too, has undergone a strange metamorphosis. Up to a week ago, he wouldn't trust me with a bottle of Bass. And there's another example of the kind even more striking. You know Stanford?"

"The manager of Pluckey's Bank?"

He nodded.

"Not long ago," he proceeded, "as I think I may have told you. he turned back my cheque because it exceeded the assets to my credit by 15/9d. Subsequently he insisted on the account being closed. Well, the day before yesterday, he was around here, as civil as you please, inviting me to re-open it. I told him I couldn't, as at the present moment I hadn't any funds to pay in. But he waived the objection aside as though it wasn't worth considering, and absolutely insisted In placing £1,000 on loan, to my credit. In the end I was compelled to accept his offer in sheer self-defence."

What further revolutions of the kind he might have had in store for me, I cannot say, for at that moment Pigspoke was announced.

The worthy man's smile was one of the most effusive I have ever beheld. His manner was cordiality itself. He seemed, as it were, to ooze blandness from

every pore. At me. however, he hardly looked. His whole attention was concentrated on Starpool.

"I've just come round, my dear fellow," he exclaimed, "to carry you off for a game of bridge. We want a fourth, and Selina is dying for a rubber."

Dennis began to make excuses. but Pig-spoke simply wouldn't listen to him. In the end, my friend had to succumb. He winked at me expressively us he took his departure, with Pigspoke's arm affectionately linked through his own.

Nothing worthy of recording happened for the next month or so. But one evening somewhere about the end of that period Dennis Starpool looked me up.

"Engaged for next Friday night?" he inquired.

I replied in the negative.

"That's all right, then," he said. "The fact is, I've been asked to stand for the Town Council, and some of my supporters, of all classes, are giving a little reception in my honor at the Assembly Rooms, and I want you to come and help and support me."

"With pleasure." I replied.

"The company will be a bit mixed," he exclaimed. "Bui you've too much sense to mind that. I know Bayley the wine merchant, and Mullington, the Jeweller, and Wreford the tailor, as well as one or two other shopkeepers, will be there. But you needn't talk to them unless you like. There'll be Pigspoke for you to hob-nob with.

"Pigspoke," I ejaculated. "Well, If he doesn't mind meeting your shopkeeping friends, I'm sure I needn't."

"Oh! He doesn't mind a bit. At least, he says he doesn't," replied Dennis. "Well, good-bye, old man. Don't forget Friday."

ON the day appointed I duly attended the reception at the Assembly Rooms. It happened that I had been detained overtime at the office and so I was rather late in arriving; in fact, when I got there I found the best of the company already assembled. Dennis, who was engaged in conversation with a worthy butcher of the town, desisted for a moment to greet me.

"So glad you've come," he said, with a cordial handgrip. "I was afraid you weren't going to turn up. Order yourself something to drink, won't you? and then find a seat. We shall be getting to the speechifying in it few minutes."

I deposited myself on the nearest vacant chair, which happened to be next to Pigspoke, and, having exchanged greetings with that individual, looked around me.

"Rather scratch pack— eh?" he whispered to me behind his fat hand. I assented with a nod. The statement was one that disputatiousness itself could not have contested.

At this moment the master of the ceremonies— an ex-mayor and a well-known local grocer— stood up, and proceeded to address the company. He didn't propose (he said) to trouble them with a long speech. They had met rather for conviviality than for speech-making. So he would content himself by proposing the health of the guest of the evening— their highly esteemed and popular fellow townsman and future town councillor, Mr Dennis Starpool. The toast was drunk with enthusiasm.

Then Dennis got up to return thanks.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it affords me peculiar gratification to be received by you with so much friendliness, and to know that I have regained that place in your esteem which I feared at one time that I had forfeited for ever." (Loud cries of "No, no!" from everybody, and loudest of all from Pigspoke.)

"In view of those convincing marks of your favor and affection, gentlemen, I am able with a lighter heart to unbosom myself to you of little secret that has been troubling me for some time. I don't know whether any of you happened to see an announcement in the papers to the effect that I had come into a handsome legacy under Mr. Andrew Starpool's will. For the benefit of those of you who may have seen it, I wish to say that the announcement was the silly practical joke of a facetious journalistic friend of mine. Gentlemen, Andrew Starpool is a myth; so is his will; ii my legacy. But that fact doesn't trouble me in the very least. Rich in your esteem and affection I want no other wealth. Blessed with such treasure I have an endowment more than equal to that of Rockefeller or Rothschild. Gentlemen, once more I thank you for the cordial way in which you have drunk my health."

He resumed his seat amid dead silence. Not the ghost of a hand-clap or a cheer was anywhere to be heard. Every man in the room sat stonily solemn; every face appeared suddenly to have grown inches longer. Longest of all, perhaps, was Pigspoke's; but the faces of Mullington, the Jeweller; Wreford, the tailor; Bayley, the wine merchant; and Stanford, the bank manager, ran it very close. It did not, of course, escape Dennis, and he rose once more to his feet, all smiles and urbanity.

"Gentlemen," he said, "some of you appear to be looking rather unhappy. There is really no occasion. If those of you who have pressed goods upon me will send round to my rooms for them to-morrow, they shall be returned. I may also add, Mr. Stanford, that I have made due provision to repay that loan or £1,000 with which you insisted on accommodating me."

It was astonishing how quickly after that the assembly melted away, and how many of the worthy townsmen, in the hurry of their departure, forgot to wish Dennis good-night. Pigspoke, for the sake of appearances, remained till last.

"Ha, ha!" he cackled, with a transparent affection of amusement. "You have given those time-serving bounders a very neat lesson, my dear Starpool."

"I hope so," said Dennis blandly. "It was my intention to prove what worms these Snobchester rotters could be if they gave their minds to it. And I think I have proved it pretty effectually. By the way, Mr. Pigspoke, in the somewhat improbable event of my calling at the Cedars, your butler needn't trouble to say 'Not at home' to me. He has only to slam the door in my face. I shall quite understand."

10: The Satyr

The Lone Hand, 1 Sep 1911
Reprinted: *The Lone Hand*, 1 May 1914 as "Sassafrasus".

NOW, there are many things concerning Sassafrasus, the Satyr, which must for ever remain unexplained. But this narrative seeks to explain nothing.

We have gathered that for many years he roamed about those timber-clad mountains which form part of the Great Dividing Range in Victoria, in the vicinity of Mount St. Leonard, and not far back from that little settlement of timber-getters, Toolangi.

Here his father died, and here, for some years after, Sassafrasus wandered lonely and morose, filled with vague dreams of those splendid nymphs of which the elder satyr had so often told him— of dryads and naiads— yet knowing no companionship but that of beasts.

It was toward the end of 1908 that Sassafrasus finally made up his mind to come down from the mountains and voyage to the sea. The spirit of spring was abroad in the forest. Wattle and blackwood waxed rich in gold; from tree to tree bird called to mate; wallaby frisked in the underbush ; the laughter of the kookaburra took on a lighter and more amorous tone, and even the stolid wombat wore a new air of comic jauntiness.

And Sassafrasus, with a strange yearning welling up in him stronger than ever, voyaged down into the unknown to seek his nymphs.

At Frankville, on the Bay, on one hot Saturday in Easter time, when Melbourne had emptied its sweltering thousands into the cooling sea, he found them.

Suddenly he came upon them as he parted the branches of a ti-tree on a high sandhill. For a moment the sight paralysed the lonely satyr. A great trembling took him; his hocks knocked together; his absurd little tail wagged with emotion, and his shaking hands could scarcely hold apart the branches.

"Nymphs!" he whispered, faint with delight. "By all the gods! Nymphs! It is even as my father told me. Nereids and naiads— hundreds and hundreds! Oh, I did well to come hither!"

Almost crazed with joy was Sassafrasus; yet, even as he gazed in rapture, an uneasy doubt crept in. What had his father said about the "beautiful, gleaming white bodies,"... but these? Why, they were all colors! Striped and spotted, patterned and variegated in a hundred bewildering ways. The satyr was troubled; but not for long. What matter the color? They were nymphs! Those dear, adorable beings he had dreamt of in all those lonely years in the mountain.

IT WAS Jack Winter, the artist, who set the rumor going in the first place. A little company of painters had pitched their camp near the beach at Frankville, industriously determined to spend a strenuous three weeks sketching. In pursuit of this laudable object they passed the time between meals, sprawled upon the beach, smoking heavily, and conversing at length on the vast importance of Art and the distressing apathy toward it of a fat-headed public—as is a habit with artists in many climes.

Upon such an artistic conclave one morning burst Jack Winter, marine painter, in a state of extreme agitation.

Seeing that Jack's normal condition was one of intense excitement broken by spells of gloomy introspection, his appearance was ignored.

For a moment he gazed about him doubtfully, then, "I say, you chaps," he demanded suddenly, with a note of pathetic entreaty, "Am I all right? I look all right, don't I?"

"As right as you can expect to be considering your habits," someone assured him. "What's up?"

Winter hesitated.

"I know you chaps won't believe it. I can't believe it myself! But there's nothing wrong with me; I feel all right, and yet.... Look here, I'll take my solemn oath that I've just seen a satyr —a living, breathing, moving, blooming satyr, not a hundred yards from here."

Harry Law gazed at the speaker sorrowfully.

"John, my son," he said, "you'll have to give up cigarettes. You're overdoing it."

''Cigarettes be ——! Look here," said Winter, ''I tell you I saw him, not twenty yards from me, as I was sketching. When he caught sight of me he scooted into the scrub."

"A cripple in a bathing-dress," suggested Tom Charlton.

"Impossible!" declared Jack. "No man could make up to resemble the thing I saw. I tell you it was a satyr, or else I'm... Well, let's see it we can find him, anyhow."

But all his entreaties could not persuade his friends to explore the scrub. They counselled rest and a stiff nip. Jack sat on a camp stool in moody silence, thinking hard. Mechanically his hand sought his pocket, and he be-gan to light a cigarette. Then suddenly he scattered the contents of the packet in the sand, and slowly walked off down the town to consult the local chemist.

His sympathetic friends retrieved the harmful weeds, and lighted one apiece as Monty Green continued his learned diatribe on the banal influence of aboriginal rock drawings on modern Art.

But during the next few days Jack Winter was not the only person in Frankville to suspect hallucinations and become a subject of ridicule amongst his friends. To escape the observation of men became the satyr's chief and constant care. But the lure of the nymphs was upon him. He took risks, and the fleeting glimpses that were caught of him set vague uneasy rumors afloat.

All along the beach on either side of Frankville city campers had spread their tents. Beside the artists' camp, was a select company of bank-clerks, self-styled "The Hyacinths," who lived in a large, floored tent in company with a piano and numerous banjos, and in an atmosphere of perfect suburban culture tinged with just sufficient mild Bohemianism to make things picturesque. Lower down a camp of frankly plebeian factory lads christened themselves "The Boshters," and made merry with a wheezy accordion, many mouth-organs, and much bottled beer. Others camps— roomy tents resplendent with carpets and wicker furniture; little six-by-eights dumped unpretentiously on the sand ; family tents, female camps presided over by young and giddy chaperons ; camps of clerks, and camps of plain unvarnished blokes were scattered over the sandhills and dotted the beach above the tide line.

In such a crowded and restless community the presence of the elusive Sassafrasus started the theory that a brainless practical joke was afoot, a theory that gradually developed into a settled conviction.

"The Hyacinths" suspected "The Boshters" of vulgar horseplay. "The Boshters" blamed the "painter-blokes," and this view, becoming general, earned for the artists much unpopularity; while Jack Winter's story of the satyr, being the only truthful account of the mystery, very naturally gained no credence whatever. The local press took the matter up, and, waxing very wrathful, suggested that it would be a public spirited and laudable act to tar and feather certain "gentlemanly" visitors and ride them on a rail out of the town, and so put an end to these unseemly pranks.

Meanwhile Sassafrasus, torn between a terror of this strange and motley crowd and a vast longing to gaze for ever on his "nymphs," had the most exciting time of his life. He had found a safe retreat far back in the sandhills, and ventured forth only at dusk, or on moonlit nights. But he was seen often, and many times narrowly escaped capture.

And then an Awful Thing happened, and left Frankville gasping.

His Worship the Mayor, Alderman Jos. Crutchett, had been violently assaulted on the public beach in broad moonlight.

With a variety of headlines, the Frankville *Banner* shrieked on the morning after this horrible occurrence:

The brainless and vulgar pranks of the alleged practical joker or jokers, that have been annoying the residents and visitors at Frankville for some time past culminated last night in an act that, for ferocious audacity and criminal violence, is happily unequalled in the history of this fair town."

Here followed an account of the assault, and a hysterical demand for swift and awful vengeance.

"Luckily," concluded the *Banner*, "his Worship obtained a good view of his dastardly assailant in the moonlight, and will be able to recognise him again. The miscreant wore long hair and a shaggy beard, both evidently false, and worn for purposes of disguise."

It was Sassafrasus, of course, who, coming upon the Mayor and his pipe suddenly, with retreat cut off, had, wild with terror, butted his Worship in the stomach ("chest" said the *Banner*), knocked out the mayoral wind, and promptly escaped. Sassafrasus had taken the Mayor to be a devil from Hades breathing fire.

Frankville was rapidly becoming hysterical. Nervous and superstitious visitors began to gather up their tents and depart. Houses were left empty in the height of the season, and the prosperity of the town was threatened. The artists' camp was boycotted, tradesmen refusing to supply goods. The harried law, almost imbecile through the rigor of vain night watches, shadowed the artists everywhere; and Jack Winter, setting his jaw, vowed he would prove his story by capturing the satyr, even if he had to live on seaweed while he matured his plans.

And then another bombshell fell on Frankville, and indignation flared up afresh

"Robbery!" howled the *Banner* in its next issue, and told how on the previous evening Mr. Reginald Crump, "a respected officer of the Australian Chartered Bank, and a member of 'The Hyacinths' camp, on coming out of the water to dress, had been set upon by a miscreant— butted in the chest, even as had been his Worship, and rendered hors de combat." On coming to, he found that his assailant and his wardrobe had disappeared.

Again it was Sassafrasus. For days past he had been thinking hard. He yearned to approach one of these glorious nymphs and have speech with her; but, being an observant satyr, he determined that it would be wise first to disguise his uncommon person in the garments of some human male. Hence the raid and the sorry discomfiture of Mr. Reginald Crump.

The donning of these unfamiliar clothes was a source of much worry to the satyr. The coat and the sweater he managed after some trouble; but the straw hat was a difficulty. Finally he knocked two holes in the crown to

accommodate his horns. The trousers hung not gracefully, for his hocks bulged out behind and destroyed the neat symmetry of the creases cherished by Mr. Crump. The boots he decided to dispense with, for the trousers were quite long enough to conceal his hoofs. Thus arrayed, Sassafrasus set forth upon his quest,

NOW, had not Selina Hopkins and her friend Rosie Meeks been given a week's holiday from the jam factory at Easter, and had not Gregson's Mammoth Circus decided to display its "galaxy of talent" to the folk of Frankville, the rest of this narrative might never have been told.

On the evening of their arrival Selina and her chum lingered in the cooling sea long after the other bathers had departed. The full-moon had risen when Rosie waded out and called to her chum.

"Come orn, Seliner!" she shouted, "I'm gittin' 'ungry."

"In a minit!" called back Selina, revelling in the waves.

"Bill'll be waiting for yeh," said Rosie.

"Tell 'im ter wait. I'm comin' d'rectly."

"I'm orf, anyway," said Rosie, turning toward the dressing shed, all unconscious of the eager, bearded face that peered at her from between the branches of a banksia close by.

Sassafrasus cautiously descended towards the beach. Now was his chance! The shore was deserted, and but one solitary nymph— adorable being! — sported in the moonlit waves. A red and white nymph it was, with stripes of blue. (Selina had spent much trouble selecting that bathing dress). The satyr rested upon a heap of seaweed where he could intercept her as she came from the water.

Selina lingered yet awhile, but at length came out along the beach and was passing him unheeding.

"Nymph!" breathed Sassafrasus.

Selina stopped and looked him over.

" 'Ullo, Whiskers," she said pleasantly. "Who yer callin' names?"

Then, pointing derisively at his trousers, she demanded, "Spare me days! Where did you get them?"

Sassafrasus glanced at the offending garments.

"I— I found them," he faltered.

"Better lose 'em again," advised Selina. "So long. I gotter git me tea."

"Ah, nymph, nymph!" pleaded the satyr, trembling with emotion, "linger awhile. If you only knew how many long and lonely years I have dreamed of this moment!"

"Chuck it," said Selina promptly.

"Who d'yer think yer torkin' to? I dunno you frum a bar er soap."

"Ah, sweet nymph, but I have known you all my life. Listen," and producing his pipes the satyr began to play.

It was a strange, unearthly air that he played, full of a wild yearning and of all the amorous voices of spring. Selina listened in wide-eyed wonder, and at the end stood staring at the strange musician in amazement.

"That's boshter!" she gasped at length. "I never 'eard no one play a mouth-organ like that before. You ain't an Orstralian, are yer?"

"I'm a satyr," said Sassafrasus. "Ah, fair nymph—"

"Satyr?" said Selina. "Never 'eard of 'em. Sorter Dago, I suppose. We got some Dagos at the fact'ry, but they ain't like you. Play us another choon. "

But, before the satyr could begin again, a hoarse voice called from an adjacent sandhill.

"Se-lin-er! Who yer smoodgin' with down there?"

"That's Bill!" said Selina, hurriedly moving off. "See yer tomorrer— p'raps," she threw back over her shoulder carelessly.

"To-morrow, sweet nymph, to-morrow!" cried Sassafrasus, preparing to flee. "To-morrow at moonrise I shall be waiting here." And, as he scurried into the scrub, Bill arrived, and the trouble began.

It is hateful to have to record the perfidy of Selina in all its mercenary coarseness, but for the sake of the story it must be told.

For to Selina and her enraged lover, Bill, as they quarrelled on the beach, came John Winter, artist, moodily sauntering, with eye a-cock for satyrs, and a week-long, unsatisfied craving for cigarettes.

Winter, democratic in his tastes, had foregathered with Bill in "The Boshters" camp.

"In trouble, Bill?" he asked.

"Trouble? 'Strewth!" said Bill. "Would yer call it trouble if you had a meet on with a tart an' you find 'er smoodgin' with a wire-whiskered bloke with a mouth-orgin. A bloomin' Dago—"

" 'E wasn't a Dago," said Selina. " 'E was a satyr. 'E tole me so."

"What!" yelled Winter, jumping with excitement.

"A satyr," repeated Selina. " 'E sed so. 'Is clothes didn't fit 'im an' 'is trousis stuck out be'ind like as if 'is legs was back ter front. Nice cove for a bloke ter be jealous of," she added witheringly. "But 'e could play the mouth-organ."

"Garn," said Bill. "Wot about tomorrer night? I 'eard, me lady."

Selina waxed disdainful.

"The gentleman sed 'e'd be 'ere tomorrer night, if that's wot yer want ter know. An' if some people don't stop gittin' too uppish—"

"Look here," said Winter, grasping the girl's arm in excitement, "do you want to earn twenty pounds? Don't waste a moment. Go and get dressed and come with me."

But Bill demurred.

"Is this all on the square?" he asked. ''I don't understan'."

"It's all right," said Winter. "You may come along, too. I merely want to introduce Miss— er —your friend, to Mr. Gregson at the circus. The twenty pounds is as good as earned."

"Orright, If you say so. But I'd like to stop an' punch that bloke's 'ead," said Bill regretfully.

TO SASSAFRASUS, as he waited in the moonlight on the following night, came Selina, half reluctantly it seemed to him, yet with a delicious coyness that was adorable.

"Oh, nymph, sweet nymph! You have kept the tryst," began the satyr.

"Chuck that," said Selina shortly. "Sit down 'ere an' play us another choon."

Sassafrasus obeyed; but he had scarce begun, when out from the sandhills rushed a score of men, who, surrounding him, cut off all retreat. For a while the satyr fought savagely, and more than one assailant lay on the sands gasping, with his hands about his middle.

"Hold that fool back!" shouted a large, oily man, with silver waistcoat buttons, who directed the attack. And he pointed to where Bill, in the grasp of two circus attendants, roared to them to "let me at him."

At last, Sassafrasus, bound with ropes, lay glaring at them from the shingle.

"Take him round the back way," directed Mr. Gregson, of the buttons. "We don't want the crowd after us. Put him in that empty leopard cage for to-night. You, Peter, see about that signboard. We'll want it in the mornin',"

And next morning, as Gregson's Mammoth Combined Circus and Menagerie moved in procession out of Frankville, Sassafrasus the undeceived— Sassafrasus the misogynist and ardent hater of all nymphs, plain or striped, glared at the crowd from between the bars of a cage that bore above in huge red letters :

THE ONLY LIVING SATYR
ON EARTH!

Of the events that followed there is no very coherent account. But if Selina was the cause of the satyr's capture, she was also at least the indirect means of his eventual escape. For despite the twenty pounds safely stowed in her reticule, the sight of caged, unhappy Sassafrasus had moved that young lady to

remorseful tears, which so aroused the jealous anger of Bill that, filling himself to the fighting mark with beer, he pursued the circus into the next town.

No one knows exactly what happened; but it appears that, late at night, Bill, having overpowered an equally unsober circus attendant, forced his way into the satyr's cage. But, before the enraged lover could wreak his vengeance, Sassafrasus sprang past him and disappeared.

He has never been seen or heard of since; and, excepting Mr. Gregson, no one seems to be grieved about it. Jack Winter, his reputation and his cigarettes regained, is quite content. As for Selina, as she often remarks to her friend Rosie Meeks, " 'E mighter bin a satyr or 'e mighter bin a Dago; but wotever 'e was 'e could play the mouth-organ."

11: While Jerry Was Away

Punch (Melbourne) 5 Dec 1905

THE POPULAR theory that Cupid attacks with only a tiny bow and darts is not convincing when one considers the size and exceeding toughness of some of his victims. When the small god smote Jerry Daley he must have used a club. Anyhow, he smote effectively, for Jerry was hard hit, and the cause of it all was sweet, ingenuous Kitty Pellew, who lived with her father, the blacksmith of Wirrappila.

Kitty was willing enough, provided Jerry could offer a decent home, and after a brief spell amongst the clouds, the lover came down to earth and counted his capital. He had never thought of saving for a rainy day, or a wedding day, which terms are, to some experienced minds, synonymous. So Jerry sought his lady love and unfolded a plan.

"It may be a year, darlin'," he said, as they swore eternal fidelity by the, slip-rails. "It may be a year, an' it may be longer, but when I do come back, 'tis the two iv us that'll have a grand weddin'. Money I'll make, an' money I'll kapne, an' all for you, me Kithy."

Then Jerry went forth and fell on evil days, for the drought was on the land, and fortunes were elusive. For six months Kitty languished, like the lady in the tower, and then, taking an eminently worldly, if unromantic, view of the situation, accepted the hand and heart and home of William Burrows, the greengrocer.

But William was unfortunate. His choice of profession was fatal, for the skin of one of his own perfidious bananas, three short months after his wedding day, successfully brought about his early demise.

For a whole year the widow Burrows languished again, with a dim sort of hope that Jerry would some day return— plus capital— and consent to overlook her own little slip, seeing that the fatal slip of Mr. Burrows had again given her her freedom. She even rehearsed, in her lonely moments, what she would say Jerry about the foolish girl who fell, in her inexperience, beneath the wiles of a designing greengrocer, yet knowing in her heart that her first love was her only love.

But her meditations were cut short and her outlook on life considerably altered by the intervention of Dugald McDougal. Dugald was not a man of means, a condition due to no fault of his own. He was a frugal, thrifty man, but ill luck had dogged his footsteps, and his latest venture, a barber's shop in Wirrappila, had turned out badly.

At this date Dugald presented one of the world's most pathetic figures, a thrifty man in love. But love laughs at frugal principles, and eventually, before quitting Wirrappila for more hopeful prospects, Dugald proposed. The widow, with a pretty air of complete trustfulness, promised to wait until he could afford to wed, and, with an elation at the success of his suit tempered by a shadowy doubt as to the wisdom if his choice, from a pecuniary point of view, Dugald went forth.

IT WAS two years later, on one of those hot, still, mid-November days, when the heat-shimmer deludes the vision, and the haze plays Will-o'-the-Wisp along the dusty road before the jaded traveller. Southward returned the faithful Dugald McDougal, his fortunes changed at last. Between the intervals of cursing the heat, and road, and the flies, and the sorry nag he rode, he allowed himself to smile as his thoughts dwelt on the little widow of Wirrappila. The town and the widow were fifty miles ahead, and he longed for the end of his journey.

As Dugald rode, deep in mixed meditation, he was startled by a wild "Hurroo" from the rear, and turning he beheld another horseman racing towards him. With his thoughts on bushrangers he felt the roll of notes in the lining of his waistcoat, and shifted his grip on his loaded whip-handle. The newcomer reined beside him and called a cheery "Good-day."

Dugald replied civilly, and noted the stranger's handsome mount with a calculating eye.

"That's a fine bit horse ye ha'e there," he ventured.

"Faith, it is that," replied the cheerful stranger. " 'Twasn't me that was ridin' thoroughbreds four years ago, though. Times is changed and forchune smilin',' as the song ses."

"Aye," said Dugald, and for five minutes they rode in silence.

"Which way is it yeh might be goin'?" enquired the stranger, suddenly.

"Maybe I'm goin' for a few miles this way," said Dugald, cautiously.

"Me, too," was the reply. " 'Tis good to have company, annyway. Wud yeh be goin' as far as Wirrappila?"

"Maybe I am," answered Dugald, still on his guard, "an' maybe I'm not."

"Annyway," said the newcomer, "I'll be company for yeh so far. 'Tis there I'm goin' meself."

With his eyes fixed on his horse's ears Dugald considered this information for a time. Then he ventured a cautious question.

"Maybe yer livin' in this Wirrappila?"

"Faith, I was, and I hope I will be," said the cheerful traveller. " 'Tis four long years since I set fut or eye on the blessed place. But love draws like a porous plaster, as the song goes. Were iver yeh there yerself?"

For a time Dugald feigned to consult his memory.

"Aye. I'm not, as yeh might say, unacquainted with the toon."

"Luk at that now," cried the stranger, delighted. "And maybe yeh heard tell there of Jerry Daley?"

Again Dugald thought hard; this time with genuine interest. Here was food for reflection; possibly need for extra caution. He had often heard the widow speak of her early love, but considered it imprudent to mention the fact just then, so he parried the question.

"And who might be this Jerry Daley?"

The stranger grinned pleasantly.

"Faith, 'tis him yeh see before yeh this minute, an' 'twas no good yeh heard iv him there below, I'll be bound. Jerry the ne'er-do-well it used to be. But 'time has flown an' wild oats sown', as the song goes. 'Tis now Jery the man iv manes, an' soon it will be Jerry the man iv family. Heigho! Tell me," he asked suddenly, "Did yeh know a girl down there be the name iv Kitty Pellew ?"

For a full minute Dugald argued a fine point with his Scottish conscience. Certainly he had known the lady as Kitty Pellew: still, said his conscience, the Widow Burrows was the same person. Finally he compromised.

"I canna say there was anybudy answerin' to that name when I was there."

"Thin, 'twas a thrate yeh missed," declared Jerry. "Swate Kitty Pellew is Mrs. Jerry Daley that is to be. Tell me, did nayther yeh know her father, the blacksmith?"

Dugald felt that this was dangerous ground. The topic must be changed.

"Maybe I did," he answered carelessly. "Where did ye think of stayin' the night ?"

" 'Tis over forty miles to Wirrappila, an' no chance iv makin' it to-day," said Jerry. "The miles is forty-three, bechune me love an' me,' as as the song ses. I think I'll put up at Puddy's pub; 'tis a few miles along the thrack. Will yeh stop there?"

"Maybe I will," replied Dugald, who, having extracted enough to meditate on for quite a while, now sought a means to stop the stranger's questioning.

"Will ye no grive us a wee bit song to pass the time, like?" he asked, insinuatingly.

"Faith, 'tis me that will," responded Jerry, readily: and without further invitation he filled the land, and the air around, and the void above with strange and awful melody. Jerry's voice was a weird and wonderful tenor of great tune and amazing volume. It defied all climatic conditions and even a

thirst of five hours' standing. It rose, and wailed, and wandered over the plain and into the vault above, until every living thing for half-a-mile around, hearing it, trembled, and fled in terror to its lair.

Jerry chose for his selection that melodious and time-honoured Australian ballad "The Colonial Boy," a little composition of some thirty-nine verses, all of which, with choruses, Jerry sang in as many different keys. A lonely magpie, devouring a silent meal in a distant paddock, heard it, and flew squawking to hills. A hawk, circling lazily overhead, heard it, and, wheeling suddenly, let out for the horizon. On a wayside stump a yellow lizard heard it, and sat in spellbound and open-mouthed astonishment; and when Jerry rose in his stirrups to let a top note loose into the world the very gums and she-oaks on the road seemed to bend before the blast.

Dugald alone rode on oblivious to it all. With eyes fixed unseeingly on the twitching and tortured ears of his own mount, he was deep in thought. Unless he evolved some scheme, and quickly, he knew that there was likely to be trouble for Dugald McDougal. This large and more or less melodious Irishman was his rival. He was handsomer, younger, perhaps richer, and had what looked like a prior claim on the affections of the widow of Wirrappila. Therefore, he must be side-tracked or delayed; but how?

They reached the lonely public-house by night-fall, Dugald still deep in troubled thought, Jerry just finishing the fifth rendering of his famous ballad.

After tea, the travellers sat in the parlour drinking each other's health in Puddy's celebrated and only whisky. As he noted the gesture, telling of long practice, with which the Irishman tossed off his drink, a crafty inspiration began to illuminate the mind of Dugald. He ran a calculating eye over the bulky frame, the steady hand and the sober eye of the Irishman, sighed as he reckoned the expense, and tackled the problem like a man and a desperate lover.

"Hae anither," he invited, with all the cordiality he could command; and, after a few minutes' interval— "Hae anither," he repeated, sighing; again as he parted with the last of his small change, and surreptitiously ripped the lining of his vest to extract a pound-note from his roll.

As night drew on the conversation flagged, and the two men and smoked in a silence, broken at ten-minute intervals by Dugald's invitation that was rapidly becoming hysterical, "Hae anither."

Jerry, the erstwhile free-handed spendthrift, spent judiciously, paying for an occasional round, but allowing his generous Scotch friend to do most of the entertaining.

"Hae anither," cried Dugald in a strained and unnatural staccato, when his pound-note had dwindled to two half-crowns. "Hae anither!" he almost

shrieked in agonised suspense, as he sat, spilling his own precious drunk under the table, and watching for the first signs of insobriety in this terrible whisky-sink of an irishman.

"Hae anither," repeated Dugald, in a voice that was beginning be charged with awesome admiration, as drink after drink disappeared down Jerry's capacious throat, as he sat lost in silent appreciation at the generosity of his fellow-traveller, pulling contentedly at his short, black pipe, and venturing an occasional, and to Dugald painfully lucid, remark anent the weather or the morrow's journey.

"Hae anither," said the desperate Dugald, throwing the last coins of a pound's worth on the table.

"Fill it up, now, fill it up!" he admonished, as as Jerry helped himself to a moderate portion.

Nothing loth, Jerry filled high, and tossing off the drink, smacked his lips and blinked his eyes, seeming to endeavour vainly to catch an elusive flavour.

With somethin akin to awe in his eyes Dugald watched and waited for the signs of intoxication that would not come.

"Mon, mon," he whispered at length, his voice choking with emotion. "Are yeh whisky-proof?"

"Me?" said Jerry, startled by the sudden query. "Faith I'm not. But yeh don't call this stuff Whisky, do yeh? Shure 'tis mild as mother's milk— wake as liminade by the stuff I'm used to. Pain-killer an' methylated spirits is what they give yeh where I came frum. Man, there's not a bite or burn in a bottle iv this stuff. Have another wid me now, the doch-an-dhurris!"

But Dugald, with the haggard look of a man who has staked high and lost, shook his head dumbly and fell into gloomy meditation.

"Will yeh be startin' early in th' mornin'?" asked Jerry presently. "I'm not so sure iv the road, an' I'd be glad iv yer company."

But apparently Dugald did not hear. He was thinking desperately. His chances with the widow seemed to be fading away. At length he decided to play his last trump.

"Daley, mon," he said, leaning forward confidentiallv, "I hae deceived ye th' day. I knew the girl we spoke of in Wirrappila, this Kitty Pellew. But she was untrue to ye; she broke her promise with ye, an' married th' greengrocer, Burrows by name. I should a telt ye befure, but I didna wish to hurt yer feelins."

Jerry remained outwardly calm as he digested this information. But if the late-lamented Burrows could read his heart at that moment no doubt he felt extremely grateful to that fatal banana skin.

"I wudn't worry about her Daley," said Dugald solicitously. "I only told ye so as to save ye the trip to Wirrappila. Or course, ye'll no be goin' there now."

For three agonising minutes Dugald waited for the answer.

Then Jerry arose in wrath.

"Not go, is it?" he shouted, thumping the table with a huge fist "Not go? Be the powers, I will go. And befure I'm tin minyutes in the town I'll have the head iv that miserable little grane-grocer that shtole fer frum me!"

"It canna be done," cried Dugald unguardedly. "The mon's dead."

"Dead? Then she's—"

"Dead against such things," said Dugald hastily. "He wud no fight ye."

For the first time suspicion began to dawn on Jerry's mind.

"See here," he said, threateningly. "What's yer game now? Is the man dead or is he not?"

"He is," admitted Dugald, cornered at last.

"Then she's a widda?" asked Jerry.

"She is," admitted Dugald, grudgingly.

"An' she can marry me after all?" cried the relieved Jerry. At that Dugald threw discretion to the winds.

"She'll not!" he shouted, thumping the table in turn. "By heaven, she'll not! She broke her promise to ye, an' ye have no claim. Dye ye hear? Ye have no claim! 'Tis me she's goin' to marry, for she promised me, an' ye have no claim."

Then the voice of Jerry grew loud in the land, and the voice of Dugald arose in noisy opposition. A bewildering and tangled volume of Gaelic and Irish brogue filled the little public-house, and flowed out on to the dusty, moonlit plain beyond. The startled publican rushed into the room..

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" he entreated.

With his appearance an inspiration came to the excited Dugald. "We'll arbitrate!" he shouted. "Stop yer noise, ye Irish loon! We'll arbitrate !"

"What d'ye mane?" asked Jerry, sullenly, quietened by the strange proposal.

" 'Tis little use," said Dugald, calmly, "makin' a noise like this. It will get neither of us any further. We have a dispute, and it is better to settle it here an' now, once an' for all. Are ye agreed?"

" I am," said Jerry, " if it can be done."

"Mister Puddy, here," pursued Dugald, "is a J P. an' chairman of the District Council here about. Let him be judge. State yer claim an' I'll do the same, an' then he can decide for us. Mister Puddy, will ye take the chair?"

The Arbitration Court was hastily improvised, much to the delight of the publican, a pompous man, who loved a little brief authority. Into his ears was poured the history of Kitty Pellew.

First, Jerry, with tears in his voice told of his early love; of the fond vows and promises that were exchanged, and of his departure to seek his fortune in the North.

Then Dugald took up the running, dwelt briefly on the story of Kitty's perfidy and her marriage, lightly sketched in the banana-skin incident, and then for nearly an hour, recounted the story of his own courtship. With painful exactness and minuteness of detail he repeated all the sacred promises that had passed between the widow and himself, and wound up with an interesting history of the rise and succcss of Dugald McDougal as a contractor in the far North, adding as a postscript, for the benefit of the court, a casual remark about a weak heart and the danger of a sudden shock or disappointment.

Then the court cleared its throat. Mr. Puddy was a small man with an exceedingly large opinion of himself and his own importance. The position delighted him. He was most impressive in his own small way, and when he talked he closed his eves and wagged his head from side to side, like an inverted pendulum, and spoke with a consequential drawl that he had learned from Muggins, M.L.C., the member for the district.

"Hum, very well," he said when the gist of the evidence had been tendered, and Dugald sat down. "Very well. Now, let us review the heviducce before the court. But before doin' so, Hi should like to point hout that the court is not, so to speak, based on a proper foundation. There has been a hoversight, gentlemen. It is usual, in these, cases, that the harbitrator should receive some renumer— rammer— hum— that is to say, payment in hadvance, so to speak. Wot do you say to the small sum of one guinea heach. Gentlemen?"

"Right yeh are," said Jerry, promptly tendering the amount. Dugald looked uncomfortable, but, fearing to lose the court's goodwill, handed over his guinea. The court promptly pocketed the fees in a manner truly professional.

"Now, gentlemen," said the arbitrator, "are you goin' to haccept my verdic' as final?"

"We are," agreed the litigants.

"Very well. Now," pursued the arbitrator, "haccordin' to the hevidunce of the first witness an agreement was entered into between him an' a lady, then known as Kitty Pellew. Very well. That agreement was, in a manner of speakin', broken by the lady by her marryin' a certain greengrocer, now deceased. Very good. Now, haccordin' to the hevidunce of the second witness the lady, then known as the Widder Burrows, entered into an agreement with him, which, or which not, she had a right to do haccordin' to law an' equity, as the case may be very well. Now, gentlemen, the question for this court to decide is: Was the first agreement with the witness Daley made null an' void by the lady's

marriage, and, hif so, did the agreement again come into hoperation, so to spcik, when the ladv become a widder? Hon the bother 'and, gentlemen, was the widder's first, marriage *quamtum sufficum* to put Daley out of the runnin' in toto, fer the term of his natural life : or was the agreement *ne plus ultra*, so to speak? And, if so, does the second agreement entered into with the witness McDougal become *tempus fugit*, an' stand good haccordin' to law an' equity. It's a knotty point, gentlemen. But before proceedin' further with these few remarks, Hi should just like to say that this court has some privit an' partic'lar hevidunce hup its sleeve which might or might not haffect the hearin' of the case, *pro bono publico*, as the sayin' is. Will you or will you not haccept the hevidence which Hi have, gentlemen?"

The litigants, who had been listening with strained attention, vainly endeavouring to get an inkling as to which side the court inclined, merely nodded their consent, and the arbitrator continued:

"Very well. Now, gentlemen, this hevidunce which Hi am prepared to swear to on hoath will, I think, have the heffect of enablin' the parties to settle this case out of court without any ill-feelin'. But, first of all, I shall deliver my verdic', which is that neither the witness Daley nor the witness McDougal shall marry the woman known as Kitty Pellew, alias Widder Burrows, Q.E.D."

"Why not?" shouted the surprised litigants in chorus.

"Because," said the court, allowing itself to smile for the first time, "because, haccordin' to the hevidence which this court has up its sleeve, the Widder Burrows, alias Kitty Pellew, an' a certain elderly gent., known to the court as an honourable an' upright gentleman, be the name of Puddy, licensed victualler, on the thirteenth of last month, entered into the holy bonds of matrimony. Gentlemen, when she comes back from the township, which I expect every minute, I shall be happy to hintroduce you to my wife."

"Th' divule!" gasped Jerry, sitting up in astonishment.

Dugald swallowed hard and gazed long and earnestly at the court.

" 'Twas no a bad joke," he said at length, holding out his hand expectantly.

"Joke?" said the arbitrator. "Not a bit of it. I am married to her right enough. Do you want to see the marriage lines?"

"I'm no doubtin' that," said Dugald, with his hand still extended. "I'm no doubtin' that, an' I'm sure I wish ye every prosperity an' happiness. But about th' fees. 'Twas no a bad joke, I'll admit; an' I'll thank ye to return the siller."

"Not much," laughed the arbitrator. "This court don't work for nothin'. But to show there's no ill-feelin' the court will now stand drinks all round. Name yer gargle, gentlemen."

"Gents," said the publican, when the glasses were filled, "here's to Mrs. Puddy."

"Tae the Widow Burrows," said Dugald, accepting the inevitable with a wry smile.

"To Kitty Pellew," said Jerry, with a sigh.

"If I'm not mistaken," said the arbitrator, "that's her buggy wheels I hear outside. Gentlemen, this court now stands adjourned."

12: Billjim's Back Fence

The Bulletin, 21 Dec 1911

IT was a warm, summer evening, in the little town of Austral Flat, in the year 19—. Upon a western hill, at the back of the town, five giant gum trees were sharply silhouetted against the blood-red sky. Three or four men leaned idly upon the railings of the town reserve, watching a score of schoolboys playing football; while upon the calm, still, evening air floated the strains of "Rule Britannia," played upon a tin-whistle by Mat the Musician. From down the street came the rhythmic ringing of a blacksmith's anvil, where the German smith, known locally as "Old Berlin," worked at his forge; and, anon, the voices of Mrs. Jackson and Mrs. Phillip rose and fell, as they argued, over the back fence, about a brindle cow. A spring-cart rattled down the uneven main as old man Primble drove away from the local pub, with a large, heavy jar. On the hotel verandah, the local policeman leaned against one of the posts, and argued about prize fowls with the landlord, who reposed against an empty beer barrel. In the town pound, Mrs. Dolittle's three milch cows lowed mournfully.

The mayor of the little town, Alderman Billjjm,. J.P., sat in his back yard, overlooking a Chinese garden at the rear, and scanned the sporting columns of the *Daily Gurgle*, while his wife swept the back verandah. Suddenly, the mayor raised his head.

"By gum!" he said. "I never reckoned that Sliprails would get a place in the Grand National. I've watched that 'orse carefully, too."

"You'd be better employed," replied his wife tartly, "if you' watched that back fence of ours. It's a disgrace to the neighborhood. And you the mayor, too! Pretty mayor, indeed."

"Aw right, me dear, aw right," said the mayor, somewhat impatiently. "I'll see to it when I have time to think to get some nails and a 'ammer."

"Nails, indeed," retorted the lady. "Why don't you get 'em at once and be done with it? Some day, one of those wretched pigs of Ah Foo's will get through and bite some of the children. You know what savage brutes they are."

"Aw right, me dear," replied Billjim, preparing to return to his reading. "Father promised to let me 'ave the loan of one of his dawgs if I wanted it. I'll see about it in the mornin'."

IT WAS a muggy summer evening in the little township of Austral Flat, five years later. Upon a western hill three giant gumtrees showed black against a

lurid sky. A small group of lusty youths and men sat upon the reserve fence, watching half a dozen small boys shooting at birds with "shang-hais," while the strains of "Soldiers of the King," played upon a mouth-organ by Mat the Musician, were borne upon the gentle breeze. Now loud, now faint, came the voices of Mrs. Phillip and Mrs. Jackson, as they disputed, over the back fence, about a black and tan dog; and up the street rattled a spring-cart, as old man Brimble drove towards the pub with a large, empty jar.

Upon the hotel verandah the local policeman leaned against the wall, and argued about the cause and cure of warts with the publican, who sat on the edge of the pavement; while, from across the road, came the tinkle of an anvil, as "Old Berlin," the blacksmith, hammered away industriously. In the town pound Mrs. Dolittle's only cow lowed plaintively.

In his back yard, overlooking a Chinese garden and piggery, the mayor, Alderman Billjim, newly re-elected, sat upon an upturned bucket, reading the football reports in the *Morning Megaphone*.

Suddenly, Billjim looked up and smacked his thigh.

''Six goals in the last quarter!" he exclaimed. "By crikey ! I wish I'd been there to see it."

"You'd be better employed," snapped his wife, "attending to that back fence. It's an eyesore ; and it's not safe, as I've told you a score of times."

The mayor looked hurt.

"Why, Susan," he said, "didn't I put three new palin's on it only, the week before last! Don't be unreasonable."

"Three palin's!" retorted his wife, with bitter scorn. "What's three palin's? What you want, really, is a good stone wall. If those pigs of Ah Foo's get in and harm the I shall hold you responsible, mind. You know what vicious brutes they are."

"There, there, me dear," said the mayor soothingly. "I'll see about gettin' one of father's dawgs."

"You know very well," replied his wife, "that your father said he wanted those dogs up at his own place. If you'd knock off that silly old paper for a few months, you might be able to buy a good watch-dog for yourself. I've no patience with you."

"There, there, dear," repeated Billjim, still more soothingly. "I'll see if I can get a couple more palin's in the mornin', or nex' week, or sometime."

And, after yelling at one of. Ah Foo's pigs that was sniffing at a crack in the fence, he returned to his reading.

IT WAS a sultry summer evening in the little town of Austral Flat, some three years later. The western hill stood bare against the fiery sky, lit- by the

spreading rays of the setting sun. A dozen men leaned against the reserve fence, watching four small cadets at drill. Mat the Musician had been killed the year before. Now loud, now soft, as the gentle breezes rose and fell, came the voices of Mrs. Jackson and Mrs. Phillip, as they disputed, over the fence, about a speckled fowl. Down the dusty street, past the hotel, rumbled the funeral procession of old man Brimble. On the hotel verandah, after the funeral had passed, the local constable leaned back against the window-sill and resumed his discussion on the exact locality of the solar plexus, with the publican, who lolled in the doorway. In the town pound Mrs. Dolittle's goat bleated pathetically; while the tapping of the German blacksmith's hammer went on incessantly.

Suddenly, from down the street, in a direction of the mayor's residence, came a woman's shriek, then a hubbub of voices. A boy, pale with excitement, and panting with terror, came running up the street towards the hotel.

"Quick!" he panted, as he came within speaking distance. "Quick! Police! Mister Leaner, you're wanted. One of Ah Foo's pigs has killed Mister Billjim's baby!"

The constable slowly straightened up.

"Spare me days!" he said. "What can I do? If the youngster's dead, the Lor can't do it no good. S'pose I better go and see, though." And he leisurely accompanied the boy down the road.

"Old Berlin," the German smith, attracted by the hubbub, came, hammer in hand, to his smithy door, and learned the news.

"Serf him right," he said brutally. "Serf him right, der lazy dog! Vy he don' mend dot fence of his? I haf no sympadies. Putty sort of mayor you've got, ain't it'! If I was der mayor I do tings better as dat. Vat?"

''Listen to 'im," said the publican, to a small group of loungers that had assembled. "Listen to 'im. Fancy we see ourselves with a bloomin' Dutchy fer a mayor. Not much! Billjim's all right, if 'e'd only get a move on. Reely ort to mend that fence of 'is, an' get a dawg or two. Come an' 'ave a drink boys, it's give me bit of a turn."

"Old Berlin" stood at his door and watched them enter the hotel.

"Don' be too sure, Mister Publighause," he said. "Ven I do some more vork an' make some more moneys, p'raps ve see."

Then he returned to his shop; and the evening calm was broken only by the steady persistent ring of his anvil.

13: The Haunted Camp

Weekly Times (Vic.), 3 Oct 1914

"I WOULDN'T camp there," said the old age pensioner, "I wouldn't camp in that clearin', not fer five 'undred pound. There's not one bushman in the mountain is game to pass it after dark."

"Ghosts?" asked Norris.

"Not what yer'd call visible ghosts," replied the pensioner, "but sounds, 'orrible sounds, especially o' windy nights like this. An' lights there are, sometimes. I've seen 'em meself, across the gully."

Norris and Weir were on a walking lour, and towards nightfall on a boisterous day had reached an almost virgin forest near the top of the Great Dividing Range. Anxious to find a safe camping-place among the huge trees that swayed ominously in the high wind, they had stopped at the hut of the old-age pensioner to inquire of a possible clearing where they might sleep, secure from the danger of falling trees. The old man smiled at what he regarded as the childish fears of the new chums. His own hut appeared to be in imminent danger of annihilation from the swaying forest giants that towered above it, but, in his case, familiarity had bred, if not contempt, at least indifference.

The pensioner assured the tourists that there was only one clearing within ten miles of the spot— an old camp that had belonged to timber-getters of a bygone day, and upon which still stood two dilapidated huts. Then he went on to tell them of a tragedy— a sordid bush tale of jealousy and hate and revenge, which ended in the killing of a woman in one of the lonely huts in the clearing. All this happened many years ago, but the pensioner assured them, the woman's spirit still haunted the clearing and the echoes of her dying shrieks could be heard on certain nights, especially on windy nights such as this; for, he explained, it was upon such a stormy night that she had been done to death.

"In all this forest yer'd not find one man who'd camp one night in that clearing for a year's wages," said the pensioner. "I've lived here this twenty year, an' I've never met one who's had the pluck to do it yet."

The fact that this recital seemed to increase the desire of the travellers to pass a night in the clearing caused the pensioner no small amazement, and an evident suspicion that they failed to realise the possible horrors that awaited them.

"If yer take my advice yeh'll stay where yeh are for tonight," he said. "I've heard them shrieks from half a mile away, an' they're enough to turn a man's hair grey; it's not healthy, I tell yer, for any man to camp there."

Both Weir and Norris smiled at the old man's warning, and assured him that they were well able to look after themselves.

"If yer found dead in the morning," i he called after them, "don't say that ! I never gave yeh fair warning."

"The old man seems to take his ghost story pretty seriously," laughed Norris, as they strode off down the mountain track.

Weir made no reply for some moments, and then muttered something about "foolish bush stories." His companion half suspected that the subject was distasteful to him.

Weir was a good deal older than his fellow-traveller, and the two had not been very long acquainted. Norris had met him casually at a city club some months previously, and the present walking tour was the outcome of what appeared to be a mutual desire to get away from the turmoil of the city.

Weir was a man of scanty conversation, and Norris knew little or nothing of his previous history. But he had already conceived a liking for the elder man, whose bushcraft and resourcefulness had so far helped to make the trip more than ordinarily pleasant.

"The old man said three miles. We seemed to have walked so far already," said Norris, after they had travelled for some time in silence.

"It's not much further," replied Weir ajbsently. "Just behind that clump of scrub yonder."

"Why?" asked Norris in surprise. "I didn't know you had been there before."

"I haven't," answered Weir hastily. "I am relying on the old man's directions."

Norris felt quite sure that the pensioner had mentioned no such particulars, but he said nothing, thinking perhaps that Weir had misunderstood the old man.

However, as they rounded the clump of high saplings, the clearing came into sight, with the two weatherbeaten huts, desolate and deserted, standing in the middle.

The wind, which had been high since morning, had now dropped to a light breeze; but the roaring in the tree-tops on the higher ridges told that it had not yet spent Its full force.

Five minutes later the men reached the clearing, and proceeded to examine the huts. Neither appeared desirable habitations, but for weary travellers even the shelter they afforded was welcome. In places slabs had

fallen from the walls, the shingle roofs were sadly out of repair, and the chimneys had fallen awry.

"I vote for this one," said Norris, indicating the hut to the north. "Neither will be much good if it rains; but this seems to be the least badly damaged."

Weir appeared to hesitate for a second. "If you don't mind," he said, "I would much rather camp in the other one. It will serve as better protection against the wind."

Norris could hardly see the force of this argument, but the question was hardly worth arguing, and the two men proceeded to spread their sleeping-bags upon the rude bunks that still remained in the southern hut.

Then Weir, who somehow had naturally assumed the position of camp cook, set about preparing the evening meal, while Norris inspected the age-stained decorations that still hung upon the waifs of the hut. He paused before a newspaper clipping, that was pasted above the chimneypiece, and read it through with growing interest.

"Come here, Weir," he called, pointing to the clipping. "This is evidently an account of the local tragedy that our old pensioner mentioned. Rather, here's portion of it; the rest has been torn away."

Weir came over, and, with an expressionless face, read through the tattered clipping. "Rather fragmentary," he commented, and went back to his cooking.

"All the same," said Norris, ' it s interesting, seeing that we are on the probable scene of the tragedy. I'ni sorry it's not all here." And he began to read it through again.

Only the centre portion of what was evidently the original clipping remained. It read :

....pson, splitter, said, 'My hut is about twenty yards from that occupied by the Skinners. Skinner was my mate," and we worked at paling-splitting. There is no other habitation within eight miles. Skinner lived with his wife, and I batches In my own hut. On the night of the tragedy I went to bed about eight o'clock. Some time during the night— I think it was after midnight— I was awakened by loud screams which lasted for half a minute. Thejse were followed by low moaning and sounds of bumping, as though someone was moving about in the Skinners' hut. I feared that something serious was happening, as the Skinners had been quarrelling, sometimes violently, on and off, for some days; and I knew Skinner to be a violent man. I dressed hastily and went over to the other hut. Mrs Skinner was lying on the floor with her head...

Here the paper had been torn away; but below, another small fragment still adhered to the wall upon which Norris was able to decipher :

....trackers have been engaged, but recent rains have obliterated any possible traces of the suspected man, and the delay in notifying "the police has enabled him to get a long start. The country is rough and overgrown with scrub, and Skinner is said to be an expert bushman. The detectives think...

"I wonder if they ever caught him," said Norris. "The usual sordid tragedy. Jealousy, I suppose."

"Tea's ready," said Weir, briskly. "Oh, that?" he commented. "I have no doubt he was caught and hanged years ago,"

The two men ate their evening meal almost in silence. Wier, particularly, seemed disinclined for conversation. Tired out with the long day's tramp, they went early to bed.

"The wind's getting up again," was Norris' final observation as he leaned over to put out the light. And five minutes later he was sunk in a dreamless sleep.

Perhaps it was an hour, perhaps two hours, later— he could not say exactly how long— when Norris awoke suddenly with an uncanny feeling that sonethinghorrible was happening. He had a vague, subconscious feeling that he had heard, or seen, something terrifying in his sleep. He ssit up in bed and listened. intently. The wind had risen in volume, and was now roaring hrough the tree-tops. Glancing toward the broken window opposite his bunk, Norris gaw that the night was pitch daifc.

Suddenly, with a waxing of his uncanny fear, Norris became aware of a low moaning that appeared to come from without. With his hands convulsively clutching the sides of his bunk, the man sat and listened. The strange moaning hid in it a note horribly human-like in quality, and he was almost convinced, against his better sense, that there was someone in pain within twentj' yards of him, outside the hut.

Then a shriek, sudden, shrill, and terrifying, arose high above the roaring of the wind. The man felt himself grow cold with the sudden horror of it. Then, as the shriek died down, again to the incessant, agonised moaning, his trembling hand groped for the matches.

"Weir!" he called. "Weir! What the devil's going on outside? Did vou hear it?"

No reply came from the bunk opposite.

By now Norris had managed to get the candle alight, and he glanced across at his companion's sleeping place.

Weir lay upon his back, his white face sharply silhoutted against the dark wall, and wide-open eyes staring straight up at the broken shingles of the roof.

With a chilling fear upon him, Norris strode across the room, calling as he went. In the next second his worst fears were confirmed. His companion was

quite dead; and the horror of his last moments was plainly written on the dead face.

To a man of weaker nerves than Norris possessed, that long night's terrible vigil would have proved unbearable. At intervals the piercing shriek, to which he vainly sought to apply some natural and common-place cause, was repeated; and the moaning went on almost without cessation. But towards davlight both sounds died away, a fact that almost forced Norris, against his will, to attribute them to some supernatural agency.

With the first light of dawn Norris set about seeking assistance. The only habitation within many miles was that of the old-age pensioner whom he had seen the previous day, and he resolved to see the old man first with the object of seeking directions. He had got half way upon his errand when he met the old man coming towards him. The pensioner greeted him with evident delight.

"I'm pleased to see yeh alive," were the old man's first words. "When yeh told me yeh were going to camp down there I had me doubts of seeing yeh alive again. Where's yer mate?" he added, gazing apprehensively down the truck.

As well as he could Norris related his experiences of the night, and with difficulty persuaded the old man to accompany him back to the hut.

Once inside the pensioner stood for some minutes gazing searchingly at the features of the dead man. Then, with a sudden movement, he opened the front of the shirt and pointed to a tattoo mark upon the chest.

"I had me suspicions yesterday," he said, quietly; "and now I'm certain. It's him."

"What do you mean?" asked Norris, "That man," said the old bushman, "was my mate, Tom Skinner. Fifteen year ago he killed his poor wife in that very hut over there."

"Are you sure?" asked Norris.

"I couldn't make no mistake," replied the pensioner. "I was mates with him for many a year, and there's the mark I've seen upon him often."

"But the shrieks?" said Norris. "The sounds I heard last night? What could they have been?"

"They was the dead woman,'' said the pensioner with conviction. "She's had her revenge. Yeh can be sure; she'll rest at peace now."

They went out into the sunlight, and to Norris, despite the ghastly evidence within the hut, the events of the night seemed unreal as a dream. The wind had risen again, and the tall trees upon the ridge opposite began to bend and sway before it. They paused beside an old withered tree, while the pensioner pointed out to Norris the road he should take to the nearest town, whither he purposed to go for assistance.

With raised hand the old man was pointing out the track, when, without warning, a piercing shriek sounded directly over their heads. The man's hand dropped to his side, and, his speech arrested in the middle of a sentence, he stood gazing at Norris with terrified eyes.

"My Gawd! it's 'er!" he managed to whisper, with trembling lips.

But the friendly daylight gave Norris a confidence and a desire for investigation he had not felt upon the previous night.

As before, the shrieking had died down to a low quavering moan, which Norris located with certainty within the tree beneath which they stood. While the pensioner stood rooted to the spot with terror, Norris investigated further.

"It's the tree!" he said at last, "It's nothing but the wind in the tree!"

"It's the dead woman," replied the pensioner. "She ain't satisfied yet."

"Come here," said Norris, reassuringly; "it's easily explained." And he pointed out to the bushman the cause of his superstitious fears. The tree was hollow, and, near its base on the windward side was a hole of about a foot diameter. Higher up, and upon the opposite side, was another hole of smaller dimensions owing to its peculiar construction the whole thus formed a gigantic whistle through which the wind shrieked when it rose high, and fell away to the strange, human-like moan as it diminished in force.

"You see, after all," said Norris "it bears a quite natural explanation."

"Maybe, maybe," said the old splitter glancing towards the hut. "But, tree or no tree, she's had her revenge."

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14: The Fatal Dinner

Weekly Times (Vic.), 1 Aug 1914

HE LIVED in a tiny, tidy hut set in a little clearing amid huge forest trees, and I stumbled upon his habitation in the course of a hush ramble. He made me very welcome, for strangers are rare in these parts; and he entertained me with tea and johnny-cake, for the bush is ever hospitable. And then he talked.

Oh, how he talked! He was a nice, clean old man, with long, white hair and a flowing, snowy beard, and, despite his years, he owned the clear, blue eye of a babe that knew no guile. He was such a nice old man, and such an air of innocent and child-like simplicity pervaded his whole being that it would positively grieve me to think that the truth was not in him.

Here is the story as he told it to me, but with many of his quaint tricks of speech and strange pronunciations omitted; for he used an astonishing mixture of Hibernian dialect and Australian slang that defies orthography.

I AIN'T never been superstitious (he said), because I got no time for them sort of fooleries; but when a man has a curse laid on, him, an' when he proves that it's there, over an' over again, well, he'd be a chump if he went on doubtin', wouldn't he? An' that's how it is with me. I got a curse on me, an' I know it, for I've proved it. I dunno how it came, nor why it came; I only know it's there, an' it's allus been there, an' I got no .anore to say.

I ain't no Australian native; I was born'd in the Old Sod, where me father was a baker. But I been here long enough to look at things like a native, an' do things like a native, ixcep' one thing: an' that's lyin'. Seems to me that in years to come the folks of this country will come to be known as "The people who pull the limbs of the stranger;" but I ain't of that clasps meself, so you can take it from me.

This is me secret, an' it ain't everyone as I'd tell it to. Listen here now. I got it in me power to murder men in secret. I got it in me power to lull one of me feller men once every year— no more an' no less— an' there ain't any law in any country in the whole wide world, that has the right or the power to lay a finger on me.

Now, listen, an' I'll tell you what it is. The man or woman who eats his Christmas dinner along with me dies sudden before the New Year's Day! If there's more than one person dines with me on that day, then one of 'em, I can't tell which, is a corpse within the week. I know it, because I've proved it after years an' years; an' the man would be a fool who took no notice of all

them warnin's. I don't know how it is, nor why it is; but it's there, an' I can't pretend it's not.

It was just after I landed in this country that I first noticed the strange curse that was on me. There was a young feller mates with me on the ship, who came from the same spot in the Old Dart. We landed two days afore Christmas, full of high hopes in the new land, an' we had dinner together in a little eatin' house in the city, an' we was makin' plans to go.straight up to the goldfields in a day or two. Next day he was took ill sudden, an' in four hours he was dead.

You can bet it broke me up a good deal to lose me only mate in a strange land, an' I got to thinkin' a lot an' worryin' about it. An' I starts thinkin' then of other Christmases I'd spent in the Old Country, an' happy enough the most of 'em was. Then I remembers that on me last Christmas Day at Home I'd had dinner with an old uncle of mine. He died in a fit on the twenty-ninth of December! An' the Christmas afore that a brother of mine was took off on the thirtieth. An' I'd et with him! An' the Christmas afore that a girl cousin of mine pegged but on Boxing Day. And

I'd e't with her. An' the Christmas afore that it was a friend of the family who was run over by a butcher's cart an' killed on the twentyseventh. An' I'd e't with him, for he'd been invited to our place to dinner, his wife bein' away at the time.

An' I goes on thinkin', harkin' away back, year after year, right as fur back as me memory would take me. I goes, right back to the time when I was a tiny little nipper an' me recollection failed me. An', so help me, there wasn't a single Christmas I could remember but someone had I died after eatin' their Christmas dinner along with me; an' they snuffed out, every one of 'em, afore the dawn of the New Year's Day!

Now, I puts it to you. Would you, or would you not, reckon there was a curse on you if things was to happen to you the like of that? An' would you, or would you not, take your solemn oath never to eat your Christmas dinner in company again?

It's what I done, anyways. There was a curse on me, an' I knew it.

For ten long years I et me Christmas dinner alone, or else et none at all, for the fear was on me, strong. Then come a time when I fell in love an' was tempted to murder.

I'd been doin' well in this country, for I made a good start on the goldfields an' saved me money. Then I moved to a country town in the North an' opened a business as a storekeeper, an' done well. Money seemed to come to me easy in them days. It was after I'd been there about a year that a new girl came to teach up at the school. An' she was as pretty, she was as sweet— but I can't

talk about her, even now. I only know that I was deep in love with her before a month was out. All me money, all me prosperity, all me luck was nothin' to me beside that girl. I wanted her with a longin' that comes to a man but once in life. An' in the beginnin' I thought that she favored me, too, an' I was happy. An' then it was that Dick Blake came on the scene. He was sort of manager on a station just out of the town, an' I got to own that he was good to look at. I only needed to see them together once or twice to see the sort of looks she gave him, an' the tender way he treated her, to know that there was nothin' for me to hope for.

Then hate came to me, hard an strong, an' me whole nature seemed to change. I'd been a decent enough lad before, with kindly feelin's an a soft heart: but now I became cunnin' an' sly an' secret, with the black heart of me plottin' and plannin' to bring' about their separation. There was nothin' I'd stop at to bring harm to Dick Blake, an' I knew it, an' gloried in it.

Many's the long night I've sat alone after me shop was shut, thinkin' out schemes to get rid of me rival. There was murder in me heart, an' I knew it. But I wanted the girl as well, an', if I killed him, it must be without discovery.

It was long before the devilish scheme come to me that I carried out in the end. An', when it did, I laughed and shouted like a madman in me lonely room, an' wondered whjr I had never thought of it before. It was this: It wanted but two weeks to Christmas Day, an' on that day I would ask Dick Blake to have dinner with me. 'Twas plain murder, an' I knew it; for I was as sure as I was of to-morrow's dawn that within the week Dick Blake would be a dead man.

Oh, I gloated over it, an' nursed it, an' fondled the thought of it; for 'twas a safe way of removin' him an' havin' the girl for meself.

He was a lonely man, like meself, and when I invited him to dine with me, with a friendly smile an' a slap on the back, he was ready an' willin', with never a doubt of me, for I played a cunnin' game.

A great dinner I prepared the best that the town could provide— an' when he came, with his dog at his heels, there was a friendly smile in his eyes an' a hearty greetin' on his lips.

' "You'll not mind me bringin' Nipper with me?" he said, pattin' the dog's head. "He's the only mate I have, an' I'd be sorry to leave him home on Christmas Day."

We et, an' talked, an' joked away like two of the greatest cobbers in the world, flingin' the scraps to the dog, an' toastin' each other in the wine I'd bought.

Times there was when me heart softened toward him, an' I come near regrettin' me deed. But when he began talkin' of the girl an' of his hopes of her, little he knew that I was thinkin' behind me smilin' face: "You'll never win

her, Dick Blake; for before the week is out it's in your own coffin you'll be, an' the girl mine."

'Twas not till he was gone— with a cheery word an' a clasp of the hand that hurt me— that the fear came on to me on account of what I'd done. It was rio remorse, for I wished him dead as much an' more than ever, but the fear to see him die, an' a hatred of the place where I had done the deed.

Next day I was sittin' with the man who had been wantin' to buy me business for months, an' in half an hour the bargain was struck. Then I drew me money from the bank an' ran away, givin' it out that a relation was dead in the Old Country, an' I must hurry Home.

It would be a long tale to tell of me wanderin's for the next five years. All over the face of the world I went, with not a peaceful day or a restful night. Sometimes I made money, sometimes I lost it, but I was still well enough off in the main. Now the longin' for the girl would pull at me, an' I would start in a hurry to come back to find her. Then the memory of the man I had killed would hold me off, an' I'd wander away to some other county.

At last I shut the fear out of me mind an' booked me passage for Australia. I wasted not a day in port when I arrived, but went straight by rail to the old town.

An' the first man I saw when I stepped off the train at the station was Dick Blake!

I staggered back at the sight of him, but he remembered me at once, an' put out his hands to hold me, thinkin' me sick. Lord! but the touch of him turned me cold, for to me 'twas like the touch of the dead!

I trumped up the story of a late illness, an' nothin' would do him but I must come to his place to make me stay, an' I went with him like a man in a dream.

I don't know what I was expectin' to find in his home, but it gave me no shock to find her there, an' with two of the finest little babies I have ever seen.

Maybe it was the relief at findin' him alive after all. but I was at home with them and me mind at rest in half an hour. An' I could look at her now as his wife without one thought of regret!

But I was curious to know how it was me curse had miscarried, an' with deep cunnin' drew the, conversation around to the last dinner we had together.

Did it do him any harm, I asked, in a voice that was meant for jokin'.

He laughed, an' said it was the best dinner he ever had.

"But," ses he, "I don't think it could have agreed with the dog, for poor old Nipper died the very next day, an' I was sorry to lose him."

An' all at once I seen that me curse had not miscarried after all. Nipper was one of us at the dinner, for hadn't we thrown him the scraps.

An' here I'd wasted five long years sufferin' the pangs of remorse over the death of a collie dog!

Me luck left me after that, an' I come down to what you see me now, a poor, lonely hatter in the bush.

But I've never et a Christmas dinner in company since— an' I never will.

———————

15: Chips

Weekly Times (Vic.), 20 Dec 1913

A NEAT little old woman, whose bright eyes seemed to give the lie to the tale of age told by the wrinkled face and the white hair parted primly in the middle; leaned beside the door of a tiny cottage set within a little clearing in a forest of giant blackbutt. It was a still day in the Australian midsummer; the gentlest of breezes stirred the flame-tipped saplings that fringed the rough bush track before the cottage; a few perky ; blue wrens chirped lazily around the door, and the clip of an axe sounded from the forest to the right. It was a typical December day, with that indefinable Christmas feeling in the air.

For some minutes the little old woman listened to the steady measured ringing of the axe; then, with a sigh and' a doubtful shake of the head, turned to go inside.

"He'll kill himself, that's what he'll do," she said, half aloud. "In this heat, too, at his age. If his old arms was only as strong as the heart of him."

She sat down wearily by the kitchen table— the table whose white, scrubbed top gave pleasing evidence of her industry— and took up a blue document which she read through laboriously— for the hundredth time. In stern, official language; it set out that, upon the payment or ten pounds to the department, James Watt could secure the freehold of ten acres in the Parish of Tanglefoot. Failing payment on or before the 31st of December, the land would be forfeited to the Crown— and, it might have added, if officialdom ever noticed such trivial things, James Watt and his tidy little wife would be homeless from that day forward.

"And," mused the little old woman, glancing through the window at the clearing and the small patch of cultivation. "after all his workin'— the slavin' and pinchin' and savin'! It's a hard world for the old' ones! Nothin' but our pensions, and the egg money, and; thirty shillings in the tin; and him with his foolish old notions of— this."

She laid aside the blue paper, and took up a gaudily printed poster, and began to read that:

TANGLEFOOT CHOPPING CARNIVAL
To be Held in Mr Loney's Paddock on
CHRISTMAS DAY
Standing Block Chop,
For All Comers,
First Prize, £15

'Oh, the. heart of Mm, the heart of him," she said. "A man of seventy to stand up amongst them young ones! And nigh forty years since he chopped in a match. But what's the use? He's crazy, clean crazy. An old man like him, with his rheumatics and all!"

The chopping in the forest ceased suddenly, and the old woman turned eagerly to watch the door, her poor, shrivelled hands plucking nervously at her apron. Presently her husband appeared in the doorway, his hale old face flushed with his exertions, and shining with the perspiration that dripped from the point of his short white beard. He carried an axe upon his shoulder, and in his left hand a huge chip, which he held up for inspection proudly.

"D'ye see that?" said he, between gasps. 'There's life in the old dog yet, eh? How's that for a chip, old woman? Two blows of the axe brought turn out; and as clean a cut as ever I made in my life. There's life in the old dog yet, as the young 'uns will find out before I'm done with 'em."

"Oh, sit down, sit down, do!" she pleaded, pushing him gently into a chair. "You'll kill yourself, Jim, before it's all over. Leave me get you a cup of tea."

"Aw, you, with your motherin'!" he said, with a brave show of fortitude, but sinking to the chair rather wearily for all that. "Ye'd make nothin' but a babby o' me if yeh had yer own way. How's that for muscle, tell me?"

And rolling up his sleeve he displayed, with much pride a stringy biceps.

"Life in the old dog! Ay, and so they'll find, come Christmas Day."

She bustled about eagerly, clattering! the tea things, while he mopped his brow and babbled on of his prowess with axe and saw.

"Laugh at me, don't they?" he said querulously. "That big Andy Bonner— all fat he is— he says as it's a farce for me to start in the big chop. Says I'm too old. Says I got no wind. By Gum, I'll show 'em! If I only get fifty seconds on that crack, Bill Simms, that fifteen pounds is mine, mother, and the home's ours for the rest of our lives."

She came over, and laid her two hands upon his shoulders— shoulders bowed with the fatigue that he strove valiantly to conceal from her.

"Give it up, Jim," ' she pleaded. "Think of the disappointment if yeh lose. What does it matter if we do lose the house? We'll manage, somehow,"

"Aye, we'll manage," he said, wearily, as he took her worn old hands in his. "That's what I been doin' all me life— managin', just managin'. Never gittin' no forrader, never doin' no good for meself. Just managin'. I been one o' the stoopid sort, old woman."

"Yeh've had no luck, Jim," she said, gently. "Yeh've been a good man to me, and I never looked for more."

"One o' the stoopid sort," he" went on unheeding. "Strong in the arm, ay, strong enough in the arm. A hewer o' wood and a drawer o' water all me life.

Men there was— the cunnin' sort, the plannin' sort— started off er scratch with me, and their wives is livin' in comfort and plenty to-day; comfort and plenty."

Taking advantage of his mood, she ventured timidly upon forbidden ground. "If— if Allan had only come back home," she ventured timidly. "He would have been a great help, Jim."

The old man's eyes grew stern as he released her trembling hands. "Don't tall to me of him!" he said, bitterly. "If he died years ago, maybe I could forgive him; but if he's above the ground to-day he's no son o mine."

"He was but a child, of fourteen when he ran away," the mother pleaded. "That was near fifteen years ago, and we were in New South then. When we came away we left no trace behind: Maybe he came back, and couldn't find us. Maybe, he advertised in the papers, hut when do we see them? Maybe he's searchin' now—"

"What's the use o' talkin', woman?" said the old man gruffly. "If he'd ha' wanted to find us he'd found us long ago. It's foolishness to hope yeh'll ever, ever hear of him again."

He rose hastily, and shouldered his axe with a resolute air, avoiding her eyes.

"Jim," she said, wistfully, "you're not going out again — In this sun?"

"Tut, woman!' he answered. "Yeh'd make a child of me. I'm goin' to win that chop, or — or they'll carry me home."

He went out of the house with squared shoulders that drooped pathetically before he had taken a dozen paces. From the door she watched him climb through the fence and disappear into the scrub beyond. Then she went back into the house, and sat for a long time gazing before her with misty eyes.

She was thinking of a wilful little lad, filled with wild fancies of bushrangers, and drovers, and all the splendid life was "back o' Bourke." Fifteen years ago he had gone away on another summer's day such as this, leaving behind him an almost illegible scrawl to say that he was going out to see the world and to be a man. Since that day she had never heard of him.

"God knows," she whispered at last, in a voice that lends pathos to the meanest platitude, "God knows it's a cruel world— for women."

The axemen's carnival was the event of the year in Tanglefoot. For thirty miles around the folk the forest and of the plains below flocked to Loney's paddock on Christmas Day to watch the strong, lithe young bushmen competing in the sport they loved the best. And this year particular interest was lent to the occasion because William Simms, the champion axeman of Australia, had entered for all events.

Early on the morning of the chop old Jim Watt was abroad, and from a passing horseman, gleaned news of the handicaps. He returned to the house filled with excitement.

"Oh, the fools, the fools!" he cried, his old eyes dancing with delight. "They've made me a present of the big chop! They've give me two minutes on Bill Simms and one minute in front of the whole field. The fifteen pounds is in me pocket! Put on your hat, old woman, and we'll be goin'."

"Don't be too certain, Jim," she admonished him once again as they started. In her own mind she was quite certain as to the result and she dreaded the effect of disappointment on him.

"Tut!" said old Jim, shouldering his axe with a jaunty air. "'Leave it to me, mother. I'll teach the young 'uns!"

Down at the chopping ground the crowd had already begun to assemble and blocks were being erected. The nomination of old Jimmy Watt for the big event provided comedy for the occasion, and many good-natured jokes were flung at him as he marched on to the ground.

"It's time you retired, Jimmy, an' gave the youngsters a show," said one gay joker.

"Say," cried another, "ain't you trained a bit too fine? There'll be nothin left of you but whiskers at the finish."

But Jimmy took it all with fine affability, and attended to the fixing of his log.

The competitors began to strip for the contest, displaying bare arms that rippled with hard muscle, and, beneath thin jerseys, the magnificent torsos, with the loose, freely-playing shoulders of practised axemen; Bill Sims, the champion, 6 feet 3 inches in his stockinged feet, perfectly proportioned and 16 stone of solid bone and muscle, stood at the scratch end, looking down the line of men busy about their blocks.

"What am I up against?" he asked his second. "Anything to beat?"

"Nothin' much," "replied the trainer. "Unless," he added, "With a grin, "unless it's the limit man. He looks like a trier."

Simms glanced down to the other end, where old Jimmy Watt, his old shoulders squared for the effort, and the look of determination still on his wrinkled face, stood, axe in hand, ready for the starter. Beside him, pouring forth a stream of sage and earnest advice, was his second, a man equally stricken in years, and an old splitting mate of many years' standing. Leaning upon the fence just outside the chopping arena stood Mrs Watt, her troubled eyes fixed anxiously upon her husband.

"Him?" said the champion. "Poor old bloke! What's his handicap? Two minutes. It's the biggest start I've ever given anyone; but they can alter it if they like. I'll give him a week."

The trainer laughed.

"They shouldn't allow him to start," he said. "But I was forgettin'. There's one cove here— a dark horse— on the 80 second mark. Andrews, his name is. Never heard of him before, an' don't know his performances. Might be a mug; but he looks pretty solid. He ain't turned up yet. He'll have to get a move on. There's the starter."

"Watch him," said Simms, "and keep me posted. Let me know when he turns."

"Now then, men!" called the starter, and he began to read aloud the names and handicaps. "Watt," he called, "hundred and twenty front of scratch; starts on the word 'Go.' "

There was a titter amongst the spectators as the old man answered promptly to his name.

"Webster." called the starter, "fifty front of scratch; starts on seventy seconds."

"Seventy seconds?" cried a jester in the crowd. "Old Jimmy'll be off before he starts!"

The starter went on down the list.

"Andrews!" he called. "Andrews! Where's Andrews?"

A young man, followed by his second, came running from the dressing tent. He was a splendidly-built young fellow, tall and muscular, with finely-developed arms burned brown to the shoulder.

"Great Scott!" said the champion to his trainer. "Them arms don't live in a mug's coat-sleeves. Keep your eye on him "

"Andrews," went on the starter, "Bonner, and Dawson, fifteen in front of scratch; all start off one hundred and five seconds. Simms, scratch, starts off one hundred and twenty seconds. Now, then, men, get ready."

Possibly there is no athletic contest which, for the brief time it lasts, provides more wild excitement than does a chopping match. For a few seconds towards the finish pandemonium reigns. The spectators and the seconds dance around the contestants like agitated dervishes, with furious faces, shouting and shrieking warnings, advice and encouragement, till a final wild cheer announces that the winner's log has toppled over.

The excitement already began to simmer as the starter walked along the line towards old Jim Watt. It was the first time that Simms, the champion, had chopped at Tanglefoot, but much had been heard of his mighty deeds with the axe.

"Get ready!" warned the starter. "Go!— one— two— three," and he continued to drone out the seconds. At the word, old Jim sunk his axe into the wood, and began to chop furiously. Something of his old power seemed to come back to him with the excitement, and he hit true to a hair at every blow.

"By thunder!" said a surprised voice in the crowd. "If the old 'un could only keep that up he'd be a champion. Put it on, Jimmy! Yer goin' strong!"

"Forty-three— forty-four— forty-five," counted the starter monotonously; and Jimmy's blows began to weaken perceptibly.

The champion, at the other end of the line, leaned upon his axe and seemed to take little interest in the proceedings. He was well used to seeing the whole field chopping furiously, some with their logs cut half through, before he laid axe to the wood, and he had learned the value of taking, things coolly. "Sixty-eight— sixty-nine," called the starter; "SEVENTY!"

The second limit-man drove home his first blow with a mighty hissing between his teeth, and rapidly began to overhaul poor old Jimmy, who still strove valiantly to respond to the facetious encouragement of the onlookers. The champion still leaned negligently upon his axe, and seemed to find enjoyment in watching the antics of the crowd; but, from the tail of his eye he watched the tall, brown young man on the fifteen mark. He also seemed to be taking things calmly enough, chatting with his second as the starter approached his log.

"Hundred an four— hundred an' FIVE!" called the husky starter; and at the last word three axes swung together, and the fifteen second men were off.

The champion balanced his axe in his hands with a steady eye on the man with the watch.

"HUNDRED 'N TWENTY!" yelled the starter.

In an instant the champion became a thing of straining rippling muscle and whirring steel. With three rapid and terrific blows Sims hewed an enormous piece from the face of his block. Then the chips fairly rained from the wood as the cut narrowed and deepened with what seemed miraculous rapidity.

Then the crowd went mad. A wild medley of incoherent shouts echoed back from the tall trees that surrounded the clearing. Men and women waved their arms frantically, each shouting quite futile advice to his or her particular favorite. Some ran up and down the line in a strenuous but vain endeavor to watch all the competitors at once. Others climbed to the tops of posts and stumps and fell off again in their excitement. But the axemen heeded only their who, red of face, strove to shout their instructions above the clamor of the crowd.

Momentarily there was a wilder commotion near the limit end, as old Jim Watt dropped his axe and staggered out of the line in the arms of his second,

and collapsed on the ground. In defiance of the officials his wife clambered through the fence and knelt beside him.

But his collapse was only of passing interest, and the crowd again turned to watch the contest. Above the clamor of the yelling spectators the rapid clip-clip of a dozen axes rang out clearly, as the axemen showered blows upon the wood, using every muscle from heels to his finger-tips. Some chopped with the easy grace and beautiful accuracy of the practised axeman, leaving a clean cut that bore no trace of an axe mark. Others chopped doggedly, belting out the wood by sheer main force, and leaving great gashes in the face; others delivered the quick, nervous and ineffectual peck that betrays the distressed novices; all were in deadly earnest.

The champion, depending likely upon his great strength, used a slow powerful stroke that buried the axe almost to the eye at every blow. As he turned to cut in the back of his block for the brief fraction of a second he allowed his eye to rest on the brown young man on the fifteen mark where he swayed beside his block, his axe swinging with the regularity of a pendulum.

The champion's watchful second was quick to admonish him. "Watch yer work!" he yelled. "Andrews is holdin' you! He's choppin' like a devil! Hold your wood! Spurt, man, spurt; and you've got him!"

By now it was evident to the spectators that the contest had resolved Itself into a dual between the champion and Andrews, the young stranger on the fifteen second mark. Both men were now chopping at a terrific pace, and the wild chorus of yells almost drowned the sound of the axe blows. The shouting reached its climax as Andrews' block was seen to tremble. One more blow, and it toppled to the ground a fraction of a second before the champion delivered the final stroke.

"Andrews, first," announced the judge. "Simms, half a blow behind, second."

The cheers were few and faint when the result was announced, for the winner was unknown in Tanglefoot; but the general opinion was expressed by a splitter standing near.

"I dunno who you are, mate." he said; "but, by gum, you can chop a treat!"

The young man smiled this thanks, and walked towards the dressing tent. On his way he passed the spot where old Mrs Watt leaned over her husband, who still lay on the ground "getting his wind back," as he put it.

As the stranger passed she looked up. then rose to her feet suddenly, her face white.

"Allan!" she gasped. "My God! It's Allan." In the next instant he recognised her.

"Mother!" he cried. "My old mother! Why, I've hunted Australia for you!" And they were in each other's arms.

"Jim!" said the old woman. "Oh, Jim, it's Allan— our Allan come back at last."

Old Jim struggled painfully to his feet.

"Who won?" he demanded.

"Oh, Jim, see, it's Allan! cried Mrs Watt, tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Who won that chop?" persisted old Jim, still dazed and not comprehending.

"I did, Dad," said the young man. "Don't you know me? I'm Allan."

"What!" cried the father. "You, my lad? My little boy Allan?"

He gazed at the stalwart form, quite bewildered; then glanced toward his wife. There could be no mistaking her Joy and the certainty of her recognition.

"An yeh won that chop?" asked the old man, a glad look in his eye.

"Yes, Dad," said the young man. "Just won it by half a blow."

"Then welcome home, my boy!" cried Jimmy, holding out his hand. "I'm proud o' yeh. Shake."

"This here's me boy Allan, come home again," he explained, turning to the curious crowd that had gathered round. "I'd ha' won meself if I hadn't struck a knot in me block; but me lad here's won it for me, an I'm proud of him! He's kep' it in the fam'ly. He's a chip o' the old block!"

"Three cheers for the chip o' the old block!" shouted someone in the crowd. And as the mother again embraced her son, the old forest gave back again the cheers of Tanglefoot.