

Below And On Top and other stories

Edward Dyson

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Below And On Top

Chapter I.

THE Peep-o'-Day had been shut down for a long time now. The grand machinery rusted in the imposing brick engine-house, deserted by all save the swallows and Dick, who could just squeeze in through the slit in the wall where the beam rode, and who did not share the superstitious fear inspired in his schoolmates by its dim light and silence and loneliness. The rabbits burrowed and bred under the black boilers and about the foundations of the towering stack, and a subduing influence hung around the old mine and touched with reverence the stranger loitering curiously about its many buildings and piled-up tips.

Over young Dick Haddon the mine exerted a peculiar fascination. Most of his spare time after school hours and on Saturday afternoons he spent running at large about the place, washing innumerable prospects in his old fryingpan at the big dam. He found his way into the locked offices, and rummaged the blacksmith's shop, the engine-room and boiler-houses; climbed the lightning-rod on the dizzy, rocking smoke-stack, to the imminent risk of his precious neck; scrambled over every part of poppet-legs, brace, and puddling plat, doing monkey on the tie-beams, with sheer falls of a hundred or two hundred feet inviting him to the scattered, clean white boulders below; or taking the air up on the poppet-heads, to the scandal of Brother Bear or Brother Petric or any other pious brother of the little Waddytown Wesleyan chapel, for all believed such devilment to be a certain evidence of evil possession.

The mine had always filled the greater part of the boy's life. He remembered since memory began with him a mighty, smoking, whistling entity, vomiting unending water, and clattering truck-loads of gravel and slate, and curious streams of white mullock, fed with big four-horse waggon-loads of wood that came up the muddy Springs road to the accompaniment of volleying whip-cracks and gorgeous profanity that seemed grand and inspiring and filled him with the same large emotions as a tale of "Arabian Nights" read aloud by his mother before the winter evening fires.

He remembered, too, that night when he was five years old -- ages ago it seemed to him now -- when he crawled from his bed and found his mother, her white nightdress all dabbled with blood, wailing over his father, lying silent and motionless upon the kitchen floor, whilst in the grey shadowy background stood three or four miners, ashen-faced and still, hiding their mouths behind their smirched felt hats. He knew that the mine had killed his father, and thought of it as a living thing taking vengeance. Even now, when he was eleven and almost a man, the illusion was not dispelled, and sometimes took complete possession of him, especially when none other was near and the wind played upon the many vast props and legs of the mine as if they were the strings of a gigantic harp, and crooned mournful songs amongst the timbers, or when he called through the openings between the slabs over the pump shaft, and started the voices whispering in the black, bottomless depths, and the moans and sobs vibrating faintly in the miles of dripping, dark drives, far below there in the centre of the world.

Other children came over the common occasionally during the dinner hour, or on bright afternoons, from the weatherbeaten wooden school in the lazy town-ship, to slide down the tips or ride on the long arms of the capstans, breaking their limbs and their heads indiscriminately, and Dickie resented it as an intrusion. Tinker Smith he didn't mind; the little dry old fossicker was silent and pipeclayed, and seemed to be part of the mine and imbued with its spirit. He had always been there, Dick thought, pottering about amongst the tips, sluicing, puddling, and cradling, or crooning over his pan at the water's edge.

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The mine had another familiar whom Dickie respected — one, indeed, whom he regarded with a profound reverence as a creature superior to the ordinary run of mortals, gentler and more angelic than mere, women were, and one having some wondrous affinity with those sorrowful souls lost in the long drives, in whose existence he so implicitly believed. This was Sim's Idiot, the mad woman who came from the bush beyond the township, and visited the mine by night only — a tall woman, with long, silver-white hair and a pale young face in which her dark eyes shone with lustre that lived in no other eyes the boy had ever seen or dreamed of. Knowing no other form of madness than this, which was ineffably beautiful and mournful and tender, Dick's mind assimilated the term with his highest ideas of beauty, purity, and love, and Agnes Brett became an ideal of his boyish fancy.

Agnes's father, a fairly well-to-do farmer, owned the paddocks where the youngsters of Waddy went to gather sticks and bark, and where they ran wild half their time — nesting or hunting meek 'possums or malicious native cats. She was a widow. Three years ago, twelve months after their marriage, her husband Simon Brett, was killed with three others in a drive of the Peep-o'-Day, almost under the house where his wife lay peacefully sleeping. A blundering, screaming fool took the news to her, and came near to killing her on the instant. A baby was born, and for long days the mother was despaired of; but she lived — lived bereft of reason and possessed with many quaint beliefs about the old mine and the spirit of her murdered lover; and this girl, who was handsome and ruddy and commonplace in health and happiness, went home to her parents again a slim, eerie creature wondrously transformed, with a face superhuman in its spirituality. Her hair whitened rapidly, and she was silent save when she spoke of Sim and of the mine that had killed him.

They called her Sim's Idiot, and in the minds of those who had known her from her infancy and had grown up with her Sim's Idiot soon ceased to be connected with Agnes Brett; it seemed as if the latter had died, and a stranger had come amongst them between whom and the woman they had known there was not a passing resemblance or anything in common.

The name was absurdly inappropriate; but Waddy lacked imagination; in common with most bush town-ships it had a lamentable poverty of ideas. Nothing in Agnes's affliction suggested idiocy — indeed, a celestial intellectuality seemed to sit upon her serene countenance. But Waddy did not draw fine distinctions, and the name stuck.

One night, shortly after her return to her father's house, Agnes was missed, and was found an hour or so later standing in the moonlight by the post and rail fence surrounding the Peep-o'-Day, gazing upon the mine and calling her husband's name. They led her away, but she came again on other nights, a statuesque figure, waiting and calling in a penetrating voice that carried above the clangour of the engines and the churning roar of the puddlers.

Sometimes she addressed the mine in sweet, plaintive unintelligible speech, and it was a pathetic yet a thrilling sight to see her thus, when the furnace yawned and the rolling steam-clouds caught the ruddy glow and lept like flame, and the radiance fell upon her for a moment, glorifying her tall figure, picking it out of the darkness.

At first she was a wonder in Waddytown, and people, when they heard that Sim's Idiot was out, would walk across from the township, about a quarter of a mile off, and, gathered in small, nervous groups amongst the scattered trees, would watch her curiously as long as she remained, offering abject opinions with the gravity of sages, the women frequently discerning Sim's spirit beckoning amongst the fleeing steam rack, to their delicious terror. Waddy presently lost interest, seeing that nothing happened, and the comings and goings of Sim's Idiot were not considered worthy of remark. Even her father, who was devoted to her, ceased to follow her, knowing that no harm would befall, and the brace-men, hearing her voice, were not thrilled, as at first, with irritating fears, or induced to take unworkman-like precautions when moving about the shaft, for the sake of their own wives, who might, some day, be brought to this.

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Whilst the Peep-o'-Day continued working the mad woman ventured no nearer than the rail fence, but at length, long after the mine was shut down, and when rust and decay had taken full advantage of the law's delay, Dickie saw her, one bright night, sitting alone by the pump shaft. Over the mouth of each of the two winding shafts stood a heavy cage, and the pump shaft was covered with slabs securely spiked, so that she was in no danger of falling into either.

The old mine in its most mysterious humours had no terrors for young Dick. His superstitious beliefs were many, but without terror. Of late he came often at night, with his horsehair nooses, trapping the rabbits that bred miraculously about the top workings and fattened on the profuse milk thistles and the wild corn, and so the sight of Agnes Brett was no unusual thing to him. But to him she never lost interest; a wonderful pity for her grew in his heart, and touched his life with a melancholy utterly at variance with his healthy boyhood and his natural heartiness — a melancholy that for many weeks gave his brave, busy little mother much concern about his digestion and othex matters, and led to his being afflicted with superfluous flannels, and plied with home-brewed medicines with a camomile basis, all equally atrocious to taste and smell.

Dick would follow Agnes to the mine, and, creeping near her in the darkness, would crouch in one of the cages, watching her and listening as she called the one name down the echoing shaft, and spoke strange mad words to the mysteries that whispered and flitted below, in a voice so soft, so piteous in its pleading, that, without comprehending, he found himself sobbing aloud, and filled with a passionate longing to do something to help this poor white woman with the starlike eyes, who was always waiting and praying for the thing that never came. He tried to understand her, to know what it was she sought, and he grew to believe that it was in her poor ruined mind that her husband's spirit was imprisoned with the rest, deep, deep down in the black shaft or the blacker drives, and that some night he would answer her — perhaps escape from the powers of darkness again and come up to her and be free and happy. To Dick it was a rational belief, and he wondered that it evoked no response.

One night, listening to her supplicating tones, thrilled by their magical tenderness, he conceived a bright idea. For days and nights it haunted him, and then resolution came. He would do the thing he had thought upon, and see if it were not possible to give peace to this fairy woman.

Chapter II.

AFTER school, on the day on which Dick determined upon taking action, he sauntered into Tinker Smith's vicinity, at the Peep-o'-Day, with his hands in his pockets, his hat set on the back of his head, and whistling affectedly. Tinker was somewhat an identity of Waddy, and Dick wanted information; but there was a matter of a broken shovel to be settled between him and the old fossicker, and he had to proceed warily. He selected a strategical position that offered facilities for a hurried retreat and commenced insinuatingly:

"Any luck t'day, Tink'?"

The old man grunted without looking up from his tub, and Dickie edged off a bit. He had little faith in Tinker Smith, a little old pipeclayed man with a ferrety face and ferrety hair and thin dry whiskers. He was full of surprises, and had a way of falling upon a victim when least expected, and taking summary vengeance in the most convenient manner that offered itself, preserving all the time an expressionless face and a calmness quite contrary to nature. He had clipped Dick with a pick handle, tipped him head over heels into the dam, and had bitten his ear till it bled, and the boy had learned the value of eternal vigilance.

"Sim's Idiot was here again lars night," ventured Dickie, after a strained silence.

Tinker was indifferent.

"Say, Tinker, them Finny kids come here yes'dee. Teddy broke your shovel, diggin' out a bunny, an' I licked him."

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The fossicker turned his dull little eyes doubtingly on the boy, but continued puddling.

Dickie tried another tack.

"I can lay you onter a bit o' pay dirt if you want it."

Tinker knew the boy sometimes hit upon decent patches of dirt, and had profited by several of his discoveries. This interested him.

"Where to?" he asked.

"Where to's tellin's," responded Dick.

Tinker churned in his tub with an air of utter obliviousness to anything beyond, and Dick, suspicious of the symptoms, edged away a few paces.

"See here," he said presently, "you tell me about Sim --- her husban', you know --- an' I'll show you the stuff. Got ten grains in two han'fuls Satterdee."

"S'welp yer bob?"

"True's death."

Tinker was convinced. He ceased puddling, leaned on his shovel, and commenced awkwardly, and with great labour --- conversation was difficult to him, coherent narrative impossible:

"Well, this here Simon Brett, he was the feller what fought Hoppy Hoffman up on the pound, eighteen rounds, and licked him, got killed in a fall in Number 3 --- him, an' Ryan, an' Bowden, an' Kit Stevens --- Collard's shift. I was platman. Strappin' chap, Sim; alwiz smilin'; he'd work smilin', an' fight smilin'. Happy sorter man. She was his missus, this idjit."

Dickie wanted further particulars, and, as Tinker had evidently agreed to an armistice, he abandoned his defences and approached the fossicker.

"But you knew him an' his wife; you went ter their house sometimes, didn't you? What 'id he call her? How'd he talk when he was bein' lovin' like? Was they sweethearts long, an' did they walk in the wattle paddocks, an' sit on the rocks on Bullock Hill?"

Dick had a riotous fancy, and Tinker was as unimaginative as a wombat, but by dint of close questioning he managed to get out of the old man much of the information he needed, and after that he waited his opportunity.

Agnes did not visit the mine for nearly two weeks, and when Dick saw her again it was too late to effect his purpose; she was already crouched at the mouth of the shaft. Her face was pressed to one of the narrow openings, and she wept with a low moaning sound. Dick touched her thin, pale hand, and spoke to her.

"Who's there, please?" His heartbeat heavily and erratically, and he trembled, although he did not fear the mad woman in the least.

She arose, and stood regarding him for a moment. The boy pointed to the shaft.

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"Won't he come?" he asked eagerly, but she moved away without appearing to have heard him, and he followed her slowly, and from the top of the big gates watched her dark figure across the moonlit flat.

After that he waited for her, and when she came again he was ready. He hastened to the shaft and pulled away one end of the side slab, having found some days previously that the spike was loose. Then he squeezed his body through the opening, and stood in the pump shaft on the topmost rung of the ladder that ran straight down the wall of the shaft. Grasping the ladder with his left hand, with the other he dragged the slab — still secured with one spike — into its place again, and, clinging to the rungs in the tomb-like silence, he waited.

The mighty black depths seemed to drag at the boy as he stood, drawing and drawing him down into the abyss at his feet, and, as if irritated at his bold intrusion, the mysteries muttered and moaned and eddied impatiently, and an ominous threatening seemed to murmur in the hollow workings. But the boy was too full of his purpose to give any heed to these when Agnes came, and he saw the light of her eyes as she bent her face to the crevice just above his head. He felt her breath upon his cheek as she called the name of her dead lover, repeating the word again and again in the mournful chant so familiar to him. There was no coherency in the words that followed. They sounded like an inarticulate prayer, instinct with intensest emotion, but softly spoken.

Dick listened for a time, absorbed, and presently, when she seemed awaiting a reply, he brought his lips close to her face, and whispered a few words:

"Aggie, dear wife!"

The boy had not anticipated the full effect of his action. A wild cry of joy rang out upon the night and awakened eddying echoes in the deep shaft, and the woman flung herself upon the slabs, beating them with her thin hands, plucking at their edges with long, white fingers, sobbing, laughing, and calling upon the dead in an ecstasy of madness that appalled him, and he clung to the ladder, trembling in every limb.

Dick had never before succeeded in winning a reply from the woman. When he met her at the mine or wandering in the bush, and spoke to her, feeling that she pleaded for something in that strange language of hers, and hoping that he might be able to help her, since none of the men and women of Waddy gave heed to her sorrow, she regarded him with great unmeaning eyes that did not see; in their gaze he seemed to have no existence; and if she spoke it was only in the tangled speech of madness. He expected she would hear and understand the voice in the shaft, and believe her husband had answered her at last.

It was long ere Dick found courage to speak again, but when Agnes was silent, save for the faint sobbing that escaped her, he leant back his head and whispered close to her face, and her hot tears fell upon his cheek. She did not shriek this time, but babbled a few words, and finished laughing softly.

Dickie addressed her with expressions of endearment and pet names learned from the old fossicker, and finding her calm and rapt, he wove quaint fancies from fairy tales into his talk, as he had planned it, and at times his words were almost as mad as her own, but he remembered always to dwell upon visions of joy and beauty. He had escaped from the desolation of the old mine, and was going up out of the darkness to light and beatitude, to dwell with the angels in a boyish paradise. The talk was jumbled; it was spoken in the quaint diction peculiar to bush boys; but there was a flavour of inspiration in it, and the mad woman clinging to the slabs above was awakened to some understanding, and laughed a soft, low laugh, and murmured like a happy child.

At length Dickie was recalled to himself by the numbness of his extended arms, and the pain throbbing in his neck.

"I'm goin' now," he whispered. "Good-bye, dear wife."

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Pressing his face to the slabs where her white face shone faintly, he kissed her mouth.

She cried out again at the contact — a cry of exultation.

Dick, standing on the ladder, waited till she should leave before climbing out of the shaft. She remained prone upon the slabs, silent, for a long time, but at length she talked, talked almost inaudibly, but with no trace of the anguish that was wont to make her voice like the moaning of a dumb beast in pain. The boy's limbs ached, and fear began to creep into his heart. Still he was true to his purpose, and after twenty minutes, that seemed half a night to him, Agnes arose and moved slowly away. Dick waited for a few minutes, and then with a great effort, painful to his stiffened limbs, he shifted the slab aside and drew himself out of the shaft. He was replacing the long spike, when, looking up, he saw the mad woman standing erect within a few yards of the shaft, regarding him fixedly. When he faced her she took a step forward, threw out her hands, and with a cry that seemed to the boy to echo among the clouds overhead and in every hollow of the earth, she fell forward upon the stones and lay still. Dick ran to her, and turned her face to the moonlight; it was rigid, the half-closed eyes were glazed. He believed her dead, and fled like a hunted hare.

Houten and Winter returned with Dick to the mine, and found Agnes as he had left her. They took her up and carried her to her father's home, the boy going after, with a quaking heart. Then followed a long illness for Agnes and a troublous time for little Mrs. Haddon, who became more and more precautious in the matter of flannel, and doubled the doses of camomile tea, without effecting any visible improvement in Dick's condition. The boy had become strangely morbid; he grew pale and thin, and whilst his mother fretted, imagining him to be the victim of some wasting disease, he was beset with a fear that Agnes Brett was going to die, and that he would be her murderer. He kept his secret religiously within his own breast, and in his spare time he haunted her father's farm, sometimes venturing to ask after the sick woman, but usually skulking about as if dreading observation.

At length, to Dick's immeasurable relief, Agnes was reported out of danger, and Waddy was electrified by the news that Sim's Idiot had recovered her reason. With the restoration of her health her mind had been restored, and she was now as she had been before the news of her husband's death struck her down. Happiness returned to the breast of Dickie Haddon, but he still kept to himself the story of his escapade at the mine, waiting for a chance to see Agnes, wondering if she remembered. When at length he saw her face to face he was sadly disillusioned. She sat in an easy chair under the verandah at the farmhouse; the beautiful white hair was done up in a hard, ungainly knot. She looked ordinary — not at all the gentle, spiritual creature he had known. Dick was vaguely troubled. He felt that the responsibility of this deplorable change rested upon his shoulders, and was surprised that no-body seemed to regret the alteration in Mrs. Brett.

Chapter III.

DICK was as mischievous an imp as the township was afflicted with — and the boys of Waddy were even more prone than boys of other places to the evil that is dear to the young heart everywhere; but the other boys did not take their pranks seriously, as he did. His exuberant fancy invested his absurdest escapades with a high purpose and a most tremendous dignity. If he led a moonlight raid upon Jock Summer's pear trees it was in the character of a mediaeval knight of spotless honour and god-like beauty, and the purpose was to rescue from an ungainly, gross, and remorseless baron some fair, distressful damsel. He stole the pears all the same, and was careful to secure his share of the loot, but for the time being imagination held sway. To his mates it was all entertaining make-believe — to Dick Haddon it was all actual, and, as the knight of old, Thunderbolt the bushranger, or Jacky Jacky, the chief of a bloodthirsty band of blacks, the boy's romanticism helped largely to keep the lives of the housewives and housefathers of Waddy from sinking into an enervating monotony of peaceful dulness.

But Dick had not enlisted the co-operation of the mates who usually shared in his boyish pranks in this, his most wonderful adventure. For some time now he had deserted the haunts of his youthful companions, and there was comparative calm in Waddy. The boys were very well as subordinate blacks or inferior banditti, but in a matter of

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pure sentiment Dick felt instinctively that he could expect no sympathy from them — they would not understand. The radiant unearthliness of the mad woman had never appealed to them; they were indifferent to her white beauty, like that of the shining angels pictured in the Haddon family bible. They were just plain boys, and the plain boy is perilously near to the brute at times in the entire absence of motive and thought that characterizes his cruelties. Dick's fiercest battle was fought with Fod Carroll, who led an attack with sods on Agnes Brett on the Back Flat, and Fod, bewildered by the impetuosity of his small enemy, collapsed miserably in the third round. That fight was long remembered in Waddy; it created a new respect for Dickie among the boys, and fixed his status as the natural leader in any matter of common interest in which he chose to interfere.

There was one boy, indeed, in whom he might have confided — Dolf Belman, a youngster of about his own age, who provided most of his books and was his lieutenant in many adventures; but Dick, in his sick unrest, wanted no companionship. The more he saw of Mrs. Brett — and she rapidly grew plump and ruddy — the more bitterly he lamented the act of his that had so altered her. He who had been most anxious to serve her had been the one to bring about this deplorable change, this transformation of an ethereal creature into a giggling dairymaid.

One evening Dick Haddon saw Agnes Brett walking with Peter Kiley in the wattle paddock, and Peter — the long, ungainly son of a long, ungainly dairyman up the creek — was making awkward and bashful love to Mrs. Brett, whilst the buxom widow made a great pretence of resisting his elephantine blandishments, with shrill laughter and coy protestations.

Dickie fled from the sight, filled with bitterness and, seeking the seclusion of the Peep-o'-Day, blubbered miserably on the slabs over the pump shaft for twenty minutes.

How would Sim bear it? was a question that now presented itself to his active mind. Agnes had not been seen near the mine since her recovery — she never seemed to think of it or of her dead husband now. Did the spirit imprisoned in the old mine miss her? Was it waiting to hear her calling again in the early evening hours? The boy's faith was absolute; he knew that the drives were peopled with the spirits of the mine's victims, and that his father's ghost, and the chosts of Brett, and Bowden, and Ryan, and the rest walked the drives, and talked in strange, low, monotonous voices. He had heard them talking, had distinguished words, he thought, when all was still. How could he doubt? But he thought only of Brett, the forsaken husband, the neglected lover, the poor spirit whom his act had deprived of its only companionship and consolation, and he spent much time peering down through the cracks and harassing his young soul with most extravagant conjecture.

The morbid condition induced by these truly preposterous problems was the occasion of many more doses of camomile tea, extra strong, and Mrs. Haddon, in her perplexity, called in elderly female experts, who, having reared large families in spite of all the ills that are the heritage of youth, believed themselves to be, and were generally believed to be, capable of diagnosing every ailment and prescribing innumerable infallible cures. These old women gravely considered Dickie's symptoms, and suggested many remedies, with most of which he was duly afflicted at one time or another; but the boy refused to brighten up and resume his old, healthy, careless, impish courses under the influence of either pill, potion, plaster, or unction, or the lot together.

Meanwhile, however, Dick had resolved to speak to Mrs. Brett at the first opportunity. He was curious to know her thoughts on the matter uppermost in his mind. He had the idea that her present condition of mind and body was abnormal, and that she might be brought back to her former romantic state if she were made to understand that the spirit of her dead husband wandered in the Peep-o'-Day workings and yearned to hear her voice again.

Later the boy saw Mrs. Brett at the Sunday-school anniversary picnic. She was now ruddy-cheeked and full-breasted. Clad in a tight town-made dress, and with her wonderful hair dyed a common brown, she was romping with a shrieking crowd playing kiss-in-the-ring, and a sense of hopelessness took possession of Dickie as he watched; but presently, when she had taken a seat on a log apart from the rest, and was fanning herself after her exertions, he approached her, and straddling the same butt, commenced, with a boy's abruptness:

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"Ain't you never goin' ter the Peep-o'-Day no more?"

Agnes Brett turned upon him, astonished and indignant. Her father had told her of her doings during the time of her affliction, and she hated any allusion to that time from the lips of others.

"If you're cheeky, little boy, I'll box your ears for you," she said, with a threatening gesture.

Dicky did not wince, but sat looking up at her, like a small, red-headed cherub in rather indifferent health, and Agnes, who was as soft of heart as any breathing creature, was touched by the wan expression of the ailing imp.

"Ain't meanin' it fer cheek," said Dick, picking nervously at the bark; "I jes wanter know."

"Well, I am not going -- I am well now -- an' you mus' never talk about it."

"Why?" Dick moved nearer. "I say, d' you know me?"

"The boy Haddon."

"Yes, but d' you remember me before you was like this" -- he suggested everything in a gesture -- "when you was tall, an' white, an' beautiful?"

"No," she said, "I do not, an' you mus'n't talk about it, don't I tell you?"

"Say, it was me what did this!" -- again he indicated the change with a motion of the hands, as if it were a deplorable thing.

"Whatever is the boy meanin'?"

"'Twas me what did it. You useter go to the shaft of nights, an' once I frightened you, an' -- an' then it happened."

"What happened?" There was none other within earshot, and Agnes was curious.

"Everythin' happened. You wanted him to come up outer the mine, an' went callin', callin' fer him. So once I got into the shaft, and when you called I spoke like him, and kissed you, an' you cried out. An' then, when I climbed up again, you saw me, and fell down on the stones. An' when you was well you was 'like this, an' it was all my fault."

Dick looked utterly woebegone. It had occurred to him that his confession might provoke trouble, but he was quite unprepared for the demonstration that followed. Agnes Brett took him unawares, and he found himself caught up in her strong arms and half smothered in a long, pillowy embrace, whilst rapturous kisses were rained upon the top of his head. When at length he escaped, and stood off regarding Agnes resentfully, he was quite bedewed with her grateful tears.

"Oh! Dickie Haddon!" she gasped. "Oh! Dickie Haddon!" and she could gasp nothing else but "Oh! Dickie Haddon!" for quite a minute, during which time her ample bosom was disturbed by most strenuous emotions, and Dickie stood at a distance ready for flight should she betray any desire to repeat that overwhelming hug.

"You -- you -- you dear boy!" stammered Mrs. Brett, when she gained a little control over her feelings. "It was you who saved me, an' I'll love you all my life."

Dick fled to the other side of the log to escape a threatened advance.

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"Ain't you comin' t' the mine again some o' these nights?" he asked, doggedly. He could not appreciate her raptures — they were quite uncalled for, it seemed to him.

"No," she said, "I wouldn't dare. Don't you see I am quite well now. I only went because I didn't know what I was doin'."

"But Sim! He is down in the drive where he died. He will want you sometimes. Come an' talk to him, won't you?" he went on, eagerly. "Come to—night — Just for a little while. I don't think he hears me, an' it mus' be dreadful lonely below, don't you think, with no one t' talk to ever?"

Agnes regarded the boy curiously for a few moments.

"Come here, an' sit near me," she said. "I want to talk to you about him. Do you think he is down in the mine — always there?"

"Not himself, jest his ghost."

"You think so because you heard me talkin' to him. Well, that was all wrong; I went because somethin' was the matter with my head, an' I fancied strange things. There is no ghost in the mine, an, you must never say so any more, or you will make me very wretched, an' remind people of the time when I was" — she dropped her voice to an impressive whisper — "when I was mad." "But he is there, I've heard him myself," said Dick, to whom Mrs. Brett's confessions were only further proof of the completeness of her pitiful fall from grace, and sweetness, and truth.

A terrified light crept into the woman's eyes, and her cheek paled. She was intensely superstitious, and the boy's earnestness impressed her; but at this stage Peter Kiley shambled up and captured Mrs. Brett for his partner in one of the osculatory games always popular at Waddy picnics, and Dickie retired into the sapling scrub to indulge in rueful cogitation and contemplate his great hatred for long Pete Kiley.

"It was a rotten picnic!" was Dick's opinion, as imparted to Dolf next day.

Chapter IV.

TIME served to soften young Haddon's great regret, but Sim was remembered still, and the boy's compassion for the poor lonely spirit was a genuine grief, and, with a dim notion of making all the reparation in his power, he continued to visit the shaft after nightfall, and would call down the reverberating mine, or whistle or sing. If he neglected this duty for three nights running self-reproach attacked him in his bed, and on one occasion impelled him to get up and dress, while his mother slept, and creep out of the house to steal away in the moonlight and do his duty by the wronged ghost.

Then came the news of the approaching marriage of Peter Kiley and Agnes Brett, and that revived the boy's keenest regrets. His goddess had parted with her last shred of divinity; and was become the commonest of clay, and now she betrayed a callousness that was hardly human. It had come to this: Sim had no one who cared to think of him now but Richard Haddon; his wife had deserted him, his friends had forgotten him, and amongst all the ghosts below and on top there was not one so wretched as the ghost of Agnes's faithful and devoted lover and husband, poor Brett.

One night about a week after the announcement of the betrothal of Pete and Agnes, Dick and his mate, Dolf Belman, were sitting on the slabs over the pump shaft at the Peep-o'-Day. Dolf had been artfully inveigled to the mine under the pretence of assisting Dick to spread traps for the exceedingly circumspect rabbits that infested the tips, but Dickie had an ulterior motive, and had cunningly shaped the conversation with that motive in view. He

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had talked of the old mine and its murders, and Dolf was worked up; he crept very close to his mate, and his face glowed palely in the shadow of the cage.

"Say, Dickie," he murmured, "d'you believe in -- you know?" He pointed down into the shaft.

"Ghosts?" said Dick. "No -- o -- o! D'you?"

Dolf compressed his lips, and nodded his head slowly.

"Yah, that's rot!" said Dick.

"But don't they say that some of the men what was killed moves about down there sometimes? An' what's that we hear when we listen very quiet?"

"Dunno, but it ain't no ghosts. Think I ought to know?"

"Why, Dick?"

"Oh," said Dick in a careless tone, "bin down, that's all."

Dolf regarded him with wide-open, wondering eyes.

"What," he murmured, "right down inter the dark?"

Dick nodded.

"All by yerself?"

Again Dick nodded his head. It will be seen that Richard Haddon was not absolutely truthful. The decalogue was not made for diplomatists.

"Gum!" said Dolf admiringly, "I wouldn't 've."

"Course you wouldn't" -- this very casually -- "you ain't game."

This was an unfriendly aspersion; Dolf reddened under it.

"Game's you any day!"

"Talk's easy stuff."

"Climbed the smoke stack ez high ez you, Ginger, see!"

"Ginger" was an epithet that usually provoked battle, but just now Dick was too busy to think of his private honour.

"Pooh! what's climbin' a lightnin' rod. Y'ain't game t' go down the ladders t' the second level."

"Neither 'r you; don' b'lieve you went down far."

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"Don't you? Well if you're so plucky come down with me. I'm on; an' I'll get the candles an' I'll go first. Now who's game?"

"I am!" said Dolf defiantly.

So it was all arranged for the following night, and Dolf was sworn to secrecy with the magical rite of the wet and dry finger and the usual dread incantation, and Dick had secured his object. He wished to go down into the mine, but although he had not Dolf's fear of the ghosts, a strange awe, not altogether painful, possessed him at the thought of meeting Sim alone below in the long drive. With human companionship he felt that he could dare all, and the longing to investigate was strong upon him. Even if Sim was not to be seen, the adventure had attractions apart from his interest in the forlorn ghost. For one thing, boys were forbidden to go near an open shaft, and to the youthful mind, inquisitive and acquisitive, what is forbidden is never wholly forbidding. The weakness of Mother Eve is visited upon her sons, even unto the present generation.

"What's it like below?" asked Dolf, when the arrangements had been agreed upon.

"Spiffen!" said Dick with enthusiasm. "It ain't dark, y'know, when the candles is burnin', an' the drives is just like a pirate's lair."

"My word!" murmured Dick. "An' no spirits ner nothin'!"

"No — o — o! D'yer think spirits 'd be sich fools ez t' stay down there. Look here, Dolf, we might find some nuggets. We'll be miners, an' I'll be underground boss, an' this is our mine. That'll be all right."

"My word!" said the other, brightening up, "an' if we get a pound's wo'th we can join the lib'ry."

Dickie nodded cheerfully, and the boys left the mine, forgetting rabbits and everything else in the new venture.

On the following evening at about eight o'clock Dick and Dolf crossed the common together to the mine, and Dick, who was determined that his companion should have no time for repentance, hastily removed the loose slab, and let himself down on to the ladder.

"I'll go down a bit, an' then light my candle. Then you come down an' light yours. We mus'n't let no one see us."

Each boy had half a candle fixed to the front of his hat with a lump of clay, and Dick had other pieces in his pocket in case of accident. Both were dressed as nearly like grown miners as they could contrive, and Dick assumed the authoritative tone and manner of the boss of the shift.

"Now," he said, when Dolf had followed him, and the two stood upon the iron-runged ladder running perpendicularly down the side of the shaft, "cling tight to the ladder whatever you do, an' keep yer body close to it. Come on."

So they started the perilous journey down into the bowels of the earth. To go up or down three hundred feet of ladders is a wearisome task for a grown man. To a strong boy, accustomed to climbing, and trusting much to his sturdy limbs, it is not a matter of great difficulty, and the lads made good progress. Below them was densest darkness, about them the faint glow of the candles, above, a pale streak of moonlight, shone the opening they had made. At occasional intervals there were scanty stagings fixed across the shaft to facilitate work in connection with the "lifts" — the pipes up through which water is pumped from a mine — and on these Dickie and his mate rested. Dick talked to keep his mate's spirits from ebbing, and his words rang strangely and lingered in the walled shaft.

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At length the boys came upon a wide staging filling half the shaft, and here several of the centres and strong timbers dividing the pump shaft from the working shaft had been knocked away, and the staging was continued through to where the mouth of the drive loomed in the feeble light.

"That's the drive," said Dick. "I don't know what level we're at, but we mus' be a awful way down. What yer doin'?"

Dolf was clinging to his arm, and pointing downwards, too horrified to speak. Dick peered over the edge of the staging, and saw two white, ghostly faces glaring up at them out of the blackness, and above the foreheads of these two faces burned yellow stars. For an instant Dick was stricken with pulseless fear, then he remembered.

"Water!" he said.

They were looking at their own reflections in the black waters that filled the rest of the shaft and flooded the lower levels. Dick dropped some bits of reef and the faces were drawn into gruesome distortions and bobbed about fantastically in the ripples.

"I say, y' ain't frightened, Dolf, are you?" murmured Dick.

Dolf shook his head, but his face was white, and his teeth chattered painfully as Dick led the way through the opening in the centres and into the great drive.

"There ain't no sense in being scared by a feller's own face in the water, is there, Dolf?" said Dickie.

"N --n -- no," said Dolf.

The two small boys stood on the plat peering into the main drive, but their candles illumined only a few yards before them, and beyond that was black night.

"Heaps of gold along there, I bet," said Dick.

"My oath!" said Dolf, falteringly.

Dickie took the other's hand.

"Come on," he said, "let's go 'n see. Ain't this grand? Wouldn't the other fellows be mad if they knew they was out of this?"

Holding hands, the boys pushed forward. The drive was high and wide, and almost dry, and in a little while Dolf recovered sufficiently to feel quite an interest in Dickie's exuberant fiction. Their feet made no sound upon the soft floor of the drive, and gradually Dickie drifted into silence. He was thinking of Sim, and a great excitement possessed him as they advanced along the apparently interminable tunnel.

Then, as they turned a curve, with the suddenness of a lime-light picture flashed upon a screen the two boys saw the apparition of a man start out of the darkness. The figure stood by the left-hand side of the drive, in a pale light, the origin of which Dick could not discover. It was dressed like a miner, and was tall and thin, and the pallid face was thrust forward in a listening attitude, the mouth open, the eyes staring.

Dolf uttered a choking cry, and fell upon his knees, clinging wildly to his companion, watching the vision with round, unblinking eyes. Dick had expected something like this. He was disappointed in details; his idea of a ghost was quite conventional, and he particularly admired white flowing draperies; but he was prepared for a spectre of

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some kind, and as he had never for a moment thought of the disembodied inhabitants of the old mine as evil spirits, or anything but sorrowing, suffering victims, the emotion that now thrilled him had nothing in common with the sickening terror that prostrated his mate. Besides, the ghost was evidently very much more afraid of him than he of it; its whole attitude and expression indicated fear, and it was partly with the hope of reassuring the poor spirit that Dickie spoke:

"Please, 're you Sim's ghost?"

The ghost did not answer, but maintained its terrified, listening attitude. Dickie's mouth was parched, but he made another effort, and adopted a more respectful manner of address.

"Please, are you the ghost of Simon Brett?"

The ghost thought for a moment, and then nodded a slow affirmative; thought again, and nodded twice.

"Oh, please! oh, please!" whispered Dolf in piteous appeal.

"Who're you, an' what d' yer want?" The ghost seemed to be disguising its voice.

"I'm Dickie — Richard Haddon." Dick approached a step, but the ghost threw out its hand with a commanding gesture.

"Don't come no nearer," it said.

Richard Haddon's idea of a ghost was undergoing a process of rapid reconstruction. He knew that "Don't come no nearer" was a most ungrammatical expression, and he understood that whatever latitude might be given mere mortals, ghosts were always expected to be absolutely correct in speech.

"Are there any more of you?" asked the ghost.

"On'y me an' Alfred Belman," said Dick.

"Oh! ghost, let us go, won't you?" moaned Dolf. "Let us go, an' we'll never come again — never, never, never!"

"I ain't goin' t' hurt you." said the ghost. "Why d' yer come here?"

"Jist to see," answered Dick.

The ghost seemed very much astonished, and looked at them for some time as if confronted with a difficult problem. Meanwhile, Dick was thirsting for information.

"Why d' you stay down here alwiz?" he asked.

"Gotter!" answered the ghost briefly.

"But why?" persisted the mortal.

This was another problem for the ghost, and he gave it due consideration. Evidently Sim's ghost was a spirit of very limited mental resource. The explanation was a long time coming. At length he said:

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"It's like this, yer see: I mus' stay till someone dies what cares for me, an' then the spirit of the one what's dead will come an' take me away."

This was an inspiration. Dickie nodded approvingly; it quite coincided with his cherished convictions. He knew who the someone must be, and a thought of the impending marriage flitted across his mind.

"But there ain't nobody t' know, 'r else I'll have t' stay on here fer ever," continued the ghost in a mournful voice. "P'raps youse two won't count, 'cause yer sich little fellers, but yer mus' swear solemn never t' say a word to a livin' soul, 'r I'll lock yer both up in a shoot an' keep yer fer ever an' ever. Amen."

"We swear! we swear!" moaned Dolf. "Never a word — never a blessed word, true 's death!"

"I take me oath I'll never speak," said Dick firmly.

"Wha's a good oath t' swear with?" asked the ghost.

Manifestly a satisfactory ghost should have been well up in such things, but Dick was not disposed to be hypercritical, remembering that at the best Sim's ghost could have had few opportunities down there of acquiring experience and enlarging its mind. He readily suggested the familiar formula much venerated by the boys of Waddy, and the ghost made the two boys kneel down in the drive, and administered the oath to them very solemnly and with great deliberation.

"Now," he said, when the ceremony was ended, "d' yer know what'll happen to the boy what breaks a hoath like that?"

The boys shook their heads dumbly, and Dolf, who had regained his feet, began to quake.

"Well, I'll tell yer. He'll be haunted. Day an' night he'll be haunted. Little fiends'll stick forks in him all day, an' a big fiend'll chase him o' nights. He'll ----"

Dolf's shaking limbs refused to support him, and Dick had to hold him up. He uttered half-stifled cries of terror, and the ghost broke off suddenly, and regarded the boy anxiously for a few moments.

"That'll on'y happen if yer split, yer know," he said, relenting. "'Cause if yer split I'll be changed into a bad ghost — a reg'lar out-an'-out bad un'; an' I'll jest delight in scarin' boys a'most t' death. But you fellers ain't goin' t' tell anyone," he continued, hastily. "You don' wanter ruin a poor ghost, I know. You'll be true t' me, won't yer?"

"Fer ever an' ever," said Dick, solemnly.

"That's all right. Then ye'll alwiz have good luck. An' now ain't yer best be goin'?"

He had been regarding Dolf critically, anxiously, all the time, and he spoke again as if for his benefit.

"Mind, there ain't no cause to be funky if yer don't blab. 'S long as yer straight an' square ye've got a ghost what's yer bes' friend, recollect' that."

Sim's ghost had not moved from the spot on which he stood when they first saw him, and it seemed to Dick that the light surrounding him shone from an excavation in the side of the drive. The ghost raised his hand awkwardly as if asking a blessing, and said:

"So long! Time's up."

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Dolf tugged at Dick's arm, and the boys turned away, and hastened down the drive towards the shaft.

"Remember!" the ghost called after them. "No reason t' be afraid so long ez yer don't split. Bes' friend!"

The ghost did more: when they had gone a little distance he started after them, walking gingerly to make no noise, fearing that the knowledge that he was following would add to the terror that afflicted young Belman. When he reached the plat the boys were already far up the shaft, and Dickie's voice could be faintly heard advising and encouraging his mate.

Dolf went first, and he climbed with blind haste. Dick had to hold him to force him to rest upon the staging.

"Grip hard, an' go slow an' careful, Dolf," was his constant warning. He had heard that advice given by old miners. "Keep close to the ladder. There's lots o' time, Dolf. Nothin' t' be afraid of, you know. He's a jolly good sort, that ghost. Eh -- don't you think?"

But Dolf spoke never a word; his face was white and set; when they stood on the staging his eyes turned up to the light above, and he never ceased to tremble. It was now that Dick experienced real, cold terror. He feared that his mate would fall, and if he fell death was certain.

Dolf did not fall. He reached the top safely, and Dick almost lifted him through the opening, and dragged himself through after, quite exhausted, and down below the ghost mopped his cold, damp forehead with his sleeve, and murmured fervently -- "Thank God! thank God!"

Dolf Belman remained for a couple of minutes prostrate on the ground, and then he scrambled to his feet, and started towards home, Dickie walking by his side, doing all he could to reassure him. At the Belmans' gate Dickie held his mate for a moment:

"No tellin's, Dolf," he said, anxiously.

Dolf shook his head.

"Not even t' yer mother!"

"No, no, not a word. So help me! -- never, never, never!"

Chapter V.

NEXT morning whilst Dick was having breakfast he was startled to see Mrs. Belman enter the kitchen. She was seeking sympathy and advice. Her boy had been ill all night, and was "queer" this morning, feverish and wild. Mrs. Haddon, a round, motherly little woman, had sympathy to spare for all the troubled in mind and afflicted in body. She advised the use of camomile tea. Camomile grew everywhere about Waddy, and Mrs. Haddon recommended it in varying shapes for all ailments. Dickie left the mothers discussing physics and diseases, and stole away. He was much concerned about his mate, and a guilty conscience advanced distressing accusations all day. There was another thing to trouble him -- Agnes Brett's wedding was to be solemnized on the following Tuesday; and in the meantime Dickie developed a curiosity about marriages and forms of marriage that taxed his mother's knowledge and patience severely. On Tuesday Dolf was still very ill, but that fact did not restrain Dick from creating a most unseemly sensation at the Kiley-Brett wedding. His act provoked much talk and satisfied the wise-acres of Waddy that all their former suspicions as to the complete sanity of "that boy Haddon" were fully justified.

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The chapel was crowded for the occasion. The rosy bride was smiling gaily, and perfectly composed in her abundant orange blossoms and a shiny silk dress, and the groom, in all the unaccustomed glory of a long-tailed coat, new lavender trousers, and gloves, faced her, looking confused and ungainly, and bearing himself like an ill-designed automaton.

Suddenly, at a most impressive point in the service, Dickie moved from his place, and, taking a prominent position in the aisle, cried in a loud, clear voice:

"I forbid this marriage!"

A peculiar hush fell upon the chapel, the minister was silenced, and all eyes turned wonderingly upon the amazing small boy in the aisle. Dick's recent inquiries and his literary knowledge, gleaned from cheap fiction, satisfied him that to stop a marriage it was only necessary for somebody to stand up in the church and forbid the ceremony, and he stood there, prepared to take all the responsibility.

A little girlish giggling was heard from the back seat, and then a voice of authority called:

"Put that boy out!"

Brother Spence captured Dickie from the rear, and led him away. Outside the good brother was strongly moved to administer paternal chastisement, but, recollecting the character and temper of his captive, delivered only a stern admonition in choice Cornish, and let him go.

The marriage ceremony was finished, and the couple departed for a brief honeymoon; and Dick Haddon spent two moody days, with the poor consolation of knowing that he had done his best for Sim's ghost. Now the spirit's only chance of rescue lay in the possibility of there being somebody else in the world who cared for him. Dolf, they told him, was getting stronger, but he was not allowed to visit his mate, and there were hints of a mystery that filled him with suspicion. Could Dolf have proved false? Would he dare to risk the anger of the spirits by telling what he knew?

On the Friday night, shortly after dark, Dick encountered quite a crowd on the common, and his heart sank within him. The people were making for the Peep-o'-Day, and Brother Tresize, who led the way, carried a long line and some candles. Dickie was seized by one of the women.

"Here's they boy Haddon!" she cried, dragging her prize along.

Brother Tresize took him by the ear. Mr. Tresize was paid by the company to look after the mine while it was shut down, and he was conscious of having neglected his duty, but now he was full of zeal.

"Wha's all this here sinfulness 'bout ghosts in the ole mine, you?" he asked.

"You le' go 'r I'll kick!" muttered Dick, sullenly.

Brother Tresize shifted his grip to the boy's collar.

"Hows'ever, you're found out, boy, an' I do suppose they p'lice will be lookin' for 'ee. So come along, you."

Dick went willingly enough. He wondered what was known, and wondered even more what was going to happen. At the mine other men were standing about -- Pearce, and Minahan, and Houten, and Spence, and Tinker Smith. The cover was off, and the rope from one of the capstans was rigged over the pulley-wheel, and hung in the pump shaft.

Below And On Top and other stories

"He's down beyant all right," said Minahan. "Sure, he ain't shown out since."

Without further talk, Tresize, Houten, and Minalian equipped themselves with candles and started down the ladders, Tresize carrying the line in a coil about his neck. At the same time others commenced paying out the capstan rope, which travelled slowly down the shaft.

During the long wait that followed the chatter of the women never ceased, and Dickie gathered that Dolf had told the whole truth about their journey into the mine. Mrs. Belman carried the information to Brother Tresize, who set a watch, and to-night a stranger had been seen to come through the bush and make his way down the ladders. These men had gone below to take the mysterious intruder red-handed in whatever iniquity he might be engaged upon, and on top there was much speculation. Some thought the man must be a criminal escaped from justice — a murderer, no less — the artistic verities demanded that; others concluded he was mad. Dickie was questioned, and threatened, and abused, but he shut his lips tight, and said never a word. He stood there as stubborn, unamiable, and aggravating a little imp as the women had knowledge of.

At length there was a call from Minahan, half-way up the ladders:

"Hello, on top! Someone ride like blazes fer a docthor!"

The people stared blankly into each other's faces for a moment, a woman screamed, and then a young man broke away from the crowd, and fled across the common. There was another call:

"Heave up — man on!"

The men rushed the capstan, and the long arms swept round, but it was necessarily slow work, and the rope came creeping up out of the black depths, whilst the crowd, standing about the shaft, watched it in silence, with grey, expectant faces. There was a good moon, but a lantern was set at the mouth of the shaft, shedding its feeble light upon the tardy rope. The demand for a doctor meant something serious, perhaps a tragedy, and stout, voluble, assertive Mrs. Tresize was subdued, crushed into meekness. Maybe brother Tresize was the victim.

"Easy there!" a warning call to the men on the capstan, and then the figure of a man stole up out of the shadows, and the light of the lantern fell upon it, hanging limply from the rope, to which it was securely bound. One side of the face was deathly white, the other showed black in the dim light. About the head was a rough bandage, and from under that and through the thick hair crept a sluggish flow of blood, dyeing the whole cheek.

"Phil Houten!" screamed Mrs. Tresize, and then the buildings and the timbers and tips of the big mine echoed and re-echoed the eerie laughter of a woman. Two others seized Mrs. Tresize, and patted, and petted and cajoled her, but she kept up that wild, irrelevant laughter for several minutes. Meantime they had set the unconscious Houten upon the long grass near the office, and the other women were gathered about him, each eager to assist in the work of washing and bandaging. Woman has the keenest sympathies, and she loves to indulge them.

"Down wid the rope once more!" cried Minahan from the depths, and the great wooden capstan was reversed, and again the men ran it at their best speed. Running a capstan is exhausting work, and finds your weak spot sooner than a whole council of doctors, consequently the best speed was a slow trot; but the crowd had a diversion in Houten, who continued in an unconscious condition, and whose head showed several bad wounds. Evidently the stranger below had made a good fight for it.

Dickie's mind was in volcanic condition, throwing up many theories, but he clung to his faith in Sim's ghost, and awaited developments. These people were flying in the face of the supernatural; Houten was there to teach them what they might expect — no one would heed him.

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"Ease her!" cried Tinker Smith, and again a face came up out of the darkness of the mine, and Dickie started forward. This time the face was that of the ghost — its eyes fixed on Dick menacingly; and Dick met them bravely, and he shook his head in answer to the accusation he saw there.

Sim's ghost was also bound and tied to the rope.

"Keep a tight grip av him," said Minahan, who appeared on the surface a moment later; "he's a tearin', howlin' divil t' fight."

Minahan bore corroborative detail in the shape of a cut forehead, a black eye, and a shirt torn to rags; and Tresize, who next appeared, had not escaped without proofs of the prisoner's prowess in combat.

The ghost was bound hand and foot, and strong hands held him, whilst curious eyes turned upon Tresize.

"Gold stealin'!" said Tresize, with the gratified air of a man who has big news.

This loosened tongues. It was something to have discovered anything worth stealing in the old mine.

"Where?" "How?" "Where 'bouts?" Each man had a question.

"Sthruck a dacent patch this side the incline in Number 2," said Minahan. "Must have known the place. Opened out off the main droive, an' he's bin workin' there fer weeks. He have a puddlin' tub an' a cradle down there, an' carried water from the shaft. There's manny a week's work done. Be me sowl, I believe he have been livin' there!"

Brother Tresize held up a pickle bottle, in which there was much coarse gold.

"They man have more'n this somewhere for sure."

"Who is he, anyhow?" and the light was thrown upon the scowling face of the stranger. "What's yer name, mate?"

The ghost replied with vigorous profanity.

"I know him, I reekerlect!" and Tinker Smith thrust a crooked, accusing finger in the man's face —

"Bill Masters — useter work here 'bout seven year ago. How are yer, Billy?"

Bill Masters cursed the little fossicker with great spirit, and relapsed into sullen silence. Then the party took up its wounded and its prisoner, and carried them to the township, and Dickie followed after, disgusted. He had forgiven much in this ghost, but a ghost cannot be bound with cords and carried into captivity by mere mortals. Whatever spirits might haunt the drives and shoots of the Peep—o'—Day, it was certain that the ghost he and Dolf had interviewed was a shocking impostor. Dick's latest romantic illusion fell from him like a garment, and his faith in Sim perished with the rest. Next day he was back with the boys of Waddy again, fresh and hungry for devilment.

But there followed the trial of Bill Masters, at which Dick was a witness, and throughout which everybody had a very great deal to say, excepting only the man most concerned, and he said nothing. It was shown that Masters had worked in the Peep—o'—Day, and it was concluded that he had discovered a patch in the main drive, which followed the gutter. The patch was hardly more than a sudden widening of the gutter carrying the gold. He had clayed this over and left it, probably with the connivance of his mate, and with the idea that some day he might have the opportunity of working it. The shutting down of the mine gave him that opportunity. What Bill Masters left of the patch was rich in coarse gold. What he took out of it was known only to him self; but the miners of Waddy were satisfied it was enough to recompense him for the five years' hard labour imposed upon him by the

solemn judge.

A Sabbath Morn At Waddy

SUNDAY-SCROOL was "in" at Waddy. The classes were all in place, and of the teachers only Brother Spence was absent, strange to say. This was the first Sunday of the new superintendent's term, always an evil time for grace, and a season of sulkiness, and bickering, and bad blood. Each beloved brother coveted the dignity of the office, and those who failed to get it were consumed with envy and all uncharitableness for many Sabbaths after. Some deserted the little wooden chapel on the hill till the natural emotions of prayerful men pent in their bosoms could no longer be borne, and then they stole back, one by one, and condoned in hurricanes of exhortation with rain and thunder.

Brother Nehemiah Best occupied the seat of office behind a deal table on the small platform, under faded floral decorations left since last anniversary. Rumour declared that Brother Best was unable to write his own name, and whispered that he spent laborious nights learning the hymns by heart before he could give them out on Sunday, as witness the fact that he "read" with equal facility whether the book was straight, or end-ways, or upside down. Brother Best was thin-voiced, weak in wind, and resourceless and unconvincing in prayer. No wonder Brother Spence was disgusted. Brother Spence could write his own name with scarcely more effort than it cost him to swing the trucks at the Phoenix; his voice raised in prayer set the loose shingles fairly dancing on the old roof; and his recitation of "The Drunkard's Doom" had been the chief attraction on Band of Hope nights for years past. Ernest Spence had not hesitated to express himself freely at Friday evening's meeting:

"Ay, they Brother Best, he no more fit for pourin' out the spirit, you, than a blin' kitten. Look at the chest of en!"

"True for en, Ernie!" cried Brother Tresize.

"They old devil, you, he laugh at Best's prayin', sureli. Brother Spence some tuss, you."

But Brother Spence had left the meeting in a state of righteous indignation. Yet here were Brothers Tresize, and Tregaskis, and Prator, and Pearce, and Eddy. True, they all looked grim and unchastened, and there was an uneasy, shifty feeling in the chapel that inspired boys and girls, young men and young women, teachers and choir, with great expectations. Brother Best, in his favourite attitude, with one arm behind him under his coat tails, his right hand holding the book a yard from his eyes, his right foot thrust well out, the toe touching the floor daintily, made his first official announcement:

"We will open they service this mornin' by singing hymn won, nought, won."

Then, in a nasal sing-song, swinging with a long sweep from toe to heel and heel to toe, he gave out the first verse and the chorus, ending unctuously with a smack of the lips at the line:

Thou beautiful, beautiful Poley Star!

Nehemiah was a dairyman, and had a fixed conviction that the poley star and a poley cow had much in common.

The hymn being sung, the superintendent engaged in prayer, speaking weakly, with a wearisome repetition of stock phrases, eked out with laboured groans and random cries.

Brother Tresize could not disguise his cynical disgust, and remained mute. A prayer to be successful amongst the Wesleians of Waddy must make the hearers squirm and wriggle upon their knees, and cry aloud. Brothers and sisters were all happy when moved to wild sobbing, to the utterance of moans, and groans, and hysterical appeals to heaven, and when impelled to sustain a sonorous volley by the vigorous use of pocket handkerchiefs; but that

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was a spiritual treat that came only once in a while, with the visit of a specialist, or when the spirit moved Brother Spence or Brother Tresize to unusual fervor.

The superintendent's prayer did not raise a single qualm; and the boys of Class II. straggled openly over the forms, pinched each other, and passed such rubbish as they could collect to Dicky Haddon, the pale, saintly, ginger-headed boy at the top of the class, who was in honour bound to drop everything so sent him in amongst the mysteries of the old, yellow, guttural harmonium, through a convenient crack in the back.

Throughout the service Brother Best, proud of his new office, watched the scholars diligently, visiting little boys and girls with sudden sharp raps or twitches of the ear if they dared even to sneeze, but judiciously overlooking much that was injurious and unbecoming in the bigger boys of Class II., who had a vicious habit of sullenly kicking elderly shins when cuffed or wigged for their misdeeds.

The Bible reading, with wonderful, original expositions of the obscure passages by horny-handed miners, occupied about half an hour, and then the superintendent stilled the racket and clatter of stowing away the tattered books with an authoritative hand, and invited Brother Tresize to pray. If he was great he could be merciful.

Brother Tresize made his preparations with great deliberation, spreading a handkerchief large enough for a bed-cover to save the knees of his sacred black-cloth trousers, hitching up the latter to prevent bagging, and finally loosening his paper collar from the button in front to give free vent to his emotions – and preserve the collar. Then, the rattling of feet, the pushing and shoving, the coughing and whispering and sniffing having subsided, and all being on their knees, Brother Tresize began his prayer in a soft, low, reverent voice that speedily rose to a reverberant roar.

"Oh, Gwad, ah! look down upon we here, ah; let the light of Thy countenance ahluminate, ah, this little corner of Thy vineyard, ah. Oh, Gwad, ah! be merciful to they sinners what be assembled here, ah; pour down Thy speerit upon they, ah, make they whole, ah. Oh, Gwad, ah! Thoo knowest they be some here, ah, that be wallerin' in sin, ah, some that be hippycrits, ah, some that be cheats, ah, some that be scoffers, an' misbelievers, an' heathens, oh, Gwad, ah! Have mercy on they people, oh, Gwad, ah! Show they Thy fires, ah, an' turn they from the wrath, oh, Loord Gwad, ah!"

Brother Tresize was evidently in fine form this morning; already the windows were vibrating before the concussions of his tremendous voice, and the floor bounded under the great blows that punctuated his sentences. As he went on, the air became electrical, and the spirit moved amongst the flock. The women felt it first.

"Oh, Gwad, ah!" interjected Mrs. Eddy from her corner.

"Throw up the windies, an' let the speerit in!" sobbed Mrs. Eddy.

Brother Prator blew his nose with a loud report, a touching and helpful manifestation.

Brother Tresize prayed with every atom of energy he possessed. His opinion was on record:

"A good prayer Sunday mornin', you, takes it out of en more'n a hard shift in a hot drive, you."

When his proper momentum was attained he oscillated to and fro between the floor and the form, swaying back over his heels till his head almost touched the boards – a gymnastic feat that was the envy of all the brethren – he shook his clenched fist at the rafters and reached his highest note. The plunge forward was accompanied by falling tones, and ended with a blow on the form that made every article of furniture in the building jump. The perspiration ran in streams down his face and neck; dry sobs broke from his labouring chest; long strands of his moist, well-oiled, red hair separated themselves from the flattened mass and stood out like feelers, to the wild,

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ungodly delight of Class II.; and whilst he prayed the brethren and "sistern" kept up a continuous fire of interjections and heartrending groans.

"They be people here, ah! what is careless of Thy grace; chasten 'em with fire an' brimstone – chasten 'em, oh, Lord, ah! They be those of uz what go to be Thy servants, oh, Gwad, ah! an' to do Thy work here below, ah, what is tried an' found wantin', ah – some do water they milk, oh, Gwad, ah! an' some do be misleadin' they neighbors' hens to lay away. Smite they people for Thy glory, oh, Loord, ah!"

A great moaning filled the chapel, and all heads turned towards Brother Nehemiah Best, kneeling at his chair, with his face buried in his hands, trembling violently. Nehemiah, two years earlier, had been fined for watering the milk sold to his town customers; quite recently he had been thrown into the Phoenix slurry by an unregenerate trucker, who accused him of beguiling his hens to lay from home. Brother Tresize was wrestling with the superintendent in prayer, and the excitement rose instantly to fever heat.

"They what do not as they wad be done by, pursue 'em, ah; smite they with Thy right hand, oh, Lord Gwad, ah! so they may be turned from they wickedness, ah. They what have better food to they table for theyselves than for they children or they wives, ah, they what be filled with vanity, ah, they what havin' no book–learnin' do deceive Thy people, an' fill the seats o' the learned, ah, deal with such, oh, Gwad, ah!"

Brother Tresize was now almost frantic with the ecstasy of his zeal. His exhortation was continued in this strain, and every word was a lance to prick the cowering superintendent. The women sniffed and sobbed, the men groaned and cried "Ahmen, ah!" It was a great time for grace.

But suddenly a new voice broke in – a shrill, thin voice, splitting into that of Brother Tresize like a steam–whistle. Brother Best had assumed the defensive.

"Oh, Lord, ah!" he cried, "give no ear to they what bears false witness against they neighbors, to they what backbite, ah, an' slander, ah, an' bear malice, ah; heed they not, oh, Lord, ah!"

Abel Tresize rose to the occasion. It was a battle. His voice swelled till it rivalled the roar of the ravening lion; he no longer selected his words or cared to make himself understood of the people; it was necessary only to smother Brother Best, to pray him down, and Abel prayed as no man had ever prayed before at Waddy. A curious crowd – the Irish children, Dan the Drover, an old shepherd, and a few cattlemen from the Red Cow – attracted by the great commotion, had assembled in the porch, and were gazing in open–mouthed, delighted.

Tresize persevered, but Best's shrill, penetrating voice rang out distinctly above all. Brother Best was transformed, inspired; under the influence of his great wrath he had waxed eloquent; he smote his enemy hip and thigh, he heaped coals of fire upon his head, and marshalled St. Peter and all the angels against him.

The severity of his exertions was telling heavily upon Abel Tresize; he was dreadfully hoarse, his great hands fell upon the form without emphasis, he was almost winded, and his legs wobbled under him. He pulled himself together for another effort, and the cry that he uttered thrilled every heart, but it quite exhausted him, and he went over backwards, striking his head upon the floor, and lay in the aisle convulsed in a fit.

Instantly the chapel became a babel. The teachers ran to Brother Tresize, and bore him into the open air, the wondering children crowding after, and left the new superintendent sobbing on his table like a broken–hearted boy.

The Trucker's Dream

"I HAD a divil of a drame last night," said Bart O'Brien, as he crowded his usual two-pound "plaster" of cold fried bacon and bread into his crib-bag.

"'Drame,' d'ye call it?" muttered Brown from his bunk. "I thougt you had the buckin' fantods; you howled like a madman."

"Be Hiven, I don't wonder thin. I thought I was pumpin' away in the place below there, whin thim two sets at the bottom av the incline came away, an' I saw Lane crushed under thim. His dead face was starin' out av the heap at me, all battered an' bloody, an' ghost-like in the candle-light. Faith, an' I ain't much amused wid these lone shifts!"

The boys grinned at O'Brien's fears, but Gleeson muttered something about the manager being "d--d well hanged" for not giving an eye to that timber, and Gleeson was considered an authority.

Bartholomew O'Brien was a Bungaree native. In Bungaree the natives are more Milesian than the Irish. Bart had for Father Cassidy a great, childlike veneration that the ribald stories told of His Reverence by Bart's sceptical hut-mates could not shake; and his belief in the wonders and mysteries of his religion and the folklore of his mother's country was profound. Bartholomew had also ruddy cheeks, and an unreliable heart.

It was Sunday evening at Waddy, hot and thirst-provoking. His mates were lounging about in their trousers on the tumbled bunks, but O'Brien was due on the plat at nine o'clock, and was dressed in his working clothes. He was a trucker at the Hand-in-Hand, and it was his turn to go below into the mine and pump the water over the incline at the head of the main drive on the lower level. Every Sunday night, after the long shift off, this work had to be done by one of the truckers, so that the face might be dry for the first night-shift, coming on at one a.m. None of the boys liked the job – O'Brien hated it. In the presence of a tangible danger he was as game a fellow as any in the district, but his superstition – an ineradicable inheritance intensified by early influences that bring the emotional side of the unlettered believer to an unhealthy development, and leave to the man the reasoning faculties of the child – made him little more than an irresponsible idiot when his imagination ran riot amongst the spooks and wraiths. He had an extraordinary stock of mottoes, religious and legendary, for warding off the spirits, and possessed all the portable charms obtainable; but his faith was not as powerful as his fears, and, in spite of these spiritual arms and armour, he dreaded to be alone in the murderous old mine with the ghosts of its many dead.

On going to the bottom level that night, and threading the course of the long, tortuous main drive, the trucker found the water below the incline higher than usual. The heavy iron pump stood over a slab-covered well in a small chamber about ten feet by six, dug in the side of the drive. It was worked with a back-racking up-and-down stroke, and lifted the water into pipes, which carried it to the higher ground, whence it drained to the shaft. The face was quite a thousand yards from the plat; and the sound from the air-pipe, like the laborious breathing of some gigantic animal afar off, offered no relief from the oppressive stillness and the deathly atmosphere of the drive.

It is a trying thing to a man afflicted with the accumulated superstitions of a hundred generations to be left alone for any time in the deep, extensive workings of an old mine, every drive, and winze, and shoot in which has its tale of blood and suffering. Bart O'Brien stuck his candle to the side of the chamber, and paused to listen. The terror was already strong upon him: his mouth was dry, and his heart beat like a plunger, catching his breath at every pulsation. The chamber was deep enough down and hot enough to suggest its proximity to the flaming home of all the damned devils in whose existence Bartholomew implicitly believed. He had done solitary duty several times at the pump, but never before had his horror of it been so great as to-night. His dream recurred to

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him, and he glanced uneasily towards the suspicious sets. He was a believer in the portents of dreams – he expected something to come of this one.

Catching at the long handle, Bart began to pump, almost in desperation. Up and down, up and down – there was relief in action, and he worked fiercely. The pump had been oiled recently, and ran smoothly and noiselessly. This irritated him – he wanted hard work, something material to fight with. And then the "click, clack," would have gone well to the rhythm of an ancient Irish rhyme which his old mother held to be infallible in keeping the elves from cows, and which he was wont to mutter all the time when beset by supernatural enemies.

So hard was the mental battle O'Brien was fighting that bodily pain or weariness never obtruded. With bent head and tightly-closed eyes he toiled at the big pump, whilst the perspiration streamed from him and ran through the folds of his scant clothing. Sometimes the face of Geordie Lane, corpse-white and bloodstained, as he had seen it in his dream, thrust itself upon him; then his brows met in cords, his hands gripped the iron with a force that split his callous fingers, the handle took a quicker, longer sweep, and the water boiled and foamed into the wooden gutter in the drive.

Bart worked in this manner till about half-past eleven; then he was startled by a gurgling, choking sound in the well beneath his feet, and fell back into one corner of the chamber with an exclamation, his eyes staring, full of fear.

The pump was drawing air! He had done four hours' hard work in little over half the time. The drive was dry.

The young man's left arm was rubbed raw from the elbow to the wrist, and his indurated hands were bleeding profusely from several deep cracks. Bart gazed at the blood stupidly, and presently found himself listening again – listening in the profound silence, out of which he heard at length the distinct patter of footsteps. Small flakes of clay were falling from the roof of the drive on to the muddy floor, but what little reasoning power Bart had was lost by this time in a passion of superstitious fear. He clutched the pump-handle once more, but it rose and fell loosely, with a clatter, and drew no water.

With nothing for his hands to do, O'Brien was no longer able to control his thoughts; they ran over the history of the mine – its list of killed. He recalled the story of Martin's ghost haunting the old balance-shaft, whilst the spirit of his wife, who died of grief, sought for him after every shift in the next level. He remembered with startling vividness Rooke, the braceman, as he looked spread upon the plat-sheets after falling down five hundred feet of shaft-battered into a horrible mass, out of which the face stood forth, ghastly white, and unmarked, though the brain was laid bare as cleanly as by surgeon's saw. Then passed before his eyes in grisly procession, showing their fearful wounds – Bill the trucker, killed at No. 5 by a fall; Carter, brained in the shaft; Praer and Hopkins, smashed in the runaway cage; Moore and German Harry, blown up in the well when sinking; and Lane, pinched under the shattered timber right before his eyes there in the drive.

O'Brien was crouching in the corner. No longer understanding that it was only in a dream he had seen Lane killed, he expected a ghost to start up before his eyes – a ghost with mangled limbs and a pale, blood-stained face. He remained thus for some time, fighting the dread as it grew upon him. At length he started up, and his fear found vent in a yell that echoed shrilly through the workings. He meant to rush into the drive and make his way to the shaft, but struck his head against the pump-handle at the first stride, and was hurled back into the water, which had risen again to the height of several inches.

The blow and the drenching steadied Bart a little, and he started pumping once more, with nervous energy. Whilst he worked, the candle fell from the wall and hissed out in the wet clay. He had no matches. In a few minutes the pump was drawing wind again, and now O'Brien's greatest trial began.

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The darkness was solid, substantial – the young man felt it weighing upon him with a pressure as of deep water, and his sense of solitude and awe was such as might be known by the last, lone man in a waste, sunless world. At times he crushed his ears with his hands to shut out the dreadful silence, and then he heard the passing of spirit feet, the muffled beat of wings, sobbing sounds, and long moans dying away beyond the distant curves. His treacherous eyes saw fleeting forms and tense, inhuman faces traced in faint, phosphorescent lines on the dense, black wall that stood up before him. His agonized fears had now obtained complete mastery of him, his mind ran in a frenzy from horror to horror, and an intolerable dread filled his soul with hellish expectations.

He stood transfixed at the back of the chamber, his arms outspread, his fingers dug knuckle-deep in the sodden reef. His eyes stared as in death, and his mouth was open wide, the fallen lower jaw jerking spasmodically. His greatest terror was of the thing he had seen at the chamber-door – the corpse – face under the splintered timbers. He saw it now, white as quartz, with clots of blood hiding the eyes; he felt its presence – it mouthed at him – threatened him.

Out of the darkness and the silence of death came a faint rumbling sound, like far-off thunder. It swelled and drew nearer. It roared in the drive, and from the inky blackness, in a pale yellow light, Lane rose up with a bloody face, and caught at O'Brien.

A minute or two later the men of the night-shift were shocked to meet Lane rushing back from the face like a maniac, with a dead man in his truck.

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"Thoo's got a bad cut i' tha head thasel,' lad," said the boss of the shift to Lane, half an hour later.

"Yes," he answered, "I slipped into that crab-hole at the second curve going up, and knocked my forehead on the truck."

The Fossickers

THE boy carried under his arm an old, rusty fryingpan, minus the handle. He was a small, sober-looking boy of about twelve years, with red hair and plenteous freckles; his big felt hat was tucked in in the approved style, and dusted with pipe-clay – he had carefully dusted it for the sake of verisimilitude; his shirt sagged artfully over the top of his moleskin trousers, which were tied under the knees with the customary "bowyangs." No detail was missing; the boots were covered with moist yellow clay, and the trousers were stained with mud from the dam and rust from the iron puddlers. Dickie was quite a realistic fossicker, a man of experience, invested with the dignity of labour.

The pan was full of greyish dust, in which were bits of gritty rope-yarn and many splinters. He sank it in the water of the dam, where stones were set for a footing, and began puddling the dirt, working with great care and a due sense of importance. He would have given much to have had a pipe and real tobacco – a bit of dry root, he felt, would not be equal to the occasion, he having "struck it" – his last dish realized quite ten grains.

Dickie puddled slowly, working his hands with the machine-like movement he had copied so accurately from the men at Pig Creek. He unravelled the bits of rope, and washed all the grit from them before they were thrown aside. No spot of clay that could hide a colour was left upon the chips, and when at length the dirt was completely puddled, he began the more interesting work of panning off.

Only about half a pint of material was left in the pan – sand and pebbles and rusty nails. The boy handled this deftly, pawing the stones and nails and throwing them out between his legs with the skill of an old hand; and then,

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shaking and dipping, he washed away the sand, until the yellow gold began to show through. Taking a little water in the dish he swirled the contents, and his heart bounded again. A streak of fine gold, with here and there a coarse speck, ran along the edge of black sand, and every lap widened the yellow band.

"Gimminy! Sonny, that's good ernuff!"

A little, grizzled, hard-looking old man, splashed with wet clay, was leaning over Dick, peering excitedly into the dish.

"Must be ten weights there, boy. Where'd yer get the stuff?"

"Find out!" said Dick, sulkily.

It is contrary to strict etiquette and accepted professional usage for one fossicker to go sneaking around another fossicker when the latter is panning off; it suggests an encroachment. Dickie filled with resentment. He shook the gold down, and moved away from the old man.

"Clear rout, can't you?" he growled.

"Only thot I'd show yer 'ow ter pan 'er off," piped the other, with a poor show of disinterestedness. This was a grievous insult to Dick, who flattered himself that he could always get a decent prospect out of Tinker's tailings, and who had been complimented on his art by an expert. Dickie felt it keenly.

"You jes'scoot – go on!" he said, resentfully. "You want ter find out where I got this, so's you can collar the stuff, don't you? You sneaked that patch what I found by the office door, didn't you? 'n got thirty-bob's worth outer it. I know you!"

"But no one else ain't 'lowed ter fossick roun' this mine but me," said Tinker. "The right was given ter me by the board uv directors, see!"

"Ger out!" cried the boy, dubiously.

"Didn't they, but? Seehere!"

The old man drew a piece of crumpled paper from his breast – the piece he had had his tobacco wrapped in.

"See here, here's the blessed deed all draw'd up, an' with the Queen's signitur in 'er own 'andwritin'."

"Le's see."

The boy reached for the paper, but Tinker restored it hastily to his breast,

"'Somever," he said, "if you'll lay me on where yer got that dirt I don' mind lettin' yer wash a few dishes now 'n again. 'R yer on?"

"No, I ain't. My father was killed in this mine, an' I got ez good er right ez you."

"Oh, very well, young feller me lad! When the mounted p'lice comes along, I jes' fixes yer up for ten years' 'ard labour, with three floggin's, fer gold-stealin'."

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Dickie looked consternated for a moment, but soon recovered himself after recollecting that Tinker was always particularly and peculiarly anxious to avoid the police, and arguing inwardly that those great, proud men on the polished horses, who pranced through the township once a month or so, would certainly have nothing to do with a mean, dirty little hatter like Tinker Smith.

"If you don't gib out I'll climb up ter the wheels an' paste you with grease," he said, "an' drop rocks in yer puddlin' tub."

Tinker stood, eyeing the boy dispassionately, and clawing his scrubby beard.

"Ten years' 'ard labour, an' three floggin's," he repeated, musingly.

Dickie had armed himself with a stone, and struck an offensive attitude. "'R you goin', once?" he said.

"A dirty, dark gaol!" said Tinker, apparently to himself.

"'R you goin', twice?"

"No tucker, no bed, nothin' but lickin's an' leg-irons!"

"'R you goin', fer the third an' last time?"

Tinker moved off slowly, reciting as he went:

"Ten years an' three floggin's! Floggin's with the cat-o'-nine-tails – cat-o'-nine-tails with bits o' lead on 'em!"

But Dickie was not in the least impressed, and when Tinker had returned to his tub up the race, set eagerly to work to finish his prospect. About half an ounce of clean gold was the result, and the sight of it added to the feverish elation that was in the boy's blood. He had never washed such a rich dish before. Hundreds and hundreds of dishes he had taken from all sorts of holes and corners about the old mine, but hitherto the best result had been a pennyweight or so from a shovelful of surface dirt dug out just near the office door, where the sweepings were scattered, and Tinker had promptly confiscated a large area, and robbed him of his right as discoverer. An unconscionable fossicker was Tinker, with no respect for the nice observances of the craft and the unwritten code which forbids one man to take advantage of another's discoveries, to poach his preserves, or encroach upon his "dirt."

But since then Dick had learned to assert himself he had found that Tinker was not invulnerable, and now he knew that, when perched up by the great black twin wheels, on the swimming height at the top of the poppet-legs, he was master of the situation, and commanded the field. They were by far the highest legs in the country, and the old man never dared venture further than the brace, not half-way up; so that from his proud eminence Dick could bombard his foe with lumps of the congealed tar and grease that flaked the wonderful pulleys, until Tinker was glad to signal a truce.

Dick washed the gold from his pan into the up-turned bottom of a broken beer bottle, along with the few grains earned during the afternoon, and, after hiding it in a rabbit burrow under the bank, hastened up the wide wooden stair leading to the high brace of the deserted mine. Along by the machines he set to work on the floor of the puddling plat with an improvised broom and a scraper, collecting the dust that lay between the boards into his dish, gathering it with as much care as if it had been pure gold. Near here had stood one of the sluice-boxes – long since torn away and burnt for the sake of the gold secreted in its crevices – and Dick, noticing that the floor was double boarded, was inspired to pull up the top planks and wash the dust collected underneath and in the cracks. Fine gold is as insinuating as quicksilver; about an old alluvial mine you find it in the most unexpected

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places. Tinker once put in a good day's work washing the dust from above the Peep-o'-Day boilers, where the "knock-off" men had hung their clay-covered working clothes to dry, shift after shift, for many years; and anywhere within a hundred yards of the mine the colour could be got for the trying.

Tinker had followed Dick to the brace, and stood greedily overlooking the boy, who was digging dirt out of the cracks with a long, pointed nail, and deeply absorbed in his work. Tinker drew nearer, his little red eyes gleaming amongst their wrinkles. He had the reputation of a miser in Waddy, and certainly gold-dust had fascinations for him that did not arise wholly from its intrinsic value; but Dickie commanded respect – his power for mischief was great. Enthroned above, he had often taken summary and complete vengeance for injustices done him. It was an occasion for diplomacy.

"Ho, ho, young feller! I've cot yer, have I?" cried the old man. "This is burglary an' house-breakin'."

Dick Haddon armed himself in defence of his property, and faced his enemy, glaring defiance.

"Yer in fer it this time right enough, Mister Haddon. Le's see," continued Tinker, eyeing the boy's stick dubiously, "I b'lieve they hangs fer robbery with vi'lence."

"Don' care!" snorted Dick. "You come near me an' I'll break yer head."

"Look here, Dickie, you don' split on me, an' I won't split on you. We'll go harves. I works at this end, an' you at that. That's a fair do."

"No, you don't!" answered Dick, sturdily. "I found this patch, an' I ain't goin' t'give it up t'no-body."

It was a bad place for a scuffle. All the boards had been stripped from the plat at the far end, and between the big pine beams supporting the puddlers, and on which the floor had been laid, was a clear fall of about eighty feet to the clean white boulders below. But Tinker's cupidity was aroused; he believed that if the whole of the plat were stripped as the boy was doing it the dust would yield five or six ounces, and he was furious at having over-looked the job so long. He edged towards Dickie cunningly.

"I don't wanter get yer inter quod, 'cause o' yer pore widder mother," he said, "but the board o' directors said I wasn't t'allow no one 'round this mine, an' if yer don't clear I'll have ter go t'town an' 'ave yer took at once. Dooty's dooty!"

"Who cares?" shouted Dick, valiantly.

"Ger out, blast yer!"

Tinker closed with the lad, and there was a struggle. Dick struck out blindly with his stick, and it cracked on his enemy's head, and Tinker went tottering back, with out-thrown arms, over the edge of the floor, and fell among the beams, clutching wildly at their smooth sides. Dick saw his blanched face, horrified eyes, and his gaping, toothless mouth for one moment, and then he disappeared between the beams with a shrill and terrible cry, echoed by one yet shriller from the lips of the boy.

But Tinker had not fallen. A long nail in the side of one of the beams had caught in the slack of his capacious trousers at the back, and the old fossicker hung, head downwards, above the enormous stones, clawing like a suspended cat, and screaming like a frightened child. His trousers were far from new, and the nail was old and rust-eaten.

"Tinker, don't wriggle!" cried Dick. "Your trousers! – they'll tear – they'll tear!"

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Instantly Tinker became as rigid as a dead man, but the awful consciousness that he was slowly slipping out of his clothes redoubled his terror, and he never ceased to yell.

The boy, lying face downwards on a beam, made an attempt to pull him up by the shirt, but desisted instantly on perceiving that the effort only served to jeopardize Tinker's one poor hold. Then Dick was inspired with a great idea. He ran for the long nail which he had been using, seized an old tooth from a puddling harrow, and returning to the pendulous fossicker, drove the spike through the old man's trousers into the beam, taking in as much material as possible. A shriek of extraordinary vigor convinced him that he had skewered Tinker's leg to some extent, but it was no time for nice distinctions.

"Don't wriggle, Tink'!" gasped the boy. "Don't stir a wink 'r you'll fall outer yer pants. I'm off for help."

Tinker, head downwards and transfixed, with starting eyes glaring upon the stones far beneath him, where already in imagination he saw his mangled corpse, answered only with a groan, and Dickie fled along the puddling plat, across the brace, and down the wooden steps, missing the last six and landing in a heap with a blinding shock. When he quite recovered his senses again he found himself tearing across the paddocks towards the cattle-yards, with a strange feeling in his head and one arm hanging at his side like a piece of old rope. Over two fences and through a blackberry hedge, and Dick, white as a sheet, streaked with blood, ragged, and gasping, burst upon Michael Minahan at the yards.

"Tinker!" panted the boy. "Quick! Quick! Tinker! He's hanging! hanging! hanging!"

Michael was a man slow of comprehension under ordinary circumstances; but a glance at Dick and a glance in the direction of his outstretched finger sent him racing towards the mine, with poor maimed, winded Dickie toiling gamely in the rear.

Meanwhile Tinker was slipping, slipping through his clothes. His voice had failed him, and he could only cry with a hoarse, thin treble, breaking into a poor squeal of mortal fear when a decided slip set him clutching frantically at the thin air, and convinced him that his end had come.

When Minahan reached the steps, the fossicker had slipped through his moleskins, and hung by the feet, moaning piteously. The cords tied below his knees delayed the great catastrophe. There was still hope. Minahan mounted the stairs with a rush, three at a bound, and Dickie, prostrate upon the dam bank, completely exhausted, watched the inverted figure of Tinker Smith with wide, terrified eyes. Presently a large hand shot down and grasped one leg, and then to Dickie's mind the world seemed to go out like a candle. When he knew anything again he was in a white hospital ward, with his arm in splints and his head in many bandages; and long before he could use that arm again Tinker had scraped the puddling plat as clean as a dining table, and, although he told no one, it yielded seven ounces.

At The Yards

WADDY, in its decadence, lived through two days of every week. The awakening began late on Sunday night, or in the gloom of Monday morning, with the sound of phlegmatic cursing – softened and chastened by distance and the enfolding darkness – the yapping of busy dogs, the pathetic lowing of weary beasts, the marching of many hoofs, the slow movements of big flocks and herds on the ironstone road.

On Sunday evening Waddy was a mile-long township facing an apparently interminable post-and-rail fence and a wide stretch of treeless country dotted with poppet-legs – a township of some fifty houses, a Sunday-school and a chapel; grey, weatherboard, rain-washed houses, and an old, bleached, wooden day-school shored up on either side with stays, but lurching forward and peering stupidly out of its painted windows with a ludicrous

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suggestion of abject drunkenness. On Sunday evening Waddy was still, silent, and apparently deserted, oppressed by the weight of a Cousin-Jack Sabbath, but on Monday morning tents and covered carts linked the scattered houses, camp-fires smoked everywhere, and bearded cattle-men, making their scant toilet under the decent cover of a cart-wheel or a rail-fence, enlivened the place with light-hearted blasphemy and careless snatches of song, whilst flocks of sheep drifted on the common, fraternizing with the local goats, and mobs of cattle came slowly down the old toll-road, sniffing at the bare, brown track; the dust-coloured, sleepy drovers, with sunken heads, nodding on their limp horses.

Tuesday was sale-day. Monday afternoon was devoted to the yarding of cattle and the yarding and drafting of innumerable sheep – the former a comparatively easy and decorous undertaking; the latter a clamorous and arduous business provocative of disgust, dust, and madness, and inducing a thirst that afflicts the toiler like a visible disease, making him an object of pity to all humane beholders. The average bullock is of incalculable mental density, but he has the virtue of faith, and if you wish him to go through a gateway he goes in blind confidence; but you may pack a mob of five or fifty thousand sheep hard against a 10 ft. opening in a fence, and you may yap yourself hoarse, and beat your trousers to rags, and your dogs may bark their lungs up, without inducing a single monumental idiot of the whole flock to venture through.

It is a hot afternoon – it always was a hot afternoon, it seems to me at this distance – and scores of thousands of sheep are being hauled, and bullied, and cursed, and cajoled into the yards, and from pen to pen. There is a decided substratum of sound – the ceaseless, senseless bleating of sheep, low and unvarying; above this the "yap, yap, yap" of the men and boys, the sharp barking of the dogs, and the lowing of the cattle in the high yards beyond. Over all, the dust and the sun – a burning, yellow sun, and a rolling cloud of powdery dust – and everywhere in the air the taint of sheep, the pungent smell of the beasts, and the taste of them if you open your lips to breathe. It is a great time for several of the boys of Waddy; it means half a day from school and the opportunity of earning a shilling or two playing at work. Every healthy boy in the township is ambitious to be a drover, and have a black pipe, a wonderful horse, and a fabulous dog. Working at the yards is an approach to the ideal, and confers a dignity obtainable in no other way. To the boys penned in the stuffy little drunken schoolhouse the others who have a job at the yards are kings, and objects of an envy unspeakable. They command humble service, and awe, and admiration always.

With treasured whips, home-made of many fragments, the boys are busy helping with the drafting and penning of the cattle, or, coated half an inch deep with yellow dust, they are rushing the sheep up and down, bleary black patches indicating where their eyes may be, and muddy circles the probable situation of their mouths. It is hot, hard work, but, oh! the glory of it, and the pride of walking home with money in one's pockets, and covered with heaped-up, honourable dirt!

On sale-day the Drovers' Arms is hemmed in with conveyances of all sorts and sizes, each with a sober horse or two tethered to a wheel, dreaming with drooped heads under the scorching sun, or patiently foraging for the last oat in the corner of the feed-box. The heat is the same, so are the dust and the smells, but the noises of yesterday are supplemented by the continuous rattle of the auctioneers' voices. Over the simmering stew sound the voices like the crackling of gum-twigs in an open fire:—

"Fo'rteen T! fo'rteen T! fo'rteen T!
"All done eighteen, done eighteen, done eighteen!
"Fo'r pounds, I'm bid. Fo'r two six! fo'r two six!
"Fo'r two six! Goin'for – two – six!"

There are a few "drunks" sleeping in attitudes of absurd abandon along M'Mahon's fence, coated with flies; and out on the common, with the whole waste to themselves, two men, stripped to the buff, are engaging in a dull, boozy, interminable fight. They have been fighting ineptly for many hours, and their punctilious observance of the rules of the ring is the wildest farce; but the comedy is wasted on Waddy, and the drovers are too busy to give

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heed.

In the afternoon the cattle begin to move out again and off by the roads they came, but the babel continues, and the buyers – stout, red, bibulous men of one pronounced type – follow the auctioneers in knots along the platforms over the yards. The cattle are not the meek, weary animals of yesterday; they have been hustled from one yard to another, rushed around, whipped and prodded, packed into small pens, and cursed and orated over to the complete loss of their few poor wits, and there is now a decided note of revolt in the lowing that rises up from the yards like a lingering curse. In every lot turned out there are one or two beasts filled with blind, blundering hate; they swing up the road, leading the mobs, red-eyed and possessed of devils; cords of saliva hang from their muzzles, and their moaning is ominous, suggesting the vacuous complaining of a maniac.

The youngsters coming from school keep close to the rail-fence, but they delight to run deadly risks, and fill the air with the profane shrieks of the drovers. Often a goaded, homicidal bullock bolts, and then young hearts are glad. It is wonderful sport to behold that frantic race for the distant timber – the long, rolling plunge of the bullock, with the good horse working on his shoulder, and the volleying whip kicking up dust and hair from his hollow ribs.

The clatter of the auctioneers grows fainter and hoarser, and the perishing beasts in the pens below toss up their heads like the branches of wind-blown trees, and push hither and thither ceaselessly with a pitiful "mooring."

Marks is selling a pen of Bellman's stock in No. 26. The buyers cluster about him on top of the fence, and bidding is brisk. One bullock, a fine red beast, has knocked himself about badly; his tail has been torn clean away, one horn is cracked close to the head, and the thick red blood oozes out, and blackens rolling sluggishly down the white blaze of his face. It is a large yard, and there is plenty of room for the brute to charge, which he does several times, now and then driving blindly into another bullock, but generally cracking his skull sharply on the great posts of the fence. Suddenly a portly, helmeted buyer, leaning over to get a better view, misses his centre of gravity and goes after it, the whole 16 st. plumping solidly into the slush of the yard below. The red bullock is at him instantly. The good horn takes Langley in the back of the trousers, and the drive rips him bare to the collar, leaving him unmarked, but prone, in a condition of unseemly nudity.

The beast backs away for another drive, shaking his head and uttering his low, tigerish bellow, the expression of all malevolence; but at the same moment a figure drops smartly from the platform, and a ragged, smudgy, red-headed small boy is riding astride the animal's neck, diverting his attention by battering him over the eyes with an old felt hat. Dicky Haddon has performed this feat often for his own amusement, to the amazement of staid and matronly cows, but this is a beast of another colour, and the trick is done in response to an involuntary heroic impulse.

The bullock backs about the yard, tossing his head in an effort to be rid of his mysterious burden, and many hands clutch stout old Langley from the other pen, and tow him along through the mire to the gate, the bottom rail of which is high enough from the ground to enable them to pull him out of danger. Then he is borne away, unnerved and invertebrate. The boy seizes his opportunity, drops from the bullock and slips under the gate like a cat. Then he follows Langley, and stands in eager expectance whilst the damaged grazier is being bundled into his buggy. Really Langley suffers from nothing more serious than blue funk, but is oblivious of everything excepting a great craving for neat brandy, and is driven off without bestowing even a glance on his small preserver.

This base ingratitude inspires the youth with a loathing that can only be expressed in the choice idiom of the yards, and the disappointed hero, dancing in the road with his thumb to his nose, yells bitter and profane insults after Jabez Langley, moneyed man and M.L.A.

A Visit To Scrubby Gully

THE men at the mine were anxious to have me visit our magnificent property. The battery and water-wheel were erected, there were 50 tons of stone in the hopper, and we only needed water and the blessing of Providence to start crushing out big weekly dividends. I know now that there has never been a time within the memory of man when Scrubby Gully did not want water, and that Scrubby Gully is the one place on earth to which a discriminating man would betake himself if he wished to avoid all the blessings of Providence for ever. But that is beside the matter.

I was carefully instructed by letter to take the train to Kanan, coach it to the Rabbit Trap, take horse from Whalan's to the Cross Roads, ask someone at Old Poley's on the hill to direct me to Sheep's Eye; from there strike west on foot, keeping Bugle Point on my right, and "Chin Whiskers" would meet me at The Crossing. There was no accommodation at the mine for city visitors, but I was given to understand Mr. Larry Jeans would be happy to accommodate me at his homestead over the spur.

Casual references to Mr. Jeans in the correspondence gave me the impression that Jeans was an affluent gentleman of luxurious tastes and a hospitable disposition, and that a harmless eccentricity led him to follow agricultural and pastoral pursuits in the vicinity of Scrubby Gully instead of wasting his time in voluptuous ease in the city.

"Chin Whiskers" met me at The Crossing. "Chin Whiskers" was a meditative giant who exhausted his mental and physical energies chewing tobacco, and who bore about his person interesting and obvious evidence of the length and the severity of the local drought – he was, in fact, the drought incarnate. The Crossing was a mere indication of a track across a yellow, rock-strewn indentation between two hills, which indentation, "Chin Whiskers" informed me, was "The Creek." That did not surprise me, because I knew that every second country township and district in Australia has a somewhat similar indentation which it always calls "The Creek." Sometimes "The Creek" has moist places in it, sometimes it is quite damp for almost a dozen miles, but more often it is as hard and dry as a brick-kiln. When the indentation is really wet along its whole length it is invariably called "The River."

I found the mine; it was a simple horizontal hole bored in a hill. The battery was there, and the water-wheel. The water-wheel stood disconsolate beside the dust-strewn creek, and looked as much at home as a water-wheel might be expected to look in the centre of the sandy wastes of Sahara. The working shareholders were unaffectedly glad to see me. They were sapless and drought-stricken, but they assured me, with great enthusiasm, that they lived in momentary expectation of a tremendous downfall. Leen had been mending the roof of his hut, he said, in readiness for the heavy rains which were due before morning. He examined the sky critically, and expressed a belief that I would be detained on Scrubby Gully a couple of weeks or so in consequence of the floods.

This spirit of unreasonable hopefulness and trust seemed to be shared by Cody, and Ellis, and MacMahon. I alone was dubious. The journey up had worn me out; the dry desolation all around and the flagrant unprofitableness of our spec. sickened me; but Jeans still remained – the prodigal Jeans, with his spacious homestead and profuse hospitality. I was heartfully grateful for Jeans. We met in due course. As I talked with Leen, a man came wearily down the hill, towing a meagre horse, which in turn was towing a log. This man delivered his log, unslung his animal, and approached us, heroically lugging behind him the miserable apology for a horse – a morbid brute manifestly without a hope or ambition left in life, and conveying mysteriously to the observer a knowledge of its fixed and unshakable determination to lie down and die the moment its owner's attention was otherwise directed. But the proprietor seemed fully alive to the situation, and never allowed his thoughts to stray entirely from the horse, but was continually jerking its head up, and addressing towards it reproaches, expostulations, and curses – curses that had lost all their vigour and dignity. This man was Jeans, and if I had not seen his horse I would have said that Jeans was the most hopelessly heart-broken and utterly used-up animal breathing on the face of the

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earth. He was about 40, grey, hollow-cheeked, hollow-chested, bent, and apathetic with the dreadful apathy that comes of wasted effort, vain toil, and blasted hopes. Jeans had a face that had forgotten how to smile and never scowled – a face that took no exercise, but remained set in the one wooden expression of joyless, passionless indifference to whatever fate could offer henceforth and forever. My last hopes exploded at the sight of him.

Mr. Larry Jeans said I was welcome to camp in the spare room "up to" his place, and added dully that "proberly" his missus could scrape up grub enough for me "fer a day'r two." "Proberly" did not sound very encouraging, but I had no option, and, being dead-beat, accepted the hospitality offered, and followed Mr. Jeans. Larry laboriously hauled his melancholy horse over a couple of low stony rises, and then we tackled the scrag end of the range, across which led a vague track that wound in and out amongst a forest of great rocks, and presented all the difficulties and dangers of mountaineering without its compensations. Jeans struggled on with dull patience, and in silence, saving when it was necessary to divert the old horse from his morbid thoughts, and when he briefly answered my questions. I gathered from him that the men at the mine had been expecting rain for four months.

"And what do you think of the chances?" I asked.

"Oh, me, I never expect nothin'. Sometimes things happen. I don't expect 'em, though."

"Things happen – what, for instance?"

"Well, dry spells."

I elicited that pleuro happened, and rabbits, and fires, and "this here new-fangled fever." But whatever happened Jeans never fluctuated; he had struck an average of misery, and was bogged in the moral slough. It seemed as if his sensibilities above a certain capacity had been worn out by over-work, and refused to feel more than a fixed degree of trouble, so that whatever might come on top of his present woes, be it fever, or fire, or death, the man remained in his normal condition of grim apathy and spiritless obedience to fate.

The "homestead" stood upon the flat timbered country beyond the rise. It was just what Jeans's homestead might have been expected to be – a low structure of bark and slabs, with a slab chimney at one end, and a door in the middle between two canvas "windows." It stood in a small clearing; just beyond the house stood the skeleton of a shed, upon which, it being sundown, roosted a few gaunt fowls; a lank cow with one horn was deeply meditating by the front door. There were signs of bold raids upon the stubborn bush, pathetic ventures; and great butts lay about in evidence of much weary but unprofitable work. A dog-leg fence, starting at no particular point, straddled along in front of the house, and finished nowhere about a hundred yards off. Not a new fence either, but an old one, with much dry grass matted amongst the logs – that was the pathos of it. There had been a brave attempt at a garden, too; but the few fruit trees that stood had been stripped of the bark, and the hens had made dust-baths in all the beds. In this dust an army of children were wallowing – half-clad, bare-footed, dirt-encrusted children, but all hale and boisterous.

At the door we were met by Mrs. Larry Jeans, and after introducing me as "him from the city," the master laboured away, dragging his shuffling horse, and leaving me in the centre of a wondering circle of youngsters of all sorts and sizes, from two dusty mites not yet properly balanced on their crooked little legs up to a shock-headed lubberly boy of thirteen, curiously embossed with large tan freckles, and a tall, gawky girl of the same age in preposterously short skirts, whom my presence afflicted with a most painful bashfulness. A peculiarity about Jeans's children that struck me was the fact that they seemed to run in sets: there was a pair even for the sticky baby deftly hooked under its mother's left arm, judging by the petulant wailing to be heard within.

The Jeans's homestead consisted of two compartments. I looked about in vain for the "spare room," and concluded it must be either the capacious fire-place or the skeleton shed on which the hens were roosting. The principal article of kitchen furniture was a long plank table built into the floor; between it and the wall was a bush-made

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form, also a fixture. A few crazy three-legged stools, a safe manufactured from a zinc-lined case, and an odd assortment of crockery and tin cups, saucers, and plates piled on slab shelves in one corner, completed the list of "fixings."

Mrs. Larry Jeans was a short, bony, homely woman, very like her husband – strangely, pathetically like in face and demeanour; similarly bowed with labour, and with the same air of hopelessness and of accepting the toils and privations of their miserable existence as an inevitable lot. She was always working, and always had worked; her hands were hard and contorted in evidence of it, and her cheek was as brown and as dry as husks from labouring in the sun.

We had tea and bread and boiled onions and corned beef for tea that evening – a minimum of beef and a maximum of onions. The last onion crop had been a comparative success somewhere within half a day's journey of Scrubby Gully. Tea served to introduce more children; they dangled over the arms of the unhappy mother, hung to her skirts, sprawled about her feet, squabbled in the corners, and overran the house. Jeans helped to feed the brood in his slow, patient way, and after tea he helped to pack away the younger in little bundles – here, there, and everywhere – where they slept peacefully, but in great apparent peril, whilst the bigger kids charged about the room and roared, and fought, and raised a very pandemonium of their own. Every now and again Mrs. Jeans would lift her tired head from her sewing or her insatiable twins, and say weakly, "Now, you Jinny, behave." Or Larry would remark dispassionately, "Hi, you, Billy!" But otherwise the youngsters raged unchecked, their broken-spirited parents seeming to regard the noise and worry of them as the lightest trial in a world of struggling and trouble.

I asked Jeans how many children he thought he had. He didn't seem certain, but after due deliberation said there might be thirteen in all. He had probably lost count, for I am certain I tallied fifteen – seven sets and one odd one.

When the washing-up was done, and half of the family were bedded down, Larry dragged a tangle of old harness from the other room, and sat for two hours painfully piecing it up with cord, and his wife sat opposite him, silent and blank of face, mending one set of rags with another – I perched upon a stool watching the pair, studying one face after the other, irritated at length by the sheeplike immobility of both, thinking it would be a relief if Jeans would suddenly break out and do something desperate, something to show that he had not, in spite of appearances, got beyond the possibility of sanguinary revolt; but he worked on steadily, uncomplainingly, till the boy with the unique freckles came hurrying in with the intelligence that the old horse was "havin' a fit'r somethin'." Jeans did not swear. He said "Is he but?" and put aside his harness, and went out, like a man for whom life has no surprises.

The selector was over an hour struggling with his hypochondriac horse, whilst I exchanged fragments of conversation with Mrs. Jeans, and went upon various mental excursions after that spare room. It appeared that the Jeanses had neighbours. There was another family settled seven miles up the gully, but Mrs. Jeans informed me that the Dicksons, being quiet and sort of down-hearted, were not very good company, consequently she and Jeans rarely visited them. I was indulging in a mental prospect of the jubilation at a reunion of the down-hearted Dicksons and the gay and frivolous Jeanses when Larry returned from his struggle with the horse. He resumed his work upon the harness without any complaint. His remark that "Them skewball horses is alwis onreasonable" was not spoken in a carping spirit; it was given as conveying valuable information to a stranger.

At 11 o'clock my host "s'posed that p'r'aps maybe" I was ready to turn in. I was, and we went forth together in quest of the spare room. The room in question proved to be a hastily-constructed lean-to on the far corner of the house, at the back. Inside, one wall was six feet high and the other was merely a tree-butt. My bunk was built against the butt, and between the bunk and the roof there were about eighteen inches of space. That bunk had not been run up for a fat man. After establishing me in the spare room Jeans turned to go.

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"Best bar the door with a log, case o' the cow," he said. "If she comes bumpin' round in the night, don't mind. She walks in her sleep moonlight nights."

It only needed this to convince me that I was usurping the customary domicile of the meditative cow. The room had been carefully refurbished up and deeply carpeted with scrub ferns. But the cow was not to be denied.

Weary as I was, I got little sleep that night. I had fallen off comfortably about half an hour after turning in, when I was awakened again by some commotion in the house. Half a dozen of the children were blubbering, and I could hear the heavy tread of Larry, and the equally heavy tread of his wife, moving about the house. Presently both passed by the lean-to, and away in the direction of the range. For another half-hour or so there was silence, and then the one-horned cow came along and tried my door. Failing to open it, she tried the walls and the roof, but could not break her way in, so she camped under the lee of the structure, and lowed dismally at intervals till day-break.

When I arose a scantily-attired small boy generously provided me with a pint pannikin three-parts full of water. The water was for my morning bath, and the small boy was careful to warn me not to throw it away when I was through with it. This youngster told me that "Dad, an' mum, an' Jimmy" had been out all night hunting Steve. Steve, I gathered, was the one enterprising child in the household, and was in the habit of going alone upon voyages of exploration along the range, where, being a very little fellow, he usually lost himself, and provided his parents with a night's entertainment searching for him in the barren gorges and about the boulder-strewn spurs of the range. How it happened that he was not missed till nearly midnight on this occasion I cannot say, unless the father and mother were really as ignorant of the extent and character of their family as they appeared to be.

Mrs. Jeans was the first to return, and she brought Steve with her. The dear child had not been lost, after all. Incensed by some indignity that had been put upon him during the afternoon, he had "run away from home," he said, and slept all night in a wombat's hole about 200 yards from the house. There his mother found him, returning from her long, weary search. The incident did not appear to have affected her in any way; she looked as tired and as heart-sick as on the previous evening, but not more so.

"You know we lost one little one there" – she extended her hand towards the low, rambling repellent hills – "an' found him dead a week after."

Larry returned half an hour later, and his apathy under the circumstances was simply appalling.

We had fried onions and bread and tea for breakfast, and immediately the meal was over Larry, who I imagined would be going to bed for a few hours, appeared in front of the house leading his deplorable horse. He was bound for the mine, he said. I put in that day exploring the tunnel, examining the immovable mill, hunting for specimens in the quartz-tip, and listening to Leen's cheerful weather prophesies; and Jeans and his soured quadruped dragged logs to the mine from a patch of timber about a mile off, which patch the men alluded to largely as The Gum Forest.

Returning to the homestead at sundown we found the children fighting in the dust and the one-horned cow meditating at the door as on the previous evening. I fancied I detected in the eye of the cow a look of pathetic reproach as I passed her. Tea that evening consisted mainly of roast onions. Jeans felt called upon to apologize because the boys had been unable to trap a rabbit for my benefit.

"Now'n agen, after a rainy spell, we're 'most afraid the rabbits is a-goin' to eat us, an' then when we'd like a rabbit-stoo there ain't a rabbit to be found within twenty mile," said the settler impassively. "When there is rabbits, there ain't onions," he added as a further contribution to the curiosities of natural history.

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The second night at Scrubby Gully was painfully like the first: Mrs. Jeans stitched, Mr. Jeans laboured over his tangle of harness, and the brood rolled and tumbled about the room, raising much dust and creating a deafening noise, to which Larry and Mary his wife gave little heed. When a section of the family had been parcelled up and put to sleep, I was tempted to ask Jeans why he continued to live in that unhallowed, out-of-the-way corner, and to waste his energies upon a parched and blasted holding instead of settling somewhere within reach of a market and beyond the blight of tangible and visible despair that hung over Scrubby Gully and its vicinity.

"Dunno," said Jeans, without interest, "'pears t'me t'be pretty much as bad in other places. Evans is the same, so's Calder."

I did not know either Evans or Calder, but I pitied both from the bottom of my heart. Jeans admitted that he had given up hope of getting the timber off his land, though he "suspected" he might be able to handle it somehow "when the boys grew up." He further admitted that he didn't know "as the land was good for anythin' much" when it was cleared but his pessimism was proof against all my arguments, and I went sadly to bunk, leaving the man and his wife working with slow, animal perseverance, apparently unconscious of the fact that they had not slept a wink for over thirty hours.

The cow raided my room shortly after midnight. She managed to break down the door this time, but as her intentions were peaceful, and as it was preferable rather to have her for a room-mate than to be kept awake by her pathetic complaints, I made no attempt to evict her, and we both passed an easy night.

I was up early next morning, but Mr. and Mrs. Jeans were before me. They were standing together down by the aimless dog-leg fence, and the hypochondriacal horse lay between them. I walked across, suspecting further "unreasonableness" on the part of the horse. The animal was dead.

"Old man, how'll you manage to haul those logs in now?" As Mrs. Jeans said this I fancied I saw flicker in her face for a moment a look of spiritual agony, a hint of revolt that might manifest itself in tears and bitter complainings, but it passed in the instant.

Jeans merely shook his head, and answered something indicative of the complete destruction of his faith in "them skewbald horses."

We had bread and onions for breakfast.

When I last saw Jeans, as I was leaving Scrubby Gully that day, he was coming down the hill from the direction of the gum forest, struggling in the blinding heat, with a rope over his shoulder, towing a nine-foot sluice leg.

We had a letter from Leen yesterday; he says the working shareholders are hurrying to get the sluice fixed over the wheel, and he (Leen) anticipates a heavy downfall of rain during the night.

A Golden Shanty

ABOUT ten years ago, not a day's tramp from Ballarat, set well back from a dusty track that started nowhere in particular and had no destination worth mentioning, stood the Shamrock Hotel. It was a low, rambling, disjointed structure, and bore strong evidence of having been designed by an amateur artist in a moment of vinous frenzy. It reached out in several well-defined angles, and had a lean-to building stuck on here and there; numerous outhouses were dropped down about it promiscuously; its walls were propped up in places with logs, and its moss-covered shingle roof, bowed down with the weight of years and a great accumulation of stones, hoop-iron, jam-tins, broken glassware, and dried 'possum skins, bulged threateningly, on the verge of utter collapse. The Shamrock was built of sun-dried bricks, of an unhealthy, bilious tint. Its dirty, shattered windows were plugged in

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places with old hats and discarded female apparel, and draped with green blinds, many of which had broken their moorings, and hung despondently by one corner. Groups of ungainly fowls coursed the succulent grasshopper before the bar door; a moody, distempered goat rubbed her ribs against a shattered trough roughly hewn from the butt of a tree, and a matronly old sow of spare proportions wallowed complacently in the dust of the road, surrounded by her squealing brood.

A battered sign hung out over the door of the Shamrock, informing people that Michael Doyle was licensed to sell fermented and spirituous liquors, and that good accommodation could be afforded to both man and beast at the lowest current rates. But that sign was most unreliable; the man who applied to be accommodated with anything beyond ardent beverages — liquors so fiery that they "bit all the way down" — evoked the astonishment of the proprietor. Bed and board were quite out of the province of the Shamrock. There was, in fact, only one couch professedly at the disposal of the weary wayfarer, and this, according to the statement of the few persons who had ever ventured to try it, seemed stuffed with old boots and stubble; it was located immediately beneath a hen-roost, which was the resting-place of a maternal fowl, addicted on occasion to nursing her chickens upon the tired sleeper's chest. The "turnover" at the Shamrock was not at all extensive, for, saving an occasional agricultural labourer who came from "beyant" — which was the versatile host's way of designating any part within a radius of five miles — to revel in an occasional "spree," the trade was confined to the passing "cockatoo" farmer, who invariably arrived on a bony, drooping prad, took a drink, and shuffled away amid clouds of dust.

The only other dwellings within sight of the Shamrock were a cluster of frail, ramshackle huts, compiled of slabs, scraps of matting, zinc, and gunny-bag. These were the habitations of a colony of squalid, gibbering Chinese fossickers, who herded together like hogs in a crowded pen, as if they had been restricted to that spot on pain of death, or its equivalent, a washing.

About a quarter of a mile behind the Shamrock ran, or rather crawled, the sluggish waters of the Yellow Creek. Once upon a time, when the Shamrock was first built, the creek was a beautiful limpid rivulet, running between verdant banks; but an enterprising prospector wandering that way, and liking the indications, put down a shaft, and bottomed on "the wash" at twenty feet, getting half an ounce to the dish. A rush set in, and within twelve months the banks of the creek, for a distance of two miles, were denuded of their timber, torn up, and covered with unsightly heaps. The creek had been diverted from its natural course half a dozen times, and hundreds of diggers, like busy ants, delved into the earth and covered its surface with red, white, and yellow tips. Then the miners left almost as suddenly as they had come; the Shamrock, which had resounded with wild revelry, became as silent as a morgue, and desolation brooded on the face of the country. When Mr. Michael Doyle, whose greatest ambition in life had been to become lord of a "pub.," invested in that lucrative country property, saplings were growing between the deserted holes of the diggings, and agriculture had superseded the mining industry in those parts.

Landlord Doyle was of Irish extraction; his stock was so old that everybody had forgotten where and when it originated, but Mickey was not proud — he assumed no unnecessary style, and his personal appearance would not have led you to infer that there had been a king in his family, and that his paternal progenitor had killed a landlord "wanst." Mickey was a small, scraggy man, with a mop of grizzled hair and a little red, humorous face, ever bristling with auburn stubble. His trousers were the most striking things about him; they were built on the premises, and always contained enough stuff to make him a full suit and a winter overcoat. Mrs. Doyle manufactured those pants after plans and specifications of her own designing, and was mighty proud when Michael would yank them up into his armpits, and amble round, peering about discontentedly over the waistband. "They wus th' great savin in weskits," she said.

Of late years it had taken all Mr. Doyle's ingenuity to make ends meet. The tribe of dirty, unkempt urchins who swarmed about the place "took a power of feedin'," and Mrs. D. herself was "th' big ater." "Ye do be atin' twinty-four hours a day," her lord was wont to remark, "and thin yez must get up av noights for more. Whin ye'r not atin' ye'r munchin' a schnack, bad cess t'ye."

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In order to provide the provender for his unreasonably hungry family, Mickey had been compelled to supplement his takings as a Boniface by acting alternately as fossicker, charcoal-burner, and "wood-jamber;" but it came "terrible hard" on the little man, who waxed thinner and thinner, and sank deeper into his trousers every year. Then, to augment his troubles, came that pestiferous heathen, the teetotal Chinese. One hot summer's day he arrived in numbers, like a plague, armed with picks, shovels, dishes, cradles, and tubs, and with a clatter of tools and a babble of grotesque gibberish, camped by the creek and refused to go away again. The awesome solitude of the abandoned diggings was ruthlessly broken. The deserted field, with its white mounds and decaying windlass-stands fallen aslant, which had lain like a long-for-gotten cemetery buried in primeval forest, was now desecrated by the hand of the Mongol, and the sound of his weird, Oriental oaths. The Chows swarmed over the spot, tearing open old sores, shovelling old tips, sluicing old tailings, digging, cradling, puddling, ferreting, into every nook and cranny.

Mr. Doyle observed the foreign invasion with mingled feelings of righteous anger and pained solicitude. He had found fossicking by the creek very handy to fall back upon when the wood-jambering trade was not brisk; but now that industry was ruined by Chinese competition, and Michael could only find relief in deep and earnest profanity.

With the pagan influx began the mysterious disappearance of small valuables from the premises of Michael Doyle, licensed victualler. Sedate, fluffy old hens, hitherto noted for their strict propriety and regular hours, would leave the place at dead of night, and return from their nocturnal rambles never more; stay-at-home sucking-pigs, which had erstwhile absolutely refused to be driven from the door, corrupted by the new evil, absented themselves suddenly from the precincts of the Shamrock, taking with them cooking utensils and various other articles of small value, and ever afterwards their fate became a matter for speculation. At last a favourite young porker went, whereupon its lord and master, resolved to prosecute inquiries, bounced into the Mongolian camp, and, without any unnecessary preamble, opened the debate.

"Look here, now," he observed, shaking his fist at the group, and bristling fiercely, "which av ye dhirty haythen furriners cum up to me house lasht noight and shtole me pig Nancy? Which av ye is it, so't I kin bate him! ye thavin' hathins?"

The placid Orientals surveyed Mr. Doyle coolly, and innocently smiling, said, "No savee;" then bandied jests at his expense in their native tongue, and laughed the little man to scorn. Incensed by the evident ridicule of the "haythen furriners," and goaded on by the smothered squeal of a hidden pig, Michael "went for" the nearest Asiatic, and proceeded to "put a head on him as big as a tank," amid a storm of kicks and digs from the other Chows. Presently the battle began to go against the Irish cause; but Mrs. Mickey, making a timely appearance, warded off the surplus Chinamen by chipping at their skulls with an axe-handle. The riot was soon quelled, and the two Doyles departed triumphantly, bearing away a corpulent young pig, and leaving several broken, discouraged Chinamen to be doctored at the common expense.

After this gladsome little episode the Chinamen held off for a few weeks. Then they suddenly changed their tactics, and proceeded to cultivate the friendship of Michael Doyle and his able-bodied wife. They liberally patronized the Shamrock, and beguiled the licensee with soft but cheerful conversation; they flattered Mrs. Doyle in seductive pigeon-English, and endeavoured to ensare the children's young affections with preserved ginger. Michael regarded these advances with misgiving; he suspected the Mongolians' intentions were not honourable, but he was not a man to spoil trade -- to drop the substance for the shadow.

This state of affairs had continued for some time before the landlord of the Shamrock noticed that his new customers made a point of carrying off a brick every time they visited his caravansary. When leaving, the bland heathen would cast his discriminating eye around the place, seize upon one of the sun-dried bricks with which the ground was littered, and steal away with a nonchalant air -- as though it had just occurred to him that the brick would be a handy thing to keep by him.

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The matter puzzled Mr. Doyle sorely; he ruminated over it, but he could only arrive at the conclusion that it was not advisable to lose custom for the sake of a few bricks; so the Chinese continued to walk off with his building material. When asked what they intended to do with the bricks, they assumed an expression of the most deplorably hopeless idiocy, and suddenly lost their acquaintance with the "Inglisiman" tongue. If bricks were mentioned they became as devoid of sense as wombats, although they seemed extremely intelligent on most other points. Mickey noticed that there was no building in progress at their camp, also that there were no bricks to be seen about the domiciles of the pagans, and he tried to figure out the mystery on a slate, but, on account of his lamentable ignorance of mathematics, failed to reach the unknown quantity and elucidate the enigma. He watched the invaders march off with all the loose bricks that were scattered around, and never once complained; but when they began to abstract one end of his licensed premises, he felt himself called upon, as a husband and father, to arise and enter a protest, which he did, pointing out to the Yellow Agony, in graphic and forcible language, the gross wickedness of robbing a struggling man of his house and home, and promising faithfully to "bate" the next lop-eared Child of the Sun whom he "cot shiftin' a'er a brick."

"Ye dogs! Wud yez shtale me hotel, so't whin me family go insoide they'll be out in the rain?" he queried, looking hurt and indignant.

The Chinaman said, "No savee." Yet, after this warning, doubtless out of consideration for the feelings of Mr. Doyle, they went to great pains and displayed much ingenuity in abstracting bricks without his cognizance. But Mickey was active; he watched them closely, and whenever he caught a Chow in the act, a brief and one-sided conflict raged, and a dismantled Chinaman crawled home with much difficulty.

This violent conduct on the part of the landlord served in time to entirely alienate the Mongolian custom from the Shamrock, and once more Mickey and the Chows spake not when they met. Once more, too, promising young pullets, and other portable valuables, began to go astray, and still the hole in the wall grew till the after-part of the Shamrock looked as if it had suffered recent bombardment. The Chinamen came while Michael slept, and filched his hotel inch by inch. They lost their natural rest, and ran the gauntlet of Mr. Doyle's stick and his curse — for the sake of a few bricks. At all hours of the night they crept through the gloom, and warily stole a bat or two, getting away unnoticed perhaps, or, mayhap, only disturbing the slumbers of Mrs. Doyle, who was a very light sleeper for a woman of her size. In the latter case the lady would awaken her lord by holding his nose — a very effective plan of her own — and, filled to overflowing with the rage which comes of a midnight awakening, Mickey would turn out of doors in his shirt to cope with the marauders, and course them over the paddocks. If he caught a heathen he laid himself out for five minutes' energetic entertainment, which fully repaid him for lost rest and missing hens, and left a Chinaman too heart-sick and sore to steal anything for at least a week. But the Chinaman's friends would come as usual, and the pillage went on.

Michael Doyle puzzled himself to prostration over this insatiable and unreasonable hunger for bricks; such an infatuation on the part of men for cold and unresponsive clay had never before come within the pale of his experience. Times out of mind he threatened to "have the law on the yalla blaggards;" but the law was a long way off, and the Celestial housebreakers continued to elope with scraps of the Shamrock, taking the proprietor's assaults humbly and as a matter of course.

"Why do ye be shtealing me house?" fiercely queried Mr. Doyle of a submissive Chow, whom he had taken one night in the act of ambling off with a brick in either hand.

"Me no steal 'em, no feah — odder feller, him steal em," replied the quaking pagan.

Mickey was dumb-stricken for the moment by this awful prevarication; but that did not impair the velocity of his kick — this to his great subsequent regret, for the Chinaman had stowed a third brick away in his pants for convenience of transit, and the landlord struck that brick; then he sat down and repeated aloud all the profanity he knew.

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The Chinaman escaped, and had presence of mind enough to retain his burden of clay.

Month after month the work of devastation went on. Mr. Doyle fixed ingenious mechanical contrivances about his house, and turned out at early dawn to see how many Chinamen he had "nailed" -- only to find his spring-traps stolen and his hotel yawning more desperately than ever. Then Michael could but lift up his voice and swear -- nothing else afforded him any relief.

At last he hit upon a brilliant idea. He commissioned a "cocky" who was journeying into Ballarat to buy him a dog -- the largest, fiercest, ugliest, hungriest animal the town afforded; and next day a powerful, ill-tempered canine, almost as big as a pony, and quite as ugly as any nightmare, was duly installed as guardian and night-watch at the Shamrock. Right well the good dog performed his duty. On the following morning he had trophies to show in the shape of a boot, a scrap of blue dungaree trousers, half a pig-tail, a yellow ear, and a large part of a partially-shaved scalp; and just then the nocturnal visits ceased. The Chows spent a week skirmishing round, endeavouring to call the dog off, but he was neither to be begged, borrowed, nor stolen; he was too old-fashioned to eat poisoned meat, and he prevented the smallest approach to familiarity on the part of a Chinaman by snapping off the most serviceable portions of his vestments, and always fetching a scrap of heathen along with them.

This, in time, sorely discouraged the patient Children of the Sun, who drew off to hold congress and give the matter weighty consideration. After deliberating for some days, the yellow settlement appointed a deputation to wait upon Mr. Doyle. Mickey saw them coming, and armed himself with a log and unchained his dog. Mrs. Doyle ranged up alongside, brandishing her axe-handle, but by humble gestures and a deferential bearing the Celestial deputation signified a truce. So Michael held his dog down, and rested on his arms to await developments. The Chinamen advanced, smiling blandly; they gave Mr. and Mrs. Doyle fraternal greeting, and squirmed with that wheedling obsequiousness peculiar to "John" when he has something to gain by it. A pock-marked leper placed himself in the van as spokesman.

"Nicee day, Missa Doyle," said the moon-faced gentleman, sweetly. Then, with a sudden expression of great interest, and nodding towards Mrs. Doyle, "How you sissetah?"

"Foindout! Fwhat yer wantin'?" replied the host of the Shamrock, gruffly; "'t' shtale more bricks, ye crawlin' blaggards?"

"No, no. Me not steal 'em blick -- odder feller; he hide 'em; build big house byem-bye."

"Ye loi, ye screw-faced nayger! I seed ye do it, and if yez don't cut and run I'll lave the dog loose to feed on yer dhirty carcasses."

The dog tried to reach for his favourite hold, Mickey brandished his log, and Mrs. Doyle took a fresh grip of her weapon. This demonstration gave the Chows a cold shiver, and brought them promptly down to business.

"We buy 'em hotel; what for you sell'em -- eh?"

"Fwhat! yez buy me hotel? D'ye mane it? Purchis th' primisis and yez can shtale ivery brick at yer laysure. But ye're joakin'. Whoop! Look ye here! I'll have th' lot av yez aten up in two minits if yez play yer Choinase thricks on Michael Doyle."

The Chinamen eagerly protested that they were in earnest, and Mickey gave them a judicial hearing. For two years he had been in want of a customer for the Shamrock, and he now hailed the offer of his visitors with secret delight. After haggling for an hour, during which time the ignorant Hi Yup of the contorted countenance displayed his usual business tact, a bargain was struck. The yellow men agreed to give fifty pounds cash for the

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Shamrock and all buildings appertaining thereto, and the following Monday was the day fixed for Michael to journey into Ballarat with a couple of representative heathens to sign the transfer papers and receive the cash.

The deputation departed smiling, and when it gave the news of its triumph to the other denizens of the camp there was a perfect babel of congratulations in the quaint dialogue of the Mongol. The Chinamen proceeded to make a night of it in their own outlandish way, indulging freely in the seductive opium, and holding high carouse over an extemporized fantan table, proceedings which made it evident that they thought they were getting to windward of Michael Doyle, licensed victualler.

Michael, too, was rejoicing with exceeding great joy, and felicitating himself on being the shrewdest little man who ever left the "ould sod." He had not hoped to get more than a twenty-pound note for the dilapidated old humpy, erected on Crown land, and unlikely to stand the wear and tear of another year. As for the business, it had fallen to zero, and would not have kept a Chinaman in soap. So Mr. Doyle plumed himself on his bargain, and expanded till he nearly filled his capacious garments. Still, he was harassed to know what could possibly have attached the Chinese so strongly to the Shamrock. They had taken samples from every part of the establishment, and fully satisfied themselves as to the quality of the bricks, and now they wanted to buy. It was most peculiar. Michael "had never seen anything so square before, savin' wanst whin his grandfather was a boy."

After the agreement arrived at between the publican and the Chinese, one or two of the latter hung about the hotel nearly all their time, in sentinel fashion. The dog was kept on the chain, and lay in the sun in a state of moody melancholy, narrowly scrutinizing the Mongolians. He was a strongly anti-Chinese dog, and had been educated to regard the almond-eyed invader with mistrust and hate; it was repugnant to his principles to lie low when the heathen was around, and he evinced his resentment by growling ceaselessly. Sunday dawned. It was a magnificent morning; but the rattle of the Chinamen's cradles and toms sounded from the creek as usual. Three or four suave and civil Asiatics, however, still lingered around the Shamrock, and kept an eye on it in the interests of all, for the purchase of the hotel was to be a joint-stock affair. These "Johns" seemed to imagine they had already taken lawful possession; they sat in the bar most of the time, drinking little, but always affable and genial. Michael suffered them to stay, for he feared that any fractiousness on his part might upset the agreement, and that was a consummation to be avoided above all things. They had told him, with many tender smiles and much gesticulation, that they intended to live in the house when it became theirs; but Mr. Doyle was not interested — his fifty pounds was all he thought of.

Michael was in high spirits that morning; he beamed complacently on all and sundry, appointed the day as a time of family rejoicing, and in the excess of his emotion actually slew for dinner a prime young sucking pig, an extravagant luxury indulged in by the Doyles only on state occasions. On this particular Sunday the younger members of the Doyle household gathered round the festive board and waited impatiently for the lifting of the lid of the camp-oven. There were nine children in all, ranging in years from fourteen downwards — "foine, shtrappin' childer, wid th' clear brain," said the prejudiced Michael. The round, juicy sticker was at last placed upon the table. Mrs. Doyle stood prepared to administer her department — serving the vegetables to her hungry brood — and, armed with a formidable knife and fork, Michael, enveloped in savoury steam, hovered over the pig.

But there was one function yet to be performed — a function which came as regularly as Sunday's dinner itself. Never, for years, had the housefather failed to touch up a certain prodigious knife on one particular hard yellow brick in the wall by the door, preparatory to carving the Sunday's meat. Mickey examined the edge of his weapon critically, and found it unsatisfactory. The knife was nearly ground through to the backbone; another "touch-up" and it must surely collapse, but, in view of his changed circumstances, Mr. Doyle felt that he might take the risk. The brick, too, was worn an inch deep. A few sharp strokes from Mickey's vigorous right arm were all that was required; but, alas! the knife snapped whereupon Mr. Doyle swore at the brick, as if holding it immediately responsible for the mishap, and stabbed at it fiercely with the broken carver.

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"Howly Moses! Fwhats that?"

The brick fell to pieces, and there, embedded in the wall, gleaming in the sunbeam, was a nugget of yellow gold. With feverish haste Mickey tore the brick from its bedding, and smashed the gold-bearing fragment on the hearth. The nugget was a little beauty, smooth, round, and four ounces to a grain.

The sucking pig froze and stiffened in its fat, the "taters" and the cabbage stood neglected on the dishes. The truth had dawned upon Michael, and, whilst the sound of a spirited debate in musical Chinese echoed from the bar, his family were gathered around him, open-mouthed, and Mickey was industriously, but quietly, pounding the sun-dried brick in a digger's mortar. Two bricks, one from either end of the Shamrock, were pulverized, and Michael panned off the dirt in a tub of water which stood in the kitchen. Result: seven grains of waterworn gold. Until now Michael had worked dumbly, in a fit of nervous excitement; now he started up, bristling like a hedgehog.

"Let loose th' dog, Mary Melinda Doyle!" he howled, and, uttering a mighty whoop, he bounded into the bar to dust those Chinamen off his premises. "Gerrou!" he screamed — "Gerrou av me primises, ye thavin' crawlers!" And he frolicked with the astounded Mongolians like a tornado in full blast, thumping at a shaven occiput whenever one showed out of the struggling crowd. The Chinamen left; they found the dog waiting for them outside, and he encouraged them to greater haste. Like startled fawns the heathens fled, and Mr. Doyle followed them, howling:

"Buy the Shamrock, wud yez! Robbers! Thaves! Fitch back th.' soide o' me house, or Oi'll have th' law onto yez all."

The damaged escapees communicated the intelligence of their overthrow to their brethren on the creek, and the news carried consternation, and deep, dark woe to the pagans, who clustered together and ruefully discussed the situation.

Mr. Doyle was wildly jubilant. His joy was only tintured with a spice of bitterness, the result of knowing that the "haythens" had got away with a few hundreds of his precious bricks. He tried to figure out the amount of gold his hotel must contain, but again his ignorance of arithmetic tripped him up, and already in imagination Michael Doyle, licensed victualler, was a millionaire and a J.P.

The Shamrock was really a treasure-house. The dirt of which the bricks were composed had been taken from the banks of the Yellow Creek, years before the outbreak of the rush, by an eccentric German who had settled on that sylvan spot. The German died, and his grotesque structure passed into other hands. Time went on, and then came the rush. The banks of the creek were found to be charged with gold for miles, but never for a moment did it occur to anybody that the clumsy old building by the track, now converted into a hotel, was composed of the same rich dirt; never till years after, when by accident one of the Mongolian fossickers discovered grains of gold in a few bats he had taken to use as hobs. The intelligence was conveyed to his fellows; they got more bricks and more gold — hence the robbery of Mr. Doyle's building material and the anxiety of the Mongolians to buy the Shamrock. Before nightfall Michael summoned half-a-dozen men from "beyant," to help him in protecting his hotel from a possible Chinese invasion. Other bricks were crushed and yielded splendid prospects. The Shamrock's small stock of liquor was drunk, and everybody became hilarious. On the Sunday night, under cover of the darkness, the Chows made a sudden sally on the Shamrock, hoping to get away with plunder. They were violently received, however; they got no bricks, and returned to their camp broken and disconsolate.

Next day the work of demolition was begun. Drays were backed up against the Shamrock, and load by load the precious bricks were carted away to a neighbouring battery. The Chinamen slouched about, watching greedily, but their now half-hearted attempts at interference met with painful reprisal. Mr. Doyle sent his family and furniture to Ballarat, and in a week there was not a vestige left to mark the spot where once the Shamrock

flourished. Every scrap of its walls went through the mill, and the sum of one thousand nine hundred and eighty-three pounds sterling was cleared out of the ruins of the hostelry. Mr. Doyle is now a man of some standing in Victoria, and as a highly respected J.P. has often been pleased to inform a Chinaman that it was "foive pound or a month."

Hebe Of Grasstree

A CHANGE had come over the spirit of Grasstree; there was a false note in the gaiety of the men up from Ramrod Flat, and the young fellows in the pastoral interest around on the Black Cockatoo, when they foregathered in Cleever's bar, discovered an un-accustomed awkwardness and restraint in their attitudes towards each other. With miners and bushmen alike confidence had given place to suspicion, and good-fellowship to an all-round surliness.

For a time the men could not account even to themselves for this strange alteration; an attempt was made to make the climate responsible, and a few insisted that it was something in the drink, but certainly all had become "sudden and quick in quarrel" -- hats went down and hands went up on the slightest provocation. Men whose ordinary work-a-day friendship had previously heightened to brotherly love under the warming influence of alcohol now became profane and bitter in drink, and short arguments terminated with a rush and a collision in the bar. Little differences that might previously have been settled by mutual concessions were now nursed and coddled till they grew into hot enmities, and even Foster and Brierly, once the best of mates, were camping apart and each working a lone hand at Goat Creek.

Eventually Hefty Maconochie was generally recognized as the disturbing element at the Grasstree, but, by tacit agreement, that fact was not publicly admitted. Possibly a delicate and chivalrous consideration for "Miss Mack's" sensibilities inspired this polite reticence, but perhaps it chiefly arose from the shamefacedness of her worshippers. The man out-back, secretive in most things personal, will admit any weakness or wickedness ere confessing to the pangs of unrequited passion. Hence when Hetty was particularly affable to Stacey on Monday evening in the bar, and allowed Riverton to monopolize her smiles on Tuesday evening, Riverton and Stacey fought a desperate and bloody battle on the Wednesday afternoon to decide the ownership of a one-eyed dog which was the local head depot for fleas, and which really belonged to a third man, who, being public-spirited, waived his claim rather than spoil sport. Riverton won the dog.

Of course Miss Maconochie was quite conscious that she had introduced a new element into the relationship of things at the Grasstree, but, although exultant in the knowledge that the men were contending with animal ferocity for her favour, she appeared always quite oblivious, and was genial or distant with the discrimination of a conscientious barmaid.

Miss Mack had been sent to the Travellers' Rest from a Melbourne labour office in response to Cleever's order, which specified "a strapping girl, not more than 26, to work and assist in bar." Hetty was "strapping," and certainly not more than 26; five feet seven, straight as a lath, strong, ruddy-cheeked, and possessing a marvellous efflorescence of glorious red hair as fine as spun silk, coruscant, throwing little subtle tendrils down about her ears, her temples, and her long white neck. There are many female Samsons. But Hetty's power was not wholly in her hair; her strength was peculiarly attractive to the men; her every action suggested strength -- strength underlying a womanly softness and roundness. She often served in the bar on warm evenings with her sleeves rolled well above her shapely elbows, and then Cleever's patrons felt it was worth the price of the drink to see "Mack" reach up for the bottle. She draped lightly for comfort, and blushed to find it fame. The average woman who puts on much to make herself attractive does not realize that half the art is in taking off. Hetty was innocent of coquetry when she divested herself of superfluous drapery, but she could not remain long ignorant of the advantages she enjoyed from her emancipation. Then her laugh helped to ensure success -- it was a generous laugh, full of suggestive music, and discovered new attractions in her large, handsome mouth. Such a laugh is

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honeyed flattery for the man who provokes it, and, as Hetty was proud of her fine white teeth, no man's joke was altogether a failure in Cleever's bar.

There were other young women in and about the Grasree — two or three in the township, and settlers' and farmers' daughters judiciously distributed over the district; but, although these had been courted, it was in a temperate and bloodless manner. These girls were not slow in concluding that Miss Maconochie was a person of extraordinary deceit and peculiar morals. But Hetty was by no means a designing woman. Saving a year spent in domestic service in an extremely Methodist household in Melbourne, her knowledge of men and manners had been gathered in the bush township where she was born and bred. Her morals were particularly healthy; it was soon understood by Cleever's customers that "Mack" knew how to take care of herself — an understanding that detracted not from the zest of the pursuit.

After the morbid propriety of that Methodist household, Hetty revelled in the unrestraint and comparative brilliancy of life at the Travellers' Rest. Cleever was a widower, and not at all exacting, and in the bar of evenings the girl received at least a specious show of respect sufficiently gratifying to a young woman of her intellectual limitations.

The first battle fell about between Stacey and one of the Devoy's. Both had been dangling over the bar, chatting and larking with Hetty for an hour or so, when Stacey's glass was upset in a bit of horse-play, and Stacey, receiving its contents over his shirt-front, became a butt and an object of derision to all in the bar. "Mack" laughed aloud, and flashed her white teeth in the lamp-light, and Devoy laughed too, and Stacey's blood grew hot, and he longed for slaughter. His opportunity came when the girl left the bar a minute later. He confronted Devoy:

"Damn you, Devoy, you did that on purpose!"

It was entirely an accident, but neither was in any humour for explanations. Devoy felt it was beneath him to excuse or parley; he blurted much defiant profanity.

"What if I did! Why don't you drink up your liquor like a man!"

He was cut short by a swinging, open-hand blow. Then thud, thud, thud, thud — four quick blows, two and two, with a sound as of a teamster banging the ribs of his bogged horses with a shovel — and Stacey and Devoy were fighting with the ferocity of tigers at mating-time.

Hetty returned to the bar to see the first blow struck, and now, leaning over the counter, with sparkling eyes, glowing cheeks, and heaving breast she watched the fight. There was none of the impassivity of the lolling tigress in her attitude: she burned with excitement; she clenched her own hands, and bruised her knuckles on the boards; she followed each swift, cutting blow, and uttered inarticulate cries of wonder.

The men fought without science, fought with the brutality of powerful men, wounding with every blow, but feeling nothing in their heat and fury. A ring of onlookers circled round them, and outside this ring danced Cleever — "Fighting" Cleever — with his "peacemaker," a wicked-looking "waddy," eager to get in a blow and stun one of the combatants, for the peace of Devil's End and the credit of the house.

The fight was not settled in Cleever's bar. Two or three rounds served to exhaust the blind fury of the combatants, and then mutual friends interceded, and a formal meeting was arranged for next day. A two hours' struggle in Haddon's grass paddock on the following afternoon ended in the defeat of Stacey, and that night Devoy appeared before Hetty Maconochie, bruised, bandaged, and badly hacked about, but big with victory. The fight was not discussed, but the girl quite understood, and the conquering hero rejoiced in her luminous smile, and was sullenly given the pride of place by his companions, who tacitly admitted this right to the victor for the time being.

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After that fistic battles were daily occurrences at Devil's End. Callaghan, the solitary constable of the district, made a gallant attempt to cope with the press of business, but after an exhausting week yielded to public opinion and was officially blind and deaf when the battle-cries were heard at the Travellers' Rest. Presently every second man in the district possessed black eyes, split lips, or a swollen ear, or all these things, and the local chemist did a roaring trade in court-plaster and Friar's balsam. The men fought on the slightest provocation, or with no obvious provocation at all; arguments on religion or politics invariably ended in bloodshed; mates in the drives below disagreed as to the proper locality for a "shot," and came blaspheming up the shafts to "settle it" in a "mill;" the boys at "Old Burgoo's" fought viciously to maintain their superiority as horsemen and shearers, and always the victorious pugilist turned up at Cleever's, in all the glory of his wounds and bruises, to invite the admiration of the creamy-skinned goddess with the brown eyes.

Grasstree had discovered Hetty Maconochie. Previously she had received a reasonable amount of attention from the men with whom she was thrown in contact, but Grasstree had made her a sensation — a craze. She gloried and revelled in her success, and the sense of pride and power it gave her. Thinking over it through the day, she laughed with rapturous delight, and felt like a queen amongst her pans. Cleever did well these times: there were no tee-totallers left in and about Grasstree, and the Travellers' Rest had absorbed all the business of the district. Being in love with Hetty himself, Cleever made an effort to dispense with her help in the bar, and excited an instantaneous revolt.

"Fetch out the girl," was the general demand. "You don't think we've travelled down here to be served by a splay-mouthed Dutchman!"

Cleever was a Swede; but Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, Belgians, Germans, Austrians, and men of Holland are all Dutchmen out-back. Other foreigners are invariably Frenchmen. If Hetty was not produced on demand there was no more drinking, but much disorder and many accidents, and the proprietor was always compelled to yield. Cleever fought with the rest. He fought without science or discrimination, and nobody took any satisfaction from an encounter with the "Dutchman." He never knew when he was beaten, and had a ridiculous and disconcerting way of resuming the battle, without word or warning, a day, a week, or a month after being egregiously whipped. Being a foreigner, he did not allow any absurd sentiment to interfere with his manner of fighting, and repudiated British prejudices and British reverence for rule and precedent, and fought with all his weapons — fists, nails, teeth, and feet. There was no credit in beating Cleever; he couldn't fight, but he was always willing to try, and, although he was considered wildly humorous in his tantrums, his opponents rarely escaped an injury of some kind or another before the battle was ended.

After much indiscriminate fighting, in the course of a couple of months it was understood and admitted without argument that the final must be contested by Riverton and Devoy. Both were unbeaten, and each would have done battle with a raging lion for the love of Hetty Maconochie. Cleever alone, of all the whipped candidates, refused to abandon his hopes of winning his handsome Hebe, and was quite willing to "take on" the two last aspirants one after the other or both together. The other men of Grasstree, and Ramrod Flat, and Grecian Bend admitted themselves "out of it," and it was quite understood that the winner of the Riverton-Devoy contest had only to step up and take possession of the prize. This view had never been questioned; Hetty's keen interest in the many battles, and her evident delight in the knowledge that she was the prize in the greatest competition that had ever shaken an Australian bush township out of its habitual quietude and lethargy, were taken as indicating her acquiescence. Certainly both Devoy and Riverton took it for granted that the best man of the two was destined to marry the belle of Grasstree.

The great fight came off on a beautiful pitch under Grecian Bend on a Tuesday morning, and half the male population of the district was there to see. Devoy and Riverton fought because the latter had ventured before witnesses to assert his disbelief in the story of Devoy's great shooting exploit — a wonderful narrative, never before questioned at Grasstree. The fight was long and stubborn. Both men were young, strong, hardened with toil, active, game as peccaries, six-foot and a bit, and fighting for an issue that seemed dear as dear life.

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They fought bare-knuckled and stripped to the buff. There was no sparring and no vain display; every blow cut or bruised; and during the first half-dozen rounds the great toughened, knubbly fists were going like sledge-hammers about a busy forge. After that it was a brutal exhibition of butchery and endurance. Blood ran freely, dyeing the combatants and darkening the grass. The faces of the fighters became unrecognizable, and after the 13th round neither could see. By this time half the spectators had sickened and turned away, and awaited the end at a distance. Devoy was knocked clean out in the 19th round, and then Riverton was carried away across three saplings, a bruised and battered champion, limp as a wet shirt, but triumphant, and feeling drunk — happily, jubilantly drunk.

Riverton would have much liked to drag himself to the Travellers' Arms that night, but it was impossible. He was helpless next night, and on the following morning his bunk still held him captive. But on Friday night, with the assistance of his mate, he conveyed his battered carcass into Cleever's bar. A woeful spectacle was the champion of Grasstree, but his wounds were glorious. About a dozen men sat in the bar. Cleever was in attendance. The hero called for drinks all round.

"Where's Mack?" he asked authoritatively.

The publican had evaded this query from others for two days in order to produce a good effect when the champion appeared to claim her. He lingered over the answer now as he served the drinks.

"She haf went by dot city for der honeymoons," he said composedly.

"Wha-at!" Riverton sprawled upon the counter, and his bruised face went livid.

"Vile you vos fight mit Devoy, she haf ride away in der coach to marry anodder feller."

"Marry! marry! Who — who is he?"

"Tommy Haynes."

"Haynes!" Riverton stood upright, looking around upon his companions, but saw only blank faces.

Tommy Haynes was the successful storekeeper of Grasstree, a small boyish man of 24, slight and fair, with curls and a complexion. He would easily have stood upright under Hetty's extended arm. Whilst others fought and suffered Haynes courted — courted pluckily, with kisses and caresses and pretty presents — courted and conquered. "Haynes!" repeated Riverton, with a lingering, bitter imprecation, "that — that worm. By the Lord! when they come back I'll put him over my knee and spank him before her face."

But they were two months coming, and long before their return Riverton had thought better of it.

A Zealot In Labour

THE creek was hacked and mangled out of all semblance to a sylvan rivulet.

The ruin effected looked like the work of many men. The muddy, yellow stream had been diverted from its course several times within half a mile, and all along the banks were torn down, great cuttings made, piles of gravel heaped up, dams built, and races dug. But the ravisher was there — a lone man, gouging his way into a bank at the head of the flat where it met the hill, looking a mere midge amongst the destruction he had wrought with his two good hands.

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"Humpy" Bannon was puny and weazened and old; he had a hump between his shoulders, and no intelligence to speak of, but he had the spirit of a little red ant, magnified to suit his size. He loved labour, and he had chosen Grim Creek as his vineyard. From a miner's point of view Bannon was the discoverer of Grim Creek. He it was who prospected it and found gold in it, and he was exceedingly proud of his field, although it was a starvation hole at the best, and rewarded him for his tremendous labours — digging, shovelling, puddling, cradling, wading in water, and grubbing in sludge — with a few wretched pennyweights where ounces would have been poor pay. But Humpy never thought of leaving. Wet days and fine found him, smeared with clays of many colours, struggling in a wet shaft or delving at the banks, full of enthusiasm, without resource, without horse sense, but all grit.

"Leave the creek?" he would say in answer to the advice of casual visitors. "Why, where'd I go ter?"

"Well, there's some good gold gettin' at Black Cap, an' I hear about somethin' worth prospectin' ten miles out by Double-U Hill."

"No fear! you don't catch me leavin' the creek. Why, some o' them minin' sharks from the city would be down here an' jump the claim afore I'd bin gone a week."

"Jump this show, Humpy! Why, there is not gold enough in a mile of it to buy a peanut."

Bannon couldn't restrain his temper when the creek — his creek — was disparaged, and at this point always became incoherent between extravagant predictions as to the fabulous richness of the wash he was going to cut presently and insulting reflections upon the intelligence of the maligner, and he would fall to working again more fiercely than ever, jiggling his old head the while, and chumming bitterly.

How he did graft! Little, and skinny, and aged, and ill-fed as he was, he cheerfully faced mountains of labour, and wore them down by sheer pertinacity — shifted them by faith and works. What wonders of toil can one determined man perform in a year! To know you must see the man struggling amongst the evidences of it, with the work of his hands piled up about him, and the man's sole master must be a belief, sane or otherwise.

Humpy's faith in Grim Creek was transcendent. That the creek gave him no justification mattered not a scrap. He lived in a little bark hut, comfortless as a mia-mia, on nothing in particular; he dressed at work in a worn shirt, patched extravagantly, and deplorable trousers and boots, and he wound lengths of sugee about his shins. His hat, a battered boxer, a gift from a sympathetic selector, had a big hole fore and aft — driven to extremes, he had once run a handle through it, and used it for a ladle when cradling — and the whole costume was cemented and frescoed with the grit and clay of the unspeakable creek.

The old man never had a mate — he never wanted one. He designed all sorts of hare-brained, unworkable contrivances in the shape of dumb-waiters, and cranks, and feed-pipes, and sluices, to overcome the difficulties that hamper a lone hand, but through disappointments and dangers and endless tribulation he struggled on, and turned up regularly every Saturday afternoon at the log store on the Piper road with his pathetic little packet of gold and his long familiar story of the good day that was coming for Grim Creek and the surrounding district when he finally "got on to it."

A few of the farmers and selectors in the district, thinking that possibly, by reason of an unlooked-for contingency, Humpy might some day "get on to it" and boom the place a bit, helped with gifts of food and old clothes that to him were as good as new. One or two, from pure wooden-headed good nature, visited him at times, especially on Sundays, and sat with him in the sun or in his smoky hut, and let him talk to them by the hour about his creek. Next to grafting in the creek like a tiger, nothing pleased Humpy better than to prattle about his work, and invent, and lie, and rhapsodize to a sympathetic audience.

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Tom Hughes was the old digger's best friend. He had secured a selection in the locality of Grim Creek within the last six months, built a hut upon it, and settled down to take life as easily as a selector can who observes the covenants. Hughes was a hatter — a big, hairy man, physically slow, mentally alert, with a golden faculty of extracting amusement out of anything and everything, from the capers of his waddling terrier pup or the solicitude of a motherly hen to the foibles of his fellows. Hughes enjoyed Humpy Bannon enormously. He cultivated him. He would sit and study him by the hour, ponderous and apparently as grave as a fat frog between meals, but with a soul full of laughter. Humpy reminded him of an ant that he had once seen attempt to shift Mount Macedon. The ant thought the mount obstructed its view, or felt that it had a call; anyhow, Tom kept track of the insect for a week and neglected his duties to watch progress, and when he left the ant was still going strongly. Now, here was this other midge ripping up the face of nature and tearing at the bowels of the earth after something he didn't really want and wouldn't know how to appreciate. Wifeless, childless, without a taste superior to mutton and bread or an aspiration above the puddling tub, and with very few years of life before him, he worked from daylight to dusk, moving mountains, and grew radiant describing the treasure he must win some day. Yet ten shillings a week would have satisfied his needs, twelve would have embarrassed him with riches.

Walking along the creek one day Hughes came upon the old man clambering out of a prospecting hole on a rise. He was dripping wet, and coated with mud; clay was in his hair and his ears, and the dirty water ran from him as he stood. Humpy was too busy for conversation; he seized the windlass handle and began hauling with terrific energy. There were two buckets on the rope — one a kerosene tin, the other an ordinary water bucket. Humpy landed and emptied these, and then, lowering the rope into the shaft again, began to fish about. Presently he hooked another bucket and brought it to the surface. After fishing once more he landed a nail keg. Then he proceeded to let himself down again, sliding on the rope.

"What's the little game, old man?" asked Hughes as the dripping head disappeared.

"After a bit o' wash here. Tremenj's rich, I think," answered Bannon up the shaft.

"But it's too wet; you'll never be able to bottom, workin' her alone."

"Bet I will, though!"

Further comment was deferred by the pit-pit of the old man's pick in the wet hole. Tom Hughes hooked the nail keg, and put in an hour or so at the windlass, and was rewarded later with Humpy's confidence. As usual, the little man was on the eve of a discovery that was going to revolutionize the district, and bring a big town humming about their ears on Grim Creek in less than no time. Hughes was a better miner than old Bannon, and thought the latter was fighting after a vain thing, but he offered no advice, understanding that it would be wasted, and remembering that it was Humpy's policy to go and find out for himself at whatever cost of sweat and patience.

Humpy did bottom that hole, and scraped up a prospect that promised about ten "weights" to the load to a sanguine man, but the water was up within three feet of the surface next morning, and eight hours' vigorous baling had no appreciable effect. The claim could not be worked without a diving-suit and apparatus.

So Humpy went apart and thought. He wasted little time in speculation, and presently took a bee-line from his shaft to the foot of the rise, 250 yards off, and commenced an open cutting. His idea was to carry this narrow cutting into the hill on a level as long as he could throw the dirt, and then, when the sides became too high, to tunnel to the shaft, and so drain the ground he wished to work. This represented about a year's labour to an average man working decent hours and in moderation. It was an utterly fatuous and foolhardy undertaking; as far as it was possible to judge, the ground would not pay for the working, let alone compensate for this gigantic "dead horse;" but Bannon did not calculate — he worked. On the occasion of Hughes's next visit he found Humpy pegging away industriously in his cutting. He had covered a good distance in the shallow ground.

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"Well, old party, what're you coursin' after now?" asked Tom.

Humpy explained between blows.

"Gee—rusalem, but you do lick 'ell an' all!"

Tom proceeded to explain the difficulties of the job, and the ridiculousness of it; but the digger's under-hand pick was going busily all the time, and at last Hughes seated himself upon a log and overlooked the toiler in silent enjoyment of his wonderful courage, his dunderheadedness, and the comical little ape-like figure and quaint tricks and turns of the man.

Humpy persisted, and in the weeks wore by his cutting extended and deepened, and at length he was forced to take on another contract. It was necessary to get the water away. He felled trees, and split palings, and laid down a box drain all along the cutting — a wonderful drain, representing much time and trouble. He timbered his job where timber was needed, and continued as before eating his way into the hill, and as he progressed his pride in his work increased. The cutting was trim and true; Humpy bestowed the most loving care upon it, and Tom Hughes brought all the strangers he came across to inspect and admire it as the one spectacle of Grim Creek, and to gaze upon Humpy and wonder over him. And whilst Tom stood aloft eulogizing the digger with something of the air of a showman, and amiably explaining his humours and eccentricities for the pleasure of these strangers, Humpy hammered away eagerly on the job below.

"He ain't got common-sense about minin'," Hughes would say; "have you, old man?"

Humpy, with his pick driven to the eye in the wall before him, would turn up his puckered, tanned, hairy face with the aspect of a venerable mandril, and damn his friend — hide, bones, and soul — as the selector went on:—

"But in a tunnel or a drive he'd work any man I ever knew stone-blind inside a week. Wouldn't you, Humpy?"

More profanity from below.

"See, he's built for it. Them shoulders was built fer pokin' round in low black drives an' muddy tunnels, but he's wasted fer want of horse sense. He's a blessed steam-engine whirling away like blazes, but doin' nothin' that matters a hang. Look at him! He's the only man in Australia that likes work — he'd rather be workin' than drinkin' — an' he's only happy when he's clayed up to the ears and sweatin' quarts."

Sometimes a visitor dropped Humpy a half-crown or a shilling, and often a settler or farmer gave him help; but for all that he was compelled to leave his cutting now and again and go fossicking in the creek for a pennyweight or two, and then he was given over to a great discontent. Whilst he was working in the cutting it preserved its spick-and-span appearance; when he was away dead leaves accumulated in it, and Monaghan's sheep sometimes destroyed the symmetry of its edges, and that affected Humpy as dirt and litter about a room irritate a good housewife.

But as time passed the great work progressed, and at length the tunnel had been opened out, and was being driven towards the shaft. It was the most elegant of tunnels, with a beautiful entrance, and carefully squared throughout, and it went in and in until at length, when Humpy was within a week of his goal, there came jangling up the creek one day a mounted policeman. The officer of the law examined Bannon's hut carefully, and tossed things about and turned the place upside down with the placid insolence with which power endows most men; and then he rode to Humpy's cutting, called the little man into the light of day, handcuffed him, and led him off.

The charge was sheep-stealing. There was no doubt of Bannon's guilt: one skin with the brand on it was found doing service as a rug on his bunk another, quite fresh, was tacked up in his shed; and the best part of a fine lamb

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was rescued from his pickling-tub, and produced in court. The spirit of the early squatter still survives in the particular and express abomination of sheep-stealing manifested by our virtuous and humane judges. The sentence was two years.

Tom Hughes tried hard to preserve Humpy's cutting from destruction, and kept a careful eye on his hut, but, walking down the creek one day twenty months later, he came upon the little old digger standing surveying the ruins of his great work. The sides of the cutting had tumbled in, the tunnel was down, and the drained ground was worked out. Humpy was smaller-looking and more shrunken, and ten years seemed to have been added to his age; he was bent nearly double, and was bleached a deadly dough-colour; his limbs trembled as he stood, and he snivelled miserably like a boy. No greeting passed between the two men.

"'Twas three fellers from Melbourne done it," said Hughes, indicating the cuttings.

"Damn 'em!" snapped Bannon.

"I tried hard to stop 'em," continued the selector. "I explained it was your job; I argued, an' pleaded, an' preached, but 'twasn't no good."

Tom had also fought the intruders, singly and in a bunch, and had been severely manhandled for his kindness and consideration, but he did not explain this.

"Hows'mever, Wasn't worth a cuss," he added eagerly. "They skursly knocked out tucker, an' only hung on jest from pure villainy."

This was a lie: the young men had done fairly well out of Humpy's claim, and had taken to town with them when they left sufficient gold to run a month-long "bender" of the most virulent and dazzling description.

"Damn 'em!" said Humpy again.

"Better track up to yer hut, old man," Hughes said. "You'll find it in order. You can spell-oh till you pick up a bit, an' then you can get down to graft. You'll be all right, you know."

"Yes, yes," grasped Bannon with a feeble return of his old fire, "there's somethin' above the fork I'm goin' after. I'll have to turn the creek. B'lieve there's some ten-ounce stuff there."

Hughes had to lead him to his hut, and attend to him for a few days, but presently Humpy was out and about again, with pick and shovel, pottering weakly here and there. Once Tom found him struggling to clean out the old cutting. By-and-by he started making great raids upon the hills, digging aimless holes, and throwing up heaps of dirt anywhere. Two or three times he was discovered lying helplessly by his work. At length the same policeman came trotting up the gully again, and once more Humpy Bannon was led away. This time he did not come back. He finished his days performing extraordinary feats of labour with a little wooden shovel at Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum, destroyed in mind and body by eighteen months of comparative peace and rest and comfort in Her Majesty's gaol.

The Washerwoman Of Jacker's Flat

THE extreme disparity in the number of male and female denizens of Jacker's Flat was a source of sore discontent to the former. That refining influence which fair women are said to exert over rude mankind was a long-felt want, as, out of a population of twelve hundred and odd, only nine were of the feminine gender. Four of the ladies were mated — a reverential regard for beautiful truth forbids us saying married — and stultified the glorifying

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womanly attribute to a great extent by persisting in a course of intemperance, and rarely appearing abroad excepting under the stimulus of rum. Deduct from the five of the softer sex who remain unallied, so to speak, three under the age of six, and that the malcontent of the men was a rational grievance becomes patent to the meanest understanding. It has been said that where women and children are few, men of affectionate natures lavish their surplus sentiment on the lower animals. This characteristic did not prevail on the Flat — indeed, experience has taught us that there, as elsewhere, men so circumstanced invariably cleave to the intoxicating cup and abandon themselves to the seductive wiles of euchre, crib, and Yankee-grab.

The few dogs of the camp were lean and debilitated, of a furtive habit, and noted for their agility in dodging missiles; the cats were unkempt and fearful, and much disposed to abandon civilization for the joys of a wild, free life on Mount Miamia; but there was not a pack of cards or a dice box on that flat that did not bear unmistakable traces of good handling and long attention, and "Monkey Bill," otherwise Mr. William Monk, the local publican, had no just cause to complain that the worshippers at the shrine of the god set up in his temple — "The Pick and Barrow" — were wanting in numbers or in religious zeal. However, these joys are vain and meagre substitutes for the companionship of lovely woman, and small wonder that the sign-board hung out before the new tent down the creek should excite pleasurable anticipations in the susceptible breasts of the local bachelors. The sign itself, apart from its terseness and the originality of its orthography, was not an object of the deepest interest — it was merely the bottom of a candle-box, on which had been inscribed with a ball of blue, in large, irregular capitals that staggered across the board at independent angles, two words — "WASHING DID." Nor was the eloquent message which this laconic advertisement was intended to convey calculated to carry any great amount of satisfaction to the masculine soul, for, if truth must prevail, the negligent diggers seldom had any washing to be "did," as many of them, reckless in the pride of big yields, simply abandoned a "rig-out" when once its appearance called very loudly for soap and water. Others acknowledged but one limit to the time an article might be retained in wear without washing, and that was regulated by the durability of the garment in question. Economy commended this latter usage, and it was most popular. No, the sign had a deeper, a more sacred import to the lone diggers; it announced a very welcome addition to the one-sided population, and signified — A WOMAN. What style and condition of woman she would prove was the subject of earnest speculation in Monkey Bill's canvas bar on the evening following the first appearance of the placard.

"I hope t'goodness she ain't hitched," moodily remarked a long, angular man with a phenomenal growth of red hair and whiskers, who was revelling in the luxury of twist tobacco and raw brandy — a combination which seemed to suit his taste, as the "quid" was never removed to make way for the liquor, each pull at the pannikin being preceded, however, by mechanical and voluminous expectoration. The observation was greeted with derisive laughter.

"Anyhow, you won't stand a show, Bender; I'll bet a cabbage-tree you're the ugliest man from Home!" observed Dick Treen, with refreshing candour.

"You've got no luck, old Frightful. Don't forget the time when you smiled at Martin's daughter on Bendigo and caused her horse to bolt."

"I don't, I don't, Dick," said Bender, as calmly as if he had been paid a flowery compliment; "I ain't built to please horses — and asses; but ladies is different — some of them takes to ugliness!"

And the speaker resumed his mastication with an air of supreme complacency, and passed his hand feelingly over his nose, which organ had been badly battered by a blow from a shovel in an encounter with a "jumper" at Deadman's Rush in '52, and afforded no contrast to his natural facial deformities, which were many and various.

"For my part, I'd rather she were married," observed a tall, rather handsome young fellow, conspicuous by reason of his immaculate rig-out, who was sitting on a bush table. "Young, you know, and married to a beautiful youth like Bender!"

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"Well, supposin' her boss does happen t' be anythin' like Joe Bender?" replied that gentleman, evidently nettled by the other's sneer. "Supposin' he is; if he ever catches you sneakin' round his tent he'll knock yer stiff for a condemned crawler! That's what Joe Bender 'ud do, me Honourable John, an' you'd best make a note of it, case y' forget!"

The Honourable John laughed lightly, and turning his back on the group, entered into conversation with a digger who was drinking alone in the shadowy part of the tent. In common with every other man on the Flat, he believed that it was not advisable to go too far with Mr. Bender, who (like every other man with a broken nose) had quite a reputation as a "slogger." He was known to have knocked out Black Anderson after a tightly-contested battle of twenty-seven rounds at Specimen Hill one Sunday afternoon, and was, although rather proud of his unique ugliness, prepared to instantly resent any derisive levity, especially if it emanated from a person like the Honourable John, whose well-greased Wellingtons, careful shave, and neatly arranged curls earned the contempt of four-fifths of the miners.

John Blake could not have been more scrupulous about the set of his Crimean shirt, the arrangement of his silk sash and tie, or the curl of his moustache had the township boasted a large assortment of fair maids instead of being limited to so meagre a female population. With the few women at hand, however, he was on the very best of terms. "I'm of good family, and a gentleman, by G—!" was his stock boast. The community accepted the statement in good faith, and dignified him with the title of "Honourable."

The man who was drinking alone in the dark corner was Mr. Stephen Bacon. It was a peculiarity of Mr. Bacon's that when he was drinking, in which agreeable recreation he passed most of his spare time, he loved to sit in the shanty, as far out of sight as possible, and drink alone — a particularly detestable characteristic in the eyes of the average digger. Mr. Bacon was a widower of three years' standing, and he drank, it was stated, to drown the grief occasioned by the loss of his wife. What terrible woe gnawed at his vitals and gave rise to an insatiable thirst for brandy previous to the demise of that lamented lady was never known, but that it was intense and irrevocable is proven by the knowledge that Stephen's unremitting but ineffectual endeavours to drown some secret sorrow in large quantities of ardent spirit had been the main factor in bringing his still young but broken-hearted spouse to her grave. After that sad event Mr. Bacon was able to start afresh and found his thirst on a tangible grievance. As an evidence of the enormous quantity of alcohol a settled sorrow can withstand, it may be mentioned that Steve Bacon had not exhaled a breath untainted with brandy for many years. He and "Mite" Power had "struck it" in a hole below the bend, but Monkey Bill "cleaned him out" pretty effectually before each sluicing-day came round. Every night saw him in the shanty, where he would sit and absorb grog till his hair became moist and clung to his temples in clammy rings, and the perspiration oozed from his forehead in large beads. At this stage he was wont to weep great tears of fusel-oil, and call upon his dead wife in lugubrious tones, or chummer over his sorrow with drunken dolorousness, till he was warned off by the forcible curses of the company, or unceremoniously ejected by a disgusted digger — whereupon he would stagger to his canvas residence and reassert his manliness by knocking his only child down and kicking her for falling.

Cecilia Bacon, known on the Flat as "Cis," was about seventeen, slight and pale, with very fair hair, and large, frightened eyes of a light-blue tint. Her whole bearing was one of excessive timidity. Of a shrinking, retiring disposition, imagining herself a burden to her besotted sire, since the death of her mother her life had been a joyless one. She was not an interesting girl, never associated with the other females of the camp, and thought she had but one friend in the world — the Honourable John. He was very kind; he overcame her bashfulness, walked and talked with her, and being interested in the daughter was gracious to the father. Often and again had that sallow, fragile, awkward girl stolen into the shanty after midnight to guide the eccentric footsteps of her drunken parent to his tent, fearing he might stray into some abandoned hole and break his worthless neck if left to come home alone, and almost as often had she been heartily kicked for her pains.

The fair lady whose condescension in shedding the lustre of her charms on Jacker's flat had awakened tender anticipations in the breasts of the forlorn bachelors of that encampment by her preliminary announcement made

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her first public appearance on the following evening at Monk's hostelry. The usual brilliant assemblage was gathered together in the "bar" of that elegant establishment, engaged in the usual convivial pursuits, when universal attention was suddenly withdrawn from cards, dice, and brandy by the entrance of a stranger.

An apparition would not have been more startling. A coarse skirt alone betokened the stranger's sex; she wore a man's black slouch hat, which bore palpable traces of having seen long service "below," and was trimmed with a narrow leather belt; she smoked a highly-coloured meerschaum pipe, the bouquet of which eloquently testified its strength; she had on a short guernsey buttoned up the front like a coat, whose sleeves, rolled to the elbow, betrayed an arm that might have graced a navy; her hair was cropped short, and bristled almost six feet from the floor. Fleshy, broad-shouldered, and straight as a sapling, her hands thrust into the pockets on either side of her skirt with an air of aggressive manliness, the new washerwoman strolled into the room and up to the counter, coolly oblivious of the impression she had created. In a strong, masculine voice she ordered "stout." Mr. Monk could scarcely express his sorrow — he had no stout — didn't keep it.

The lady calmly anathematized his eyes, cleverly lumped his soul, shanty, and immediate relatives in a brief but comprehensive curse, and "made it gin."

The gin was satisfactory. Then she replaced her pipe, after throwing off the "nobbler" with scientific abruptness, thrust her hands into her side pockets once more, and, lounging against the counter in a devil-may-care, intensely mannish attitude, boldly surveyed the company. Everything about the woman bespoke her manly sentiments. Those skirt-pockets were a brazen plagiarism of the refuges for idle hands in the nether habiliments of the lords of creation, and her upper lip bore unmistakable traces of an earnest endeavour to grow a moustache; even her distorted nose seemed to suggest the pugnacious male.

Monkey Bill's patrons were astounded; they gazed at the washerwoman and at each other in grave surprise, and continued playing their hands with unwonted solemnity. Bender alone seemed capable of grasping the situation, and, after concluding the game in which he was engaged, left his seat and advanced to the new-comer with outstretched hand.

"Brummy Peters!"

"What! Bender?"

"That same."

"Well, I'm — !"

After a hearty, hail-fellow-well-met sort of greeting, Bender ventured the query:

"Well, Brummy, how's things?"

To which the lady replied that things were very slow indeed, emphasizing the assertion with an ejaculation only admissible in the pulpit, and informed Bender, in a casual way, that Peters was no more. Mr. Bender did not seem to think himself called upon to exhibit very violent grief over this sad intelligence; he merely remarked:

"You and Peters weren't spliced, were you?"

One might think the palpable indelicacy of this question would have affected the lady to anger; but no, it touched only her pride.

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"Spliced!" she ejaculated, and all the scorn she felt for that feminine weakness was apparent in her voice. "Devil a fear! We just chummed in."

Further conversation revealed the fact that the late Mr. Peters, whilst under the influence of blended liquors, had fallen into a puddling machine at Bendigo, a lamentable accident which was only made apparent some time later, when bones, buttons, boots, and other distinguishing features turned up in the sluice-boxes. Mr. Peters's chum, who had been accorded her mate's surname and sobriquet as a humble tribute to her superior manliness, was then thrown upon her own resources — and here she was at Monkey Bill's bar.

Mr. Bender introduced the latest acquisition to the assembled gentlemen as "Brummy Peters," insinuating, with some judicious profanity, that she was a splendid fellow, and had vanquished a reputable pugilist in her time. After which the lady took a hand at crib, and succeeded in winning several pounds, and establishing her reputation as "a good sort of a chap" before the night was spent.

Three months passed by, and Jacker's Flat still maintained its not over-numerous population. The yields, though good enough to keep its pioneers hanging on, were not sufficiently exciting to attract strangers from a distance, and if few had departed less had arrived. Amongst the former was the Honorable John — that gentleman, "by G—," having furled his tent by night and silently stolen away, without taking the trouble to afford his numerous creditors an opportunity of bidding him a fond farewell. Brummy Peters, by which inelegant appellation the Amazonian laundress became generally known, was a frequent visitor at Monkey Bill's establishment where she placidly puffed at her meerschaum, dashed off an occasional brandy, called down dire eternal penalties on the urbane host for omitting stout from his stock-in-trade, and engaged in various games of cards and Yankee-grab with so natural an air of manly bravado that her chosen associates at length quite overcame the diffidence that the presence of a woman had occasioned, and comported themselves with their accustomed easy freedom, no longer pausing to select their oaths with an eye to gentility or style, or being deterred by gallantry from raising a row when all didn't seem fair, square, and aboveboard a the card-table. In fact, since Brummy acted as bottle-holder for Treen, when he and Barney Ryan settled their little difference in a fifteen-round mill, and displayed her signal ability to fulfil that honourable and responsible office, the men had quite disburdened their minds of the impression that she was a woman, and now looked upon her as one of themselves, a compliment for which she was duly grateful. Certainly, Bender was frequently chaffed about his intimacy with Brummy, between him and whom there existed a friendship; but the inferences of these jokes were so preposterous, and the jokers themselves were palpably so cognizant of the absurdity, that Mr. Bender received the chaff with the best grace. Mrs. Peters did not consort with the others of her sex at the camp, but in the unwholesome-looking daughter of Mr. Stephen Bacon she displayed a sort of fraternal interest, which moved her to tow that lugubrious inebriate from the shanty to his tent on divers occasions in a manner at once unceremonious and emphatic.

The washerwoman had adorned the locality with her rather massive charms for the space of about ten months, when one dark night, deterred by the rain from making her usual visit to the "Pick and Barrow," as she sat on an inverted tub in her cosy tent, her hands deep in her side-pockets, her back against the bunk, her feet thrust out towards the fire that raged up the small sod chimney, and the inevitable meerschaum in her lips (manly even in her solitude), a light, quick step was heard without, the flap of the tent was drawn aside, and Cecilia Bacon, whiter, more wretchedly wobegone and desolate-looking a thousand times than was her wont — and she was white and wobegone at her best — staggered into the tent. Her head was bare, her thin flaxen hair, sopping wet, clung to her face and neck; and the rain dripped from the poor skirt that was drawn up to shield a tiny object feebly wailing at her breast.

Brummy started up, her beloved meerschaum, the object of a year's tender solicitude, fell, unheeded, and was broken on the clay floor. She caught the reeling girl in her arms, and laid her on the bunk, tenderly took the babe from the wet skirt, wrapped dry things of her own about the feeble atom of humanity, and laid it on a possum rug by the fire. After which she turned her attention to the young woman, and without a word commenced to divest her of her soddened garments and dry her reeking hair. Brummy was a woman now, with all a good woman's

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gentleness, compassion, and quick perception. She showed neither surprise nor curiosity, but proceeded quietly and quickly with her work, and when the girl, revived by the warmth and the spirit that was forced between her lips, began to moan and cry, she soothed her with pitiful words in a soft, low voice that proved how vain had been the long years of wild, rough life and harsh associations to embitter the soul within.

Cecilia's story was soon told. The Honourable John was the father of her child. He had deserted her without a consideration, without a word. After the birth, fearful of meeting her father, she had left her tent, intending to crawl to the creek and drown herself and her child; but when the black waters lay at her feet she had not the courage to take the leap, and, after wandering about the bush in the wind and rain, distracted with misery and fear, she sought the washerwoman's tent. "Because," she said, "you saved me from him when you could." And, starting up, she continued wildly: "He will kill me! I am sure of it! My father will kill me when he knows!"

"No, no," murmured the woman, compassionately don't you fear. "I will watch you."

"You do not know him," hoarsely whispered the young mother. "You do not know how terrible he is at times. He has threatened me with a pick over and over. He will do it now. Hadn't I far better have gone into the creek with my baby? My blood would not have been on my father's head then, but on his — its father's. Father is drinking again, and he will kill me!"

"Hush! hush! and rest now. If you can, go back to your tent early in the morning. Your father is drinking; he will notice nothing — tell him nothing. Leave your baby with me; I will care for it. Nobody will kill me!" And Mrs. Peters squared her great shoulders, and thrust her hands into her pockets, with her old assumption of manliness. "No one will kill me, I think!"

The habitue's of the "Pick and Barrow" were astounded, mystified, amazed, and virtuously indignant when on the night following the incidents related above Dick Treen entered Monk's bar with the intelligence that "Brummy Peters had got a kid!"

The shock conveyed by the news was general, and confounded the miners. They gazed open-mouthed and dumb. A hurt and resentful feeling succeeded. They had been imposed upon — their confidence had been outraged. To think that Brummy Peters, who had overawed them with her muscle and manly assurance and hoodwinked them with side-pockets and a billycock hat, was as frail as the frailest of her sex — a weak, wayward woman after all! It was a violation of all their finest sentiments. "And she threw me, Cumberland and Durham style, best three out of five!" murmured a small Geordie in a bated whisper, only now feeling the full force of his degradation. Strangely enough, all eyes focussed on Mr. Joseph Bender, who blushed like a school-girl under the concerted gaze, and toyed uneasily with his dislocated nose.

Gradually the look of consternation on the faces of the assemblage gave place to a broad grin, which presently extended to a wild guffaw, and thirty accusing fingers were pointed at the now furious Bender.

"Here, look here, you fellers!" he roared, dashing his glass upon the floor and drawing his sleeves back from his great, knotted fist. "This is too thunderin' stiff, y' know! The first man ez says I've anythin' t' do with that youngster 'll get smashed! Now, notice!"

Nobody spoke, but everybody laughed, and the accusing fingers still pointed. Mr. Bender lingered for a moment on the point of running amok and wreaking his vengeance on all and sundry, but thought better of it, pulled his hat over his eyes, and strode out, his soul a prey to angry passions and the pangs of injured innocence.

Mrs. Peters fed the child by artificial means; she procured a cunningly-designed bottle and tubes, and went regularly to the station homestead, at the foot of Miamia, for milk. The diggers regarded this conduct with an unfavourable eye; they supposed it to be another display of anti-feminine sentiment, and nothing that Brummy

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might do now could make them forget that she was a woman — she had forfeited all her rights as a man and a brother irretrievably. She visited the shanty occasionally, and endeavoured to maintain her old footing, but the men preserved a studied coolness, and Curly Hunt even went so far as to suggest that she be summarily ejected, but that perky little individual was brought to a sudden repentance by being knocked over a bench and thrown bodily through the calico window by the ireful washerwoman.

Brummy appeared to be very fond of the child, but Bender was frequently accused of displaying a criminal lack of parental affection. Since the arrival of the little stranger the demeanour of this gentleman had undergone a painful change. He had grown moody and furtive; the banter of his companions drove him furious; to be regarded as the father of Brummy's child was bitter gall. Given any other woman, and he might have accepted the imputation with some complacency, but Brummy — Brummy Peters, with her side-pockets, ready fist, and strong meerschaum — it was too much. He determined to vindicate his character and clear his name of the tender impeachment at any cost. With this object in view he developed amateur-detective proclivities, and kept a zealous eye on the laundry.

The baby was just a month old when one night the homely Mr. Bender burst into the "Pick and Barrow" (which, by the way, he had avoided of late), his face radiant, and the ejaculation of an ancient philosopher on his lips.

"Eureka! I've struck it, boys!" he cried triumphantly.

"What? — the reef?" exclaimed the men with one voice — there having been some prospecting for a reef on the high ground.

"Reef be d——! No; proofs that you fellers 're a lot of blamed asses as 've been barkin' up th' wrong tree!" The representation of a lot of asses barking up a tree was certainly not a strikingly felicitous illustration, but Bender was too excited to be precise in small matters. He continued:

"See here, with all yer infernal cleverness, that kid ain't Brummy's after all."

"Not Brummy's!" — and great excitement. "No, 'taint. It's his daughter's!"

But, despite Bender's circumspection, Mr. Bacon had heard, and he advanced into the light, the big tears stealing down his cheeks and his favourite look of unutterable woe overspreading his bloated face.

"Whose child did you say, Mr. Bender, sir?" he queried, in tones of deep bathos.

"Nobody's! Go to blazes, snufflebuster! This ain't no business of yours."

Stephen Bacon retired again to his shades to indulge his lachrymose propensities and sorrow over his brandy, and Bender related in a low voice how by keeping an eye on Brummy's establishment, noting Cis's frequent visits, and putting this and that together, he had arrived at the conclusion that was to prove him innocent of the delicate peccadillo insinuated against him.

Mr. Bacon's settled sorrow was very distressing that night, and he was subsequently ejected amidst a shower of tears, dolefully calling upon his late lamented wife to come back and comfort his declining years; but that lady, doubtless retaining a lively remembrance of the weight of his fist and the force of his foot, failed to respond.

Next morning being Sunday, an off day, quite a number of the miners, who were indulging in a game of quoits, and others who were sunning themselves and smoking on the grass, indolent and uninterested spectators, were disturbed by sounds of a row at the tent of their laundress, and as the public interest of the Flat centred for the time in that domicile, the loungers leisurely arose, the contestants dropped their quoits, and all strolled across to

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the tent. Mrs. Peters was standing with her back to the entrance, her lips were tightly compressed, and there was an awed, sorrowful expression in her face that the men had never seen there before. She held the baby in her arms, in quite a matronly fashion, and calmly faced Mr. Stephen Bacon, who was bordering on sobriety, and whose settled sorrow was subordinated for the time to unreasoning rage.

"You've got my girl here!" he yelled, gracefully turning the sentence with several euphonious curses, and brandishing the pick-handle he held in his hand.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Peters, quietly; "she's in the tent."

"Well, I want her. D—n you! I want her. I've 'eard your little game. Its all up! She got away from me last night, but I'll have her now!"

"She got further away than you think, Steve Bacon; but you can have her."

"You don't want t' see no girl with that in yer fist," said Bender, who had come up with the others, snatching the pick-handle from his grasp. "And you want t' be carm, y' know, 'cause if you hurt yer girl when I'm near I'll spread y' out quick."

"He can't hurt her," added Brummy. "Come in. Don't go away, boys; she'd like to see y' all. Jest come up and look in."

The men who had turned away, thinking the girl would doubly feel her shame if upbraided in their presence, startled by the tone in which the request was made, went back. Brummy held the flap of the tent aside, and they all looked in.

"Great God! Dead!"

Yes, the pale, slight, awkward girl, scarcely paler in death, her large, light-blue eyes fixed with the frightened expression that had characterized them in life, lay dead upon Brummy's bunk, and from the spare flaxen hair, and the long thin hand, and the points of her clothing, hanging over the side, pools of water had dripped to the floor.

"Yes, she's dead!" said Mrs. Peters, the tears on her lashes belying her harsh tones. "Drowned! I found her body in the shallow water near the bank when I went to the dam this morning. This is your work, Joe Bender."

"No! No! For the Lord's sake don't say that!"

"You told her story at Monkey Bill's last night -- he heard you. That snivelling cur was a devil to her. She said he would kill her if he ever knew -- he intended to last night, but she got away and took the job off his hands."

Steve Bacon, shocked by the unexpected sight, had fallen into a crouching position in the corner. He straightened himself now.

"And her child?" he muttered, pointing towards the dead girl.

"He is mine. She gave him to me, and I will keep him." And the muscular arms of the washerwoman folded the tiny mite closer to her breast.

On the Monday evening following Brummy Peters was waited on by a deputation. A very respectful deputation it was, and wished "to signerfy that the fellers all voted her a brick, an' hoped how she'd pocket that trifle to help her with the youngster, an' say nothin'." That trifle was a roll of notes of all sorts and sizes surrounding a five-ounce

nugget, the biggest ever found on the rush, and the contribution of the Geordie. Mrs. Peters, in responding, accepted the gift, and said she knew "the boys was real grit," and promised to make a man of the little chap on her bosom if she could.

Dead Man's Load

IT was bright and cosy within the pile-getters' hut; outside the night was wet and stormy, and the wind piped a deep, mournful organ tone in the gnarled and stunted gums on the hill-side. The three young men had finished tea, and washed up and squared up — that is to say, Dayton had stowed the bread and butter and the remains of the salt beef in the kerosene box that served them as a larder, M'Gill had dipped the tin plates in hot water and wiped them carefully on a superannuated white shirt, and Woodhead had raised a tremendous dust under a pretence of sweeping out the hut with a broom extemporized from a bundle of scrub ferns; for it was the first principle of their association that every man should "do his whack" in the matter of attendance to domestic duties.

"Too thunderin' wet to go down to the camp, an' too blessed windy to climb up to Scrubby's," said Dayton, who was curing himself of an extraordinary habit of profanity for a wager, and found the task of filling in the blanks rather a trial. "I s'pose cut-throat's our little dart," he continued, producing an overworked euchre pack.

M'Gill was fighting his way into a stubborn oil-skin coat that crackled like tin armour.

"Not cut-throat to-night, boys," he said; "I'm going up the gully a spell."

"Where bound, Mack?" queried Dayton, with quick suspicion. The young men had discovered a pretty girl at Scrubby Scanlan's settlement, two miles off, and each thought he had an exclusive right to the friendship and hospitality of Scanlan and the smiles of his handsome, hard-working, and very sensible eldest daughter.

M'Gill smiled.

"Not there, old man," he said. "I promised 'The Identity' I'd give him a look in to-night."

"Well, you ought!" with great derision. "What d'ye want foolin' after that evil old beast? If he was well to-morrer he'd bang you on the head for half a quid. That's my straight say-so. I'll be sworn he shook our crosscut; an' here you are, dancin' attendance same 's if he was clear white!"

"The poor devil is as harmless as a baby," said M'Gill. "Anyhow, I can't leave a sick man to take his chances in that miserable hole up there."

Joe M'Gill went out amidst a rush of wind and rain, and left his mates to their game and the comfort of their warm, watertight hut.

"Off his bloomin' chump!" commented Dayton emphatically, slapping down the cards.

The philosophical Woodhead, who was smoking placidly, looked up and cut.

"Joe's all riight," he drawled. "Always had a weakness for sick things. I've seen him take more trouble with a lame dog than most men would over a poor relation. Besides, the old man is real bad, and if Mack didn't give an eye to him I expect I would have to do it myself. I'm awfully soft-hearted that way, and I like to see other fellows looking after the poor and the sick — it saves me the trouble."

Meanwhile M'Gill was boring his way through the storm towards a point of light showing fitfully amongst the

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thick, supple saplings that rolled like a sea in a gale. "The Identity's" hut stood at the head of the gully, in the centre of a small clearing. It was sheltered on one side by the abrupt rise of Emu Hill, and exposed on the other (saving for the intervention of the leafy young peppermints, the growth of recent years) to the fierce winds that seemed to gather the rains into the narrow confines of the gully, and drive them pounding up its whole length, in eddying torrents, to be thrown back in tumbling yellow floods from the invulnerable side of Emu Hill.

Peter Shaw, variously known as "The Identity," "The Hermit," "Blue Peter," and "Old Shaw," was a veteran fossicker, a reticent, gruff man, whose almost complete isolation had recently been broken by the appearance in the locality of Brown's Patch of a few parties of sleeper-cutters and pile-getters, driven thitherward by the approach of the railway to Bunyip.

Peter was living in the same chock-and-log hut at the head of Grasshopper Gully when the first selector settled in the district, and when the reputation of Brown's Patch as an alluvial field had already faded and been forgotten, and when the fact that the creek, and the hill, and the gully had once rattled and rung with the clatter of cradle and puddling-tub, pick and shovel, and windlass-barrel was unknown to all within the jurisdiction of the Bunyip Shire Council, with the exception of old Shaw. Even now Peter's settled neighbours were few and far between, and until the arrival of the timber-getters his beloved seclusion was but rarely disturbed by man, woman, or child. He lived, according to the common belief, on the vegetables he grew, eked out with the supplies he brought from Bunyip at long intervals — supplies bought with the price of the few "weights" of gold won by fossicking patiently and laboriously up and down the creek and in the many little blind gullies running into Emu Hill.

Of course "The Identity" was talked about. Whenever two or more selectors were met together Peter's character and habits were sure, sooner or later, to come under discussion, and as he was one of the the stock themes of the local fabulist, the history attached to him did not lack romantic interest. He was generally credited with having stolen everything that went missing in the district, and, amongst the women at least, there was a profound belief that he and "the old devil" were on excellent terms and exchanged visits frequently; but for all the attention Shaw gave these people they might have been merely stumps or stones by the way.

M'Gill pulled the catch of the old man's door, and entered without knocking. The remains of a big log were smouldering in the wide sod chimney, and a slush lamp, manufactured from a sardine tin, guttered on the bush table, filling the hut with a villainous smoke. On a narrow bunk, face downward, lay the half-clad figure of a man. "The Identity" lifted himself upon his hands as the door clanged to, and turned a haggard face, surrounded by a scrub of iron-grey hair, towards the intruder. His eyes brightened as he recognized Joe.

"Good on you! Good on you!" he gasped, extending a shaky hand. "I was hopin' you'd come."

Joe threw open his oilskin, and drew a couple of small parcels from his shirt.

"Here you are, old party," he said; "I've brought you some stuff for beef tea, and a bottle of medicine." Shaw took the bottle in his hand and examined it. It contained a patent medicine then very popular with bushmen as an infallible remedy for all the physical ills that man is heir to, from cuts to consumption.

"It's too late, my boy," he said, "I'm a done man; but a dose might ease me a bit if it's hot enough — gimme a dose."

Joe poured out a quantity of the medicine into a pannikin, and held it towards him; but the sick man clutched his hand, and a sudden excitement lit up his deathly face as he whispered:

"Did you do the other thing what I told you?"

M'Gill nodded.

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"Put your pegs in an' make your application fer the lease all correct an' accordin' to law?"

"Yes, yes, just as you told me. Now drink!"

Shaw drained off his medicine, but retained his grip on Joe's arm.

"Certain you didn't let on to no one?" he asked, with a look half suspicious, half cunning in his eyes — "no p'lice, no doctors — eh?"

"Not a soul; I always keep my word. But for all that I think you should have a doctor."

"No, no, no!" cried the old man, with fierce energy; "no doctors — no p'lice! I'm peggin' out — don't I know it? — an' I won't have doctors, damn em! Can't you let a man die his own way?"

"Right you are," said Joe, soothingly; "you'll buck up again, though, when you get outside a pint or two of this."

M'Gill threw the wood in the fireplace together, and set about preparing the beef tea, and Shaw, who had relapsed into his former position, face downwards upon the bunk, watched every movement with one alert eye. Presently he spoke again.

"I said I'd tell you the whole yarn t'-night, Joe."

"Not to-night, Peter, you're not equal to it — wait till you are stronger."

"Stronger! stronger!" The fossicker had started up again, and was glaring angrily. "Wait till I'm dead an' dumb, you mean. No, it mus' be t'-night. One of the chaps up at the camp'll be knockin' together a coffin fer me t'-morrer."

M'Gill admitted to himself, as he looked into the brilliant, deep-set eyes of the man, and saw the grisly configuration of the skull standing out under the stark yellow skin of his face, that nothing was more probable. Shaw looked like a man face to face with death, sustained only by the feverish excitement that blazed in his restless eyes and manifested itself in the uneasy motions of his wasted hands. The young man offered him a pannikin of the beef tea, but Peter put it aside after trying a couple of mouthfuls.

"No, I can't take it, boy," he said, "I can't take nothin', I don't want nothin', only to tell you all before I cave in. Sit here on the edge of the bunk. I'll hold you so you can't go till I'm through. Wait — go round the hut, see no one's listenin'."

M'Gill, to please him, did as he was directed, and then resumed his position by the side of the bunk.

"Joe," said "The Identity," "you come here to help me, an' you've took a lot of trouble with me, 'cause you're a good sort, an' can't help it, like; but you don't like me. I could see you didn't like me — you suspicioned me from the first, eh — didn't you?"

This was quite true, but the young man returned no answer. There had never been anything about Peter Shaw to invite affection; in health he was sullen, covert, and uncanny, and in sickness evil-tempered and childish in his wants, and, more particularly, in his fears.

"I knew it — I knew it!" he continued, "but because you are a good sort, an' because I must out with this load here, here!" — he struck his breast feebly with his hand — "I'm goin'to tell you somethin' that'll make a rich man of you, Joseph M'Gill."

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Clutching Joe's sleeve with his bony fingers, he went on with his story, speaking in quick undertones, with a sort of insane energy that sustained him to the end.

"I came to this district twenty odd years ago, my lad. Brown had just struck the surfacin' down the gully by the creek, an' we called the rush Brown's Patch. Two days after campin' I picked up my mate Harry Foote — Stumpy Foote we named him 'cause he was bumble-footed. He was a dog, a mean hound, but he didn't look it, an' he was a good miner. We went to work on the alluvial, an' did fairly, but we both had a great idea about a good reef in these hills. All the indications pointed to it, an' presently we slung the wash an' started prospectin'. We trenched, an' travelled, an' trenched fer weeks without strikin' an ounce of quartz, an' Stumpy got full of it; but I grew more certain about that lode, an' hung on. So we agreed that he'd go back to the alluvial again, an' I'd keep on peggin'away after the reef, an' we'd be mates whatever turned up. Well, we kep' this up fer a long time, me trustin' Stumpy all the time, an' intendin' t' do the square thing by him when I lobbed on the lode, as I was sure I would. I worked like a fiend. I was mad fer gold then. I hadn't been out on'y a few years, an' strikin' it lucky meant everythin' t' me; meant — But no matter, that ain't anythin' t' do with the story. You wouldn't understand how I felt if I told you, an' I believe I don't understand meself now. Stumpy did poorly, or told me as much. I got barely enough as my share to pay tucker bills, but he kep' workin' away, sluicin' the surfacin' down along the creek — a patch he had hit on himself."

"One night I returned to the tent unexpected. Foote had told me the week afore that he was goin' to roll up his swag. an' skip, an' I'd bin out on those hills beyond Scanlan's ever since. A light was burnin' inside, an' Stumpy didn't hear me till I'd thrown back the flap of the tent. He was leanin' over the table, an' he looked up at me sudden, an' his face went milky white. Well it might — I caught him in the act of sweepin' a pile of gold into a canvas bag. A pile — a heap — hundreds of ounces it looked t' me — hundreds of ounces in coarse nuggets an' rich specimens. The cur fumbled it in his hurry t' get it out of sight, an' spilled some of the finer stuff on the floor."

"I went mad at the sight of all that gold, an' at the thought of the dirty trick he'd served me. I didn't speak, but jes' grabbed him so, by the neck, an' dragged him outer the tent. I don't think I meant murder — I don't know what I meant, but there was a pick handle leanin' agen the sod chimbley, an' I took it in my right hand. He opened his mouth to yell, an' I hit him once — jes' once — an' he went over like a wet shirt. I waited fer him to get up, but he didn't move agen, an' when I come t' look at him he was dead. The paper-skulled, chicken-hearted cur, he was dead!

"I didn't funk — I didn't lose my head fer a second. I was never cooler in my life; my brain was clear, but I saw on'y one thing at a time — on'y one thing, an' I acted on it. After dousin' the light in the tent, I took Stumpy up on my shoulder, an' carried him over the hill to the slope furthest from the camp.

"'Twas a clear, moonlight night, bright enough t' read Bible print by, but the sides of Emu Hill was well timbered, an' the saplin's was thick as scrub, so I was not likely t' be seen. I dropped the body in a small clear space amongst a thick patch of scrub on that spur above the soda spring. There was a good depth of soft vegetable soil there — a beautiful quiet place fer a grave.

"Then I went back t' the tent, careless like, case anyone should chance along; but the camp was a good step down the creek from our tent, an' I never met a soul. Stumpy had his swag ready fer rollin' up — he meant to cut and leave me. I took up his things an' a pick an' shovel, an' trudged back t' the body. It lay sprawlin' in the shadder of the scrub, jest as I'd dropped it, one hand reachin' out into the light clawin'the grass; but I on'y thought of my job, an' I set t' work t'dig his grave at once.

"I worked quietly — the pick made no noise in that soft ground — but I worked hard. I meant t' bury him deep, an' bury him well. A neat hole I made him, seven by two, an' as plumb as a prospectin' shaft. As I dug an' shovelled — quite cool in my mind, fer all the body was spread out there behind me in the shadder — my

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thoughts went wanderin' over my bad luck, an' the idea that Stumpy had been on good gold, an' meant to rob me of my fair half, made me vicious, an' I belted in hard an'fast.

"I had her down 'bout three foot, an' reckoned that'd nearly do. I was squarin' up the end when my pick struck agen somethin' that made it ring. I dug away a bit around that somethin', a sudden excitement growin' in me, an' makin' me ferget I was diggin' a grave — a grave fer a murdered man. Down in the west corner of the hole I saw the white gleam of quartz. Stoopin', I lit a match to examine it. By the Lord, Joe! I'd struck it — struck it thick an' rich!"

Old Peter's agitation became so intense at this stage that Joe was compelled to put his arms about his attenuated form, and hold him on the bunk.

"See that fire, boy?" he gasped, pointing an uncertain hand, and glaring as if in a frenzy. "Well, it was like that — the live embers, the glowin' red gold in it! Rich! It seemed all gold. I'd struck the cap of the reef, an' I went a'most mad with joy at the sight of the beautiful, beautiful gold. I staggered back agen the other end of the hole, starin' at the reef. I was goin' t' yell an' dance, thinkin' of nothin' but my lovely luck, when I half turned, an' caught a glimpse of Stumpy's white, dead face glowerin' et me in the moonlight, an' I funk'd fer the first time. The shadder had crep' back, leavin' jest his face showin', an' there it was, with a spark in each of its big eyes, mouthin' at me — grinnin' horribly!

"I went dead cold, my legs broke under me. All of a sudden I was dreadfully afraid. Then I thought: 'Pete, this is a hangin' match — Pete, they're after you. What's the good of a golden reef to a hanged man?' I crawled out of the hole, wantin' t' run, but It's devilish eyes followed me. Oh! I crawled like a worm, crazy with fear — sick with it! The findin' the gold there in his grave seemed a damned trick of his an' the devil's t'spite me — t' make me mad. I seemed t' know then, while the horror was on me, what it all meant — thet I'd cursed meself fer ever — thet, good luck or bad luck, fer the future 'twas all the same t' me.

"But I was strong enough t' bury him. I turned his face down, an' dragged the body along, an' flung it into the hole on top of the reef; and when it was out of sight, under a foot or so of dirt, I began t' feel stronger an' braver, an' t' reason a bit. I would bury him beautifully there, I said to meself, an' wait, an' some time I would dig him up again, and hide him far enough away, an' then I could work the reef, an' by—an' bye go home to — to — go home a rich man!

"I did bury him, an' then crawled back t' the tent, an' tried t' sleep, but couldn't. At daylight I was back at the grave again, smoothin' it with my fingers, rakin' dry leaves, an' grass, an' bark over it t' hide every trace, shiverin' in my boots all the time. They reckoned me a brave man once. I'd done some things that made men think me game. But I've been a cur ever since the night I killed my mate — a coward in the night an' in the day, before men and before devils.

"Durin' the day I managed to go down among the men an' make inquiries 'bout Stumpy. None of the chaps seemed surprised t' hear he was not around, an' one or two hinted pretty straight that I wasn't likely t' see him agen — thet he'd been doin' pretty well down the creek, an' had cleared with the gold to do me outer my share.

"Joe, I never dared t' touch Stumpy's grave from thet day t' this. Fer five years small parties was workin' about the creek off an' on, an' I kep' tellin' meself that when they'd all gone some day I'd shift Stumpy's bones. Then the Chows came fossickin', an' time went on, an' as it passed I grew more an' more of a coward. Once or twice there's bin prospectin' parties out here after the reef, an' I think I was stark crazy while they was about. The fear of them strikin' the lode used t' drive me wild, an' I grew t' hate every man who come near Emu Hill, an' gradually to loathe the sight of human bein's. I shifted up here t' be further from the grave, an' 'cause I'd got lunny notions that Stumpy was walkin' about o' nights.

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"There was on'y a hundred ounces or so in my mate's bag, after all. It'd looked five times ez much t' me. It's buried in the ground jest under the head of my bunk. Onst I sold a few ounces of it in et the township, but it was coarse stuff, an' the news got 'round, an' the next thing I knew there was another small rush along the creek, an' diggers was pokin' about everywhere. That frightened me again. If the reef was struck Stumpy's bones would be found, an' they'd hang me, sure ez death. Half a dozen men lived at Wombat who'd remember my mate's disappearance, an' there was things I'd buried with Stumpy that'd make his bones known. So I buried the gold, an' never tried t' sell another colour of it.

"Since then I've had scores of chances of shiftn' them bones, but I wasn't the man t' do it, an' then I begun t' find that I didn't want to — that I didn't want the gold — that I didn't want any of the things that I'd wanted like mad before. But I didn't go away. I was chained here, an' I always thought that some day someone would find Stumpy, an' I would be wanted, an' all these years I've dreaded it, an' waited fer it, an' hated, an' suffered, an' here I am, an' there, out on the hill, are Stumpy's bones, an' the gold — the beautiful yellow gold! It's yours, Joe — all yours. I leave it to you! You know the spot. I planted that stunted bluegum, with the limb that turns down to the ground, right on the top of the grave the mornin' after I buried him. You'll find his bones in among its roots."

"The Identity" sank back on his bed, cold and exhausted.

"You'll bury them bones decent, Joe?" he murmured in a voice that had suddenly grown faint.

"Yes, Peter," replied M`Gill, in whose mind the story had created both amazement and doubt.

"An' you've got the lease, Joe, sure?"

"I've applied for it — the ground is secured."

"Yes, yes, an' you'll stick by me while I last, eh — you won't go? An' no p'lice, mind — no p'lice!"

It was already daylight when Joe M`Gill awakened his mates stumbling into the hut.

"Old Shaw is dead," he explained to the indignant Dayton. "You might dress, Jack, and go and stay by him, for decency's sake, while I have a few hours' sleep. And, Woodhead, you must go to Bunyip and bring the police. They will have to take charge of the body."

M`Gill and his mates found the skeleton of Foote exactly as Peter Shaw had said they would, and the grinning skull rested upon the cap of the golden reef that was eventually known as "Dead Man's Lode," and which, before twelve months went by, had enriched the three young men, and had yielded small fortunes to many dozens beside.

After The Accident

ONE man sat upon a heap of broken reef near the face, with his broad palms supporting his chin. His thin, hollow cheeks showed, between the out-spread fingers, a sickly yellow in the candle-light. One candle in a spiked holder burned against the side of the drive. Two billies and two full crib-bags hung near on dog-hooks driven in an upright leg, and at the man's feet lay a couple of picks and a shovel. Kyley sat with his back to the face, staring with glowing, vindictive eyes into the gathered gloom down the drive, where the passage to the shaft was choked to the roof with splintered timber and fallen mullock, and where the head of a second man was dimly visible. Only the head and shoulders of this other were free; the rest of his body was hidden under the debris. The second man was thrown face downwards; across his back, pinning his arms, lay the great cap-piece, which alone seemed heavy enough to have crushed the life out of him. Beyond this the tumbled reef and splintered slabs were piled to the roof.

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But the buried miner was not dead. The tough red-gum log, forced down by the mighty pressure, had ploughed its way diagonally down the side of the drive, and pinched him to the floor, stopping when the pressure of another inch must have been followed by certain and speedy death. A stout iron truck was jammed under the log beside him, torn and doubled like a cardboard box. The young man could lift his chin a few inches from the floor of the drive, and turn his face from one side to the other, but was incapable of any other movement.

Presently he spoke. His voice came with an effort, and sounded feebly shrill, like that of a very old man.

"Dick, Dick! in the name o' God, speak, man! D'ye think there's a chance fer us?"

Dick Kyley dropped his hands, and there was an expression of grim satisfaction in his gaunt face as he replied deliberately — "There's a chance for me, William."

The buried man lifted his clay-smirched face, startled by the other's tone, and gazed eagerly at his mate, and continued gazing for fully a minute, puzzled and frightened by the incongruous levity in the face that confronted him. Then, the position becoming painful, he dropped his cheek in the wet clay again.

"What d'ye mean?" he asked anxiously. "Why only fer you?"

"Because, William, I don't think you've got a dog's Show."

The reply was without a trace of sympathy; there was, in fact, a touch of malicious banter in the mincing tone of the "William." William Hether had never been anything but "Hether" or "Bill" to his shift-mate before.

Again Hether looked anxiously into Kyley's face. Its cadaverous hollows were filled with dark shadows, and the high-lights brought out the salient features in a grotesque caricature that struck Hether as simply fiendish. He turned from the sight, with a new horror in his heart.

"This ain't no time to fool a man, Dick," he said humbly. "How can there be any chance fer you if I ain't in it?"

Kyley arose, plucked the candle from the wall, and advancing close to his mate held the flame low down and showed him a small pool of water gathered upon the floor within 18 inches of his face.

"That's why," he said.

Hether understood, and a cry broke from his lips.

"Keep it back, Dick!" he gasped.

"William," said Kyley, calmly replacing the candle and resuming his former position on the reef, "you're a fool. That water's coming in from the face, as usual. The fall has dammed the gutters, and it can't get away; consequently, in less'n five hours the pool will be above your ears. And you know what that means."

"But you can build a dam around me. Get the shovel-quick! Make a dam with that loose reef an' the clay off the floor. Dick, Dick! give us a chance, for God's sake, man!"

Hether stopped short, staring at the other, who sat calmly regarding him. Presently he spoke again in a quavering whisper:

"You won't see a man drown without lendin' a hand t' help him ?"

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"No, I won't see it," replied Kyley, "because I'm goin' to douse this light. A candle burns up the air, an' I'll want all there is here, I reckon, before the boys reach me."

Driven almost wild with terror, a terror occasioned no less by the grim significance of Kyley's leering countenance and the brutality of the words than by the horrors of his position, Hether began to plead piteously, with tears and moanings. The pain of broken bones and the sickness of exhaustion had quite unmanned "Big Bill Hether;" but his agony did not touch the heart of Kyley, who seemed to have forgotten that death also threatened him in the delight that the young man's sufferings awakened within his breast.

"Why've you rounded 'on me, Dick ? What've I done -- what 've I ever done?" moaned the helpless man.

"I'm not goin' to lift a finger to keep you out of hell," answered the other, "because of her, William -- because of Hannah."

Bill turned his face to the light again, and once more he stared at Kyley, sharply, inquiringly, reading ever line of his fateful countenance. Then a groan of despair broke from him.

"I'll go away, Kyley," he said -- "true's Christ, if we get out I'll go away, an' you'll never hear of me again. Only make a dam. Quick, man, quick -- it's comin'! God! this is worse than murder. Dick ----"

The water, having filled the depression at the side of the drive, was now running down and forming a pool in the hollow under Hether's chin.

Kyley turned and blew out the candle. For a long time Hether continued to supplicate in the darkness, and Kyley, leaning comfortably against the face, heard the thin voice, weakening to an almost inarticulate whisper, beseeching by all that is good on earth and holy in heaven for a little grace -- another poor chance of life -- and answered never a word. By a painful effort the young man continued to keep his mouth above the gathering water, but gradually the torture that afflicted his extended neck became unendurable, and now in his last extremity he railed at Kyley as a murderer, and abused him with curses in weak, childish tones that were nevertheless pregnant with passion, and sounded distinctly and with terrifying emphasis in that black chamber of death.

Suddenly there was silence. Dick Kyley listened, and presently heard a bubbling sound in the water. That ceased, and all was still. He felt now that his vengeance was complete -- that Hether was dead, and at that moment the fierce emotions of resentment and revenge -- hunger that had possessed and upheld him departed in a breath, and left him weak and cowed. His limbs trembled, and beads of perspiration gathered about the roots of his hair and rolled coldly upon his brow and cheeks. He was thinking, too, of his own wretched case. He heard, fitfully, a distant drumming, the sound of timber being driven home, and knew that the rescue parties were working as hard as men may work, but whether theirs would be a job of hours or days he could not tell, and already he fancied he detected some taint of vitiation in the air.

Dick Kyley, sitting alone in the blackness of his prison, waiting for salvation or death, was soon the victim of an ungovernable fear, a supernatural terror entirely new to him, and the more awful for its novelty. From the moment he believed Hether dead he began to fear him. He strove with all the energy of his strong sense to drive him from his thoughts, but do what he might his mind would revert to the dread subject, and his eyes turn, staring intently into the darkness, where at times they seemed to detect a yet blacker form in the pitch-black night that filled the drive -- the shape of the dead man's head. The horror grew, and with it an agonizing conviction that Hether's dead face was staring at him with dead but seeing eyes. Imagination had pictured the pallid cheeks stained with blood and clay, and the wide, accusing eyes, till the vision became a reality to him. Tortured beyond endurance, Kyley fumbled in his pocket and found a match, which he struck upon the shovel blade. As the light filled the chamber a groan of relief broke from the miner's labouring breast. Only the back of Hether's head was visible; his face was sunk to the temple in the water. Dick extinguished the match -- his last -- and sat down again, only to

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struggle with another relay of horrors that presently arose against him.

William Hether still lived. He had discovered that by taking a deep breath and sinking his face till the forehead rested upon the clay he was enabled to allay the pain in his neck and to continue the struggle. He persisted in this course, noiselessly, for the sound of the rescuers at work had filled him with a glorious hope, and with that hope had come a fear that Kyley might be moved to murder him if he thought his rescue possible.

So another hour fled. The water in the drive, which had now found a broad level, continued to rise slowly. Kyley had lost the power of appreciating time, and sat huddled against the wall, distraught with fear and despair. Hether's face was haunting him again, standing forth visibly, threatening and awful in the tomb-like darkness. His mad fancy stretched every hour of his imprisonment into a long day, and he believed that it was his fate to be stifled by the foul gases from his mate's decomposing corpse. Even now the taint was in his nostrils. Although he was listening all the time with agonized intensity, he no longer heard the hammering of the miners beyond; his mind was too full of its unspeakable fear -- he awaited the attack of the inhuman thing that his irresponsible faculties had fashioned out of the impenetrable gloom at the end of his narrow prison. At this crisis Hether called again, in a piercing voice, full of the supreme terror: --

"Help! help! Kyley, you murderer! fiend devil-----"

At the first sound of the voice, Kyley sprang back against the end of the drive, and shrieked, with all the power of his lungs, again and again; and there he remained, crouched down, pressing his face into the gravel, clutching his ears, shivering and moaning.

Three hours later the rescuers broke through, and found Hether under the fall, with his head in a pool of water, dead, and Kyley squatting at the face, babbling of spectres and devils.

It is still Mr. Richard Kyley's quaint belief that he is a conspicuous figure in hell.

Mr. And Mrs. Sin Fat

MR. Sin Fat arrived in Australia in the year of grace 1870, a poor and friendless man. He entered the great city of Melbourne, a stranger in a strange country, possessed only of a blue dungaree suit that had served him long and faithfully in his distant home, ninepence in coppers, and as much of his fatherland spread over his surface and deposited in the cracks and crannies of his gaunt person as he could conveniently carry.

Sin Fat was not tall and athletic, nor fair to look upon -- in truth, he was stunted, and as plain of face as the pottery gods that he had learned to revere at his good mother's knee. His complexion was so distraught by an uncongenial climate that it possessed less bloom and beauty than the inside of a sun-dried lambskin; his features were turned and twisted and pulled awry till they resembled excrescences and indentations on a pie-melon, and his lank, lean limbs were mute evidence of a life of privation and toil. In point of fact, Sin Fat was so ungainly and so sparing of personal attractions at this period of his existence that his homely visage soon became the theme of popular comment, and "ugly as Sin" is an aphorism which will survive as long as the English language is spoken.

The humble immigrant paid no poll-tax; he was a duly certified subject of Her Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, towards whose throne and person he possessed an ardent and undying affection, as he told the Customs officer in mutilated English and accents tremulous and low. For Sin was by nature bashful and conciliatory, his tones were unctuous, and his humble carriage excited the derision of a distempered and woe-worn dog which had its habitat amongst the lumber on the wharf -- a vagrant, craven mongrel, that lived in a perpetual state of cringe, yet which assumed something of dignity in the presence of a still meaner creature, and boldly pursued Sin Fat as he ambled

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away, and assailed him in the rearmost parts of his frame. But the lowly foreigner continued on his road with downcast eyes and an expression of religious meekness, till, as if guided by instinct or the power of affinity, he slunk into that nest of pestilence between Little Bourke and Lonsdale streets, and was lost amongst the hordes which there do congregate.

Fifteen years ago the Chinese Camp at Ballarat East was a large and populous suburb. Thousands of prosperous, but unkempt and wasted, disciples of Confucius lodged in a nest of tottering, vermin-ravaged, smoke-begrimed hovels, of which no independent hog would accept a protracted tenure. The area extending from the main road to back beyond the old Llanberris was almost covered with the broken-backed tenements of squalid, immoral heathens, who followed various light and remunerative callings — peddling tea, gimcrack fancy goods, and moonstruck fish; fossicking on the Yarrowee and Black Hill flats; or prowling round with a pair of shabby baskets strung on a stick, collecting rags, bones, and bottles, or any movable items of intrinsic value which could be reached through the fence when the proprietor's attention was otherwise engaged, and each and all supplementing their income by deeply-planned nocturnal raids on distant poultry yards, fruit farms, wood-heaps, or sluice-boxes. A couple of serpentine streets, inhabited by grimy pagans, still remain, but the majority of the Chows have migrated to other diggings, some have returned to the homes of their childhood, and some have gone to heaven. The staggering shanties which still remain are a good sample of the sties that littered the flat in '73 — decrepid dens, reaching away in all directions for something to lean against, indented on one side, bulged on the other — compiled of logs, stones, palings flattened tins and battered pans, and roofed with sugar-mats. The common Chinaman glories in these little snug cribs. When by some chance he becomes possessed of a home with a respectable exterior he straightway hews a hole in the roof, boards up the windows with borrowed planks, and disfigures the front with scraps of tin and old battens — whether in accordance with a perverted taste or out of a guileful desire to mislead the tax-assessor is beyond Caucasian comprehension.

It was evening, after a day hot enough to blister the ear of an elephant. Sin Fat's work was done, and he jogged homewards along a little side-street in Ballarat East. He bore the orthodox Chinese baskets, a pair which had evidently been in active business for some considerable time, and, judging from the hooked stick in his hand and the grateful aroma of old bones and such things which clung to him like a brother, Sin was following the calling of a "Rag John." S. Fat, as we now see him with the eye of faith, is physically much improved since he landed in Australia; he does not appear to have missed meals so regularly of late, and his predatory success has lent him an air of confidence and self-esteem, though he smiles with his old deference and still clings with superstitious awe to the dirt of his fatherland, now cemented by grit of Australian origin.

Our hero has disposed of his day's collection of rags and rottenness, gleaned from the gutters and rubbish-heaps of the city, at a local marine-store, and he now hies him to his humble home and merited repose. But he is not lost to a sense of duty; his ever-watchful eye is open to detect an opportunity, however trifling, of increasing his diurnal income, and when he spies a goose, obese and matronly, making frantic endeavours to squeeze her portly form through a small aperture in a fowl-house behind a private residence, his soul is instantly fired with a desire to possess her — to call her his own, if only for a few hours.

Sin is a man of action; dropping his baskets, and casting aside all reserve, he enters the yard, and in a moment the well-conditioned bird is in his power. Tucking her under his arm, and stifling her noisy clamours, he turns to vacate the premises; but, alas for his circumspection, the door of the residence opens, and a fat woman, with a baby dangling over one arm, comes out to swear at a neighbour's boy who is throwing stones at a cat on her roof. She has not noticed the enterprising Mongol, but "he who hesitates is lost," and Sin's native wit serves him well. Advancing boldly to the stout female, smiling obsequiously the while, and covering the brands and birth-marks of the goose with his jerkin, he blandly queries:

"Buy em goose, missee? Welly good, welly fat."

"Naw!" snaps the woman, eyeing him suspiciously.

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"Muchee fine goose, welly fat!" persists Sin, coyly smiling.

"Don't want it; go away!"

"All li; some odder day, eh?" So Sin retreats, still smiling, and as he trots on his way congratulates himself, gibbering aloud in his rapture.

Sin had a bijou villa, built in his spare time from plans and specifications of his own making, and composed of old palings gleaned from neighbouring fences on moonless nights, and multitudinous other scraps and patches which were within the reach of a poor Chinese. The residence was a very comfortable one for summer wear; it had openings to catch the breeze from every point of the compass, and if the rain did come in at the roof — well, it ran out at the sides again. Standing at the front door one commanded an excellent view of a creek, embedded in whose thick yellow clay lay the decomposing remains of many domestic fauna. The house was within two minutes' walk of a fantan-table and a Joss-house; it abutted on a stagnant pool, and received the balmy westerly breeze as it bounced off a candle-factory. Our hero was content with these few advantages for the time being, but by steady industry and frugality he hoped one day to run a gambling-hell of his own, and move in the best Celestial society in imported wooden boots. Sin was ambitious.

Sin Fat parted with his feathered prize to an epicurean fellow-countryman at a high figure before he reached his humble home. He knew that, had he not done so, Mrs. Sin Fat would have seized the earliest opportunity of converting the bird into square gin. Mrs. Fat was possessed of a deplorable habit of thus transmuting all kinds of personal property into liquor, in consequence of which it was part of her industrious husband's policy to carefully place all articles readily saleable beyond her reach.

It was dark before Mr. Fat reached his own roof-tree. He groped his way into the parlour, which was also kitchen, bedroom, drawingroom, and outhouse, and lit a candle (candles were another of Mrs. Fat's extravagances). The glare awoke a woman who was sleeping, sprawling amongst a few filthy rags on a low bunk at one end of the hut. She lifted herself on her hands, and gazed at the Chinaman with stupid, drunken eyes. A great shock of unkempt black hair fell about her sallow face, which, despite the ravages of drink, and that faint, strange Mongolian look which surely comes to the woman who consorts with Chinamen, still possessed something of beauty. Under earlier and more favourable circumstances her eyes had been full, dark, and luminous. Her features were well cut, the nose somewhat aquiline, the mouth large and sensual. A virago surely, with the temper of fifty devils — a woman abandoned to the filth and utter loathsomeness of a Chinese camp. About thirty-four years of age, tall, round with the unnatural obesity of a heavy drinker, intensely hating all about her — aye, and hating herself worse than all as she wallowed in the very dregs and slime of the social system — such was Mrs. Sin Fat.

"Home again, sweetheart!" she muttered. "home again to your true love, my tall, beautiful — Bah, you ugly thief! Get out or I'll brain you!" And a list of profane ejaculations was smothered as she fell with her face amongst the rags once more, clutching vacantly for the empty bottle wherewith to assault her submissive husband.

This was Sin's only weakness — this she-fiend, from whose bursts of passion he had often to fly for his life. He had found her one cold, wet night, stretched in the mud at the door of his hovel, and had taken her in. She was haggard, ragged, and so fearfully emaciated that the men turned from her with wry expressions, and this seemed her last chance. She and Sin Fat "got married." She was possessed of one husband already, a portly Melbourne mechanic, but she had left him and her child years before — left him because he was a "fat old fool," an opinion based on the fact that he did not kick her down and jump on her with his working boots when she flew into a tantrum. Other men had done this since, and she respected them. Sin fed her up, dressed her well, and then she left him, only to return again, worn with debauchery, to be dressed and fed, and to "clear" once more. She repeated this course several times, and her dutiful lord always received her with open arms; but at length an idea occurred to Sin: he refused to provide fine clothes, and then she stayed with him, and made merry by occasionally cracking his head with a gin-bottle — an empty bottle, of course, for she would rather that her dear lord should escape

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correction altogether than waste a "nobbler" of her favourite nectar. Sin bore his cross patiently, but it was not affection entirely that restrained him from dropping something unhealthy into her gin. We have said that he was ambitious; he had many plans, and this woman could dress well and ape the lady. He foresaw the time when she would be useful to him.

Sin had no intention of remaining a toiler and moiler all his life. He had done well in the rag-and-bone business, but it was laborious, and our hero had gentlemanly instincts — he wanted to acquire riches and fatty tissue without expending any more of the sweat of his brow than was absolutely necessary, and he but waited to increase his available capital before embarking in business. By a dispensation of Providence, the fulfilment of his laudable ambition was brought about earlier than he expected.

Midnight. The white moon floated low in the eastern sky, and thrust her sheeny beams like sword-blades through the crazy walls of Sin Fat's home. A tall, willowy cat, with swan-like neck and attenuated frame, bestrode the ridge-pole, and stood black against the pallid orb of night, and lifting up her voice recited her woes to the listening spheres in accents wild and weird. All else was still. The camp lay like a cluster of islands in a lake of light. Sin's sleep was calm and childlike, and his wife had ceased to toss and breathe half-uttered curses in his deaf ear. The moon rose higher and higher, and the long black shadows slowly folded towards their base. Suddenly and stealthily the ground opened like a yawning giant; Sin Fat's villa trembled, tottered, and sank quietly into the black abyss, and where it had stood gaped a deep, dark pit — and a dusty cat, with a broken tail and a coat of many colours, tearing madly across the battery sands, seemed to be the only creature that quite realized the extent of the catastrophe. The Chinese camp at Ballarat is situated chiefly over "old ground." The country has been worked so thoroughly that sections of the earth's crust often settle down abruptly into the caverns below, accompanied by sundry Mongolian residences, to the exceeding discomfort of their greasy inhabitants.

At break of day the squalid denizens of the camp gathered about the chasm, at the bottom of which lay Mr. and Mrs. Sin Fat buried in the ruins. The Chows appointed a chairman, and discussed the situation with characteristic clamour and gesticulation, finally resolving by a large majority to call in white men to undertake the rescue. When there is work to be done which entails the probability of a broken head or the unearthing of a corpse, the heathen Chinese is sure to have a sore hand or an important engagement at some distance. White men came, and Mr. and Mrs. Sin Fat were fossicked out of the dirt, full of dust, old nails, and wooden splinters, but not much the worse for their premature interment. Mrs. Fat thanked her rescuers, as she was hauled up through the roof of the hut, with a few well-chosen objurgations, terminating with a heartfelt wish that they might be instantly consigned to a region where frost and snow are unknown.

Sin stood on the brink of the aperture for some time after the thoughtless herd had dispersed, dolefully surveying the fragments of his late home. His mind was made up at last — he would not build again, he would go into business.

The year 1876 A.D. Little Bourke-street, Melbourne, Sunday morning. On both sides of the narrow thoroughfare were groups of sleek-looking Chinese, arrayed in imported clothes, their hands buried in their long sleeves, debating politics and theology, or more likely cavilling at the absurdly low price of "cabbage" and "green pea," the conversation occasionally eliciting a shrewd ejaculation from a dun-coloured philosopher a hundred yards off, or from a hoary, half-dressed pagan at a third-story window. They were a fat, comfortable-looking lot, and they aired their Sunday best on a fine Sabbath "allee same Eulopean." In front of a smoky little shop, possessed of only one window, in which a roast fowl, beautifully browned and highly polished, hung suspended by a string, and served as a roost for half the flies in the lane, was congregated a particularly verbose and noisy crowd, attracted evidently by the brilliant conversational powers of one of their number — a short but enormously fat "John," who leaned in the doorway. His stoutness was phenomenal; it would not have discredited the treatment of those wily men who prepare prize hogs for agricultural shows. Layers of blubber bulged about his eyes, leaving only two conical slits for him to peer through; his cheeks sagged below his great double chin, and his mighty neck rolled

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almost on to his shoulders, and vibrated like jelly with every movement. But his corporation was his greatest pride — it was the envy and admiration of all his friends; it jutted out, bold and precipitous, and seemed to defy the world. This Celestial phenomenon was dressed in the very latest Chinese style; gorgeous silks of many colours bedizened his capacious person; his feet were encased in the richest stub-toed wooden shoes; his hat was a brilliant building direct from the Flowery Land, and his proud tail swept the floor. A dandy dude was he — a heavy swell from home — oily and clean, looking as if he had been well scraped and polished with a greasy rag. He was jolly; his smiles went from his ears to his toes like ripples on a lake, and succeeded each other like winking — in fact, he was brimful of a wild sort of Chinese humour. We have read that the Chinese delight in punning; this man must have been the king of Mongolian punsters, judging from the merriment his every remark was wont to evoke. He was brimming with irony, sarcasm, and sparkling repartee. A white man could never grasp his witticisms; after translation they sounded much like childish nonsense, but anyone who listened to him would feel confident that he was a comical dog all the same.

In compliance with a suggestion from the portly host, the Chows streamed after him through the dark, dirty "shop" into a long, low room on the left, where were a number of tables covered with matting. Seating himself at the head of one of these, and producing the "tools," the fat man prepared to preside over the game, his small eyes twinkling keenly enough now from out of the depths of his head; and soon all were enthralled in the mysteries of fan-tan. The Chinaman, stoical under all other circumstances, gambles like a fiend; these men were soon worked into a delirium of excitement, but the fat Mongolian was always cool, and whilst the sums of money before the players fluctuated, his increased steadily, surely.

A sign over the door of the little smoky shop translated into English implied that Sin Fat, Chinese cook, lived and plied his trade within, and was prepared to fulfil all orders with promptitude. That sign was a bold and brazen lie. Sin Fat was no cook, and the burnished fowl which hung in the window was only a "blind" — a window-blind, so to speak — intended to beguile "him foolee white feller." Sin Fat ran a gambling-hell and something worse. Sin had attained his ambition; while making flesh he was also making money rapidly. Our hero, the poor broken Chow who had landed in the city not many years before without a shilling or a change of raiment, had, by patient industry and steadfastness of purpose, acquired an extensive business and a quantity of capital at interest. The colonial climate agreed with him, and he had many friends. When Constable Mahoney, Sergeant Mulduckie, or Private O'Brien met him they greeted him like a brother; they winked knowingly, dug him jocularly in the ribs, and insinuated that he was a sly dog. These zealous guardians of public property and morality had mastered the art which was necessary to every "mimber av the foorce" who would have his bank-book and little terrace in the suburbs — the art of not seeing too much.

Beyond the little shop adorned with the pendant fowl, stretched to the right and left till the back premises of the houses in the block seemed to be absorbed, were numerous small rooms — cabins reeking with the nauseating odour of opium and pollution and Chinamen, and always clouded with smoke. There was no order, no design, in the building of these cribs; big rooms had been portioned off and holes cut in partitions recklessly. You groped through the place, and might find your way, to your great surprise, into two or three filthy lanes at the back, right or left. The curious European, on a voyage of discovery, saw in these rooms, through the clouds of choking, evil-smelling opium fumes, debilitated Chinamen, with animalized faces, floating to hell in the midst of visions of heaven; lank, skinny coolies, Indians, and other vile Asiatics; and, worst of all, European girls, corrupt below anything else in nature, excepting only the ghouls they consorted with. Girls of sixteen, decoyed in at the front door by the sheen of silk and the jingle of gold, percolating through that terrible den, to be finally cast out amongst the slime and rottenness of the lanes — abject wrecks, with nothing of humanity left within them, and hardly the semblance without.

Mrs. Sin Fat was well and hearty; she had fine clothes galore, and no longer thought of deserting her dear lord — perhaps because she saw that he was not now so very anxious to prevent it. A great assistance in the business was the tall, dark woman, who could "put on style;" she clung to her old love — the gin-bottle — and frequently worked up a small cyclone, an hysterical fit peculiarly her own, which militated against the prosperity of the

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house by suspending business for the time being. In these moments she called herself many vile and unladylike names, bit her arms, tore her hair, spat upon her lord, and spurned him with something heavy and hard, even going to the extent of hurling bottles and other dangerous projectiles at the shaven heads of the best customers. This was unpleasant, but Sin condescended to overlook it when she sallied forth in fine raiment, with a thick veil concealing half her face, to wander in the public parks and gardens, and enter into conversation with young girls who were airing babies, or reading romances in the shade. She talked with them so sweetly (one at a time always) about babies, birds, or flowers; but she was at her best when describing with poetic fervour gorgeous dresses, all bespangled and glittering, or dwelling upon hats that were dreams of loveliness. She was always making appointments with these girls, and gradually, deftly leading them by a golden thread, she drew them into the shop of Sin Fat the cook, and the sign over the door might well have read:—"Abandon all hope ye who enter here!" Mrs. Fat was not always successful; but one success condoned for fifty failures. Sin Fat's trade was so extensive that he was enabled to give other women commissions in this line; none of them, however, succeeded so well as his wife.

Two years rolled by, and Sin Fat's business increased and multiplied in every branch. A polished fowl still hung in the little window, and the green and golden sign published the same old lie. Sin was even jollier and more rotund; he was looked up to as a Chow among Chows. His capital at interest had grown apace, and he fondly dreamed of selling out and returning home to the Flowery Land, there to buy a Celestial C.M.G.-ship, and lord it as a representative Australian. His wife by this time was a source of grave uneasiness to him; her temper had intensified, she had grown hypochondriacal, and refused for months to tout for the business. Her bursts of passion were terrible to contemplate, and Sin Fat, Esq., had now attained a station so exalted that to be seen evading the wrath of a tall female armed with a poker or a bottle compromised his dignity. He felt that it was time to assert his authority.

One day Sin, as head of the firm, was overjoyed at the advent of a new victim. The decoy in this case was a loudly dressed young woman who shortly before had developed marvellous ability in that line. The new girl was aged about seventeen, tall, dark, and thin, but handsome — the spoilt daughter of a weak parent. She had been caught with the golden cord, and the hook had been baited with her own vanity. A few hours after her advent he was seated with her in the one room of the place which had any pretensions to cleanliness and attractions. It was draped and hung about with all kinds of ridiculous, highly-coloured Chinese gew-gaws, and fairly furnished. This was the bower into which all novices were first introduced; when they left it they had received their initial lesson in the hard course of misery just entered upon. Sin was introducing this girl to her first pipe of opium — that devil's drug and Chinaman's greatest ally. The obese Confucian prattled to her in tender tones, like the jolly old gallant he was, and the girl, half-stretched upon a sort of settee, laughed and joked with the boldness of an old hand.

Suddenly the door opened and Mrs. Sin Fat entered. She had come to inspect the strange girl for the first time. She looked wild and uncanny enough as she stepped over the threshold, but when her eyes encountered the face of the new-comer her countenance became horrifying.

"Great ———!" she whispered, supporting her shivering limbs against the door. The exclamation was not blasphemous — for a wonder — it was half a prayer, half the expression of strong inward agony. Then a fierce determination seemed to strengthen every muscle and sinew in her tall frame; she strode into the room, dashed the pipe from the girl's hands, and, seizing her by the arms with a force that made the bones crack, she said hoarsely:

"Who are you, my fine miss? Your name? What's your name? You need not scream, Jessie Hill. You see I know you. I have watched you from a distance for years. So your tender-hearted father has let you drift this way, as he did me. He is too kind for devils like us. You go out of this — back to your father! Do you hear me? You go now, and if you ever come here again I'll stab you to death! Remember, I swear I will watch for you, and if you come here again I will kill you on the spot! They told you you would have rich dresses, handsome admirers, pockets full of gold, didn't they? They have lied, as they lied to the miserable wretches who have gone before you. There is no

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finery here — nothing but filth and misery and degradation. Come here again, and I will throw your dead body into the gutter. Now, go!"

But the girl had fainted, and no wonder, for the woman gripped her like a vice, and her face was as frightful as a nightmare. Mrs. Sin Fat ran out for water; when she returned her husband had locked the outer door and placed the key in his pocket. She rushed at him in a fury, but checked herself with her hands in the air.

"That girl has got to go!" she hissed.

"No savee," muttered Sin, putting on a bolder front than ever he had dared to do before.

"I tell you she shall go; she is my daughter, my child!"

"Nosavee! Stay here all a same." And he crossed into another room. Sin had paid his agent a big commission on this girl, and was determined not to lose her. Besides, he had taken a fancy to her himself; he would rather have lost the mother than the daughter. Mrs. Sin Fat did not storm and rage, but turned away with a calmness that was unnatural, and presently followed Sin into the room, and came close to him, concealing one hand in the folds of her dress.

"That girl," she said, calmly; "is she to go?"

"No, no! Go yourself——"

These memorable words were the last ever spoken by the great, the prosperous Sin Fat. A knife flashed before his eyes, and was driven to the hilt in his side. He fell forward with only a groan, and the fall forced the heavy handle of the weapon still deeper between his ribs. Mrs. Sin Fat, coolly removing the keys from his pocket, went out, followed by a little stream of bright blood, which ran along the floor under the closed door, as if to keep watch upon her, and entered the room where she had left the new girl — her own daughter, as the fates would have it. The new girl was sitting gazing about her, frightened and confused.

"Here, come with me," said the woman, seizing her roughly by the arm; "come with me, and see the delightful life you will have of it in this house!" She led the girl through the vile den, showed her all its abominations, and at last pushed her into one of the filthy alleys. "Here," she said, "you would be thrown out in a few months' time, a degraded wretch. A fine, gay life, eh? Now go, and be a good woman if you can. So help me Heaven, if you ever come back I will kill you. Remember that, night and day!"

The girl hurried away, full of horror and fear, but saved and her mother followed her at a distance. Sin Fat was found, and duly inquested. A verdict of murder was returned, and a warrant issued for Mrs. Sin Fat, but she was never caught. Only one man ever cast eyes on her again. A week after the murder a stoical old ferryman was working his lumbering craft across the river late one night, when something struck the prow, turned slowly round, and quietly drifted with the dark waters. It was a body. It turned over after the contact with the boat, and the man saw a white, bleached face in the moonlight, surrounded by a mass of black hair, which formed a sombre halo. The ferryman looked after it curiously for a time, then resumed his rowing, muttering:

"Only a body! Well, I don't want t' be mixed up in no inkwests."

An Incident At The Old Pioneer

MANAGER M`Fie had seen the 12 o'clock shift below, and now, tired and disgusted, he kicked off his wet things, and "turned in." Manager M`Fie's hut was quite a salubrious summer residence, but the rain had already

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picked holes in the bark roof. An iron bucket suspended above the head of the bunk caught the tiny stream that would otherwise have dribbled upon his pillow, an oil-skin coat turned the drops that rained upon the foot of the bed into a miniature river meandering along the hard clay floor, and the darkness was made musical by the tinkling sound of drops falling into tin dishes placed here and there about the hut to catch them. Mack curled down amongst the blankets under his great 'possum rug, swore a prayer or two, and endeavoured to give himself up to sweet forgetfulness of his "danged roomertism," the fact that she was pinching out — "she" being the reef — and his many other managerial troubles.

Outside the night was pitch dark, and the rain raced by in successive charges, driven by the howling wind that caught and tore the gusts of phosphorescent steam above the engine-house at the mine, and sent the fragments streaming and curling away amongst the complaining trees like maddened wraiths. The driver in the well-lighted, rain-tight engine-house whistled contentedly over his work, and the battery boys, under comfortable shelter, rather delighted in the storm, the howling of which could be heard even above the thunder of the stampers; but the unfortunate braceman, crouching in the lee of one of the poppet-legs beneath the misty yellow glow of his lantern, cold, soddened, and more than half afraid of the tempest, that shook the brace vigorously under its bare poles, muffled the chattering of his teeth with a big quid, and heartily envied the facemen in the warm stopes and drives below.

Sleep was long coming to the weary "skipper;" he lay awake for hours, feeling the rheumatism like rats gnawing in his old bones, and swearing quietly but with the emphasis of a devout "Geordie." At length, whilst listening intently for the four o'clock whistle, oblivion fell upon him, and a deep organ note mingled with the tinkling of the raindrops in the scattered tins.

Mack imagined he had not slept twenty minutes when he was roughly awakened. He felt himself being energetically shaken, and heard a voice with a decided note of terror in it mixed up with the march, march, march of the rain and the long shrill cries of the wind in the dead gums. A shower of water rained upon his face from wet oilskins as he turned, and the voice of Tom White called again:—

"For God's sake, boss, tumble up! The 'big blow' has caved in, and the old shaft is choked with reef."

The manager was out on the sloppy floor in a moment, groping for his clothes.

"An' Brierly, Brierly—— D——n it all, man! what about Brierly?" he gasped.

"He is trapped like a rat."

"Lord, Lord!" groaned M'Fie, "an' there hasn't been a man near the cursed hole for months before to-night."

Mack discovered the matches, but they were like mush in his hand, and he was compelled to tear his way into his clothes in the darkness. Presently he rushed after White towards the mine. The whistle was piping piteously against the storm, which still thundered in the gully.

A hasty examination served to inform the manager of the extent of the disaster, which troubled him all the more for the fact that it was not quite unforeseen and might have been avoided. About forty yards from the working shaft of the Old Pioneer mine was another and a smaller shaft, one that had been sunk by the discoverers of the reef. At the lower-most level of the latter hole the two shafts were connected by means of a drive for the purpose of improving the air in the workings. Within about fifty feet of the surface the original workers had opened out and struck a big blow of quartz, the very richest of the lode, and in taking out the stone had excavated a great irregular chamber, reaching in places to within twenty feet of the surface. This chamber they eventually stowed full of loose reef from the lower workings, with the dual object of saving hauling and holding up the ground. It was a bad job from a miner's point of view, but when a small independent party is on rich stuff that is not

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expected to hold out the members rarely waste time on fancy mining. Long since the surface over the excavation had settled down, leaving a large hollow place. To-night the great pressure of the many tons of earth, combined with the force exerted by the swelling of the reef, caused by the moisture that percolated through, had crushed out the timbers that walled up the mouth of the old drive, and sent the broken reef pouring into the pit, like the waters of a cataract, filling eighty feet of shaft in the winking of an eye.

If this were all the accident might not have been very serious, but at 12 o'clock M`Fie had sent Bill Brierly to put in a shift in a small drive leading from the air-shaft towards the Old Pioneer, and about thirty feet from the bottom of the former. Scarcely any work had been done in this drive since it was opened out, and now the shaft was choked, and Brierly was penned in that tiny chamber, with air enough, Mack reckoned, to last a man five hours, provided he had sense enough to put out his candles, and sit and wait for death in the dark -- a hair-bleaching, marrow-freezing experience men say who have so sat and waited.

"Stop the battery!" roared M`Fie, after his cursory inspection. "Send the boys to knock up the men at the Piper an' up at Mother Murty's. They'll never hear that penny whistle agin this wind. White, you take Harry an' Bricky an' a couple of others when they come, an' rig a win'las over the air-shaft, an' pull reef till all's blue! Ben, go below -- I expect Evans an' Castro are already on the job. Chuck it down the winze, stow it anywhere, an' work -- work like fiends. If we don't get at Brierly inside five hours I'm a done man, an' so is he!"

The manager remained on top a few minutes longer, giving orders to the brace-man and the engine-driver, and then went below with a couple of volunteers who had come out of the black bush, half-dressed and puffing like engines. In No. 3, which drive ran into the old shaft, three silent men, stripped to their flannels, reeking in the faint, ghostly light of the candles, worked desperately upon the broken reef that had gushed into the drive.

M`Fie and the others "took a hand," more men came down in the next cage, and the next, and next, and presently wherever there was room for a man to plant a shovel or push a truck a man was toiling with the magnificent energy with which the meanest miner is endowed when the life of a mate is at stake. On the brace three or four men handled the trucks as the cages leapt to the landing. The engine throbbed, groaned, and strained like a living thing, and the eager volunteers, stoking vigorously, kept steam up to a dangerous pressure, while the safety-valve fairly shrieked under it. At the mouth of the air-shaft a brawny contingent whirled the windlass, pulling dirt from the top of the heap below, where two men toiled like heroes. Six or seven others, waiting to relieve exhausted mates, gathered in the red glow before the boilers, and talked of the imprisoned man in low voices and with a newborn respect, telling all the best they knew of him; and two or three frightened, curious women, with shawls drawn over their heads, peered with white faces out of the surrounding darkness.

At daybreak the struggle was still going on with undiminished zeal, and every handy place that would hold a truck of dirt was choked with reef, and the cages sprang up with the full trucks or rattled down with the "empties" swiftly, and with scarcely a pause.

Manager M`Fie worked with the best of them. Drenched with perspiration, bruised and cut by pieces of falling reef, he faced the mass of dirt in the old shaft, careless of danger and ignorant of fatigue. As fast as the reef was shovelled away more rolled into the drive out of the shaft, but at length Mack uttered a sharp exclamation of joy and pointed to a dark open space showing below the cap-piece of the first set. Enlarging this with a few strokes of the shovel, he seized a candle and examined the shaft beyond; then, staggering back in the drive, bellowed a cheer that was caught up by the men and echoed on the brace.

The unexpected had happened. The choked pit was a ladder-shaft; a stout ladder, well stayed, ran up the side of the shaft, past the drive in which Brierly was immured; between it and the slabs lining the shaft was a space about 18 in. wide; large lumps of reef had jammed between the rungs, and now, right up the side to the mouth of the drive, was a clear passage, large enough to admit of the escape of a slight man like Brierly.

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"Steady lads — easy does it!" said Mack, as the men attacked the reef again. "A wrong stroke might bring the stuff down again. Clear a way, an let's see what can be done."

Mack put his head into the shaft and called, but no answer came back. He called louder, again and again. Still there was no reply, and the old manager turned away, and looked meaningly into the blank faces of the men, and his own cheeks were grey with dread.

"I'll chance it, boss!"

A young fellow stepped forward — a trucker, a boy merely — with a plain, strong face and glowing eyes, luminous with resolution.

"No, no, lad! it might mean death."

But young Stevens pushed by the extended arm and seized the ladder. Somebody stuck a lighted candle on his hat with a scrap of moist clay, and he went up the shaft on the under side of the ladder, climbing gingerly, conscious that the least vibration might bring the reef rushing in upon him. Mack watched him from below, and no man spoke a word. The boy reached the drive, paused only a moment, and started down again. Half a minute later he was dragged from the ladder by M'Fie's eager hands, and the same instant the reef rushed in, and filled up the place where he had been, and poured into the drive with a vibrant roar like thunder.

Stevens stood with his back to one of the legs for a moment, a superstitious fear transfiguring his face, his limbs trembling painfully.

"He is not there!" he gasped in a choked voice.

"Not there?"

The boy shook his head.

"Then," murmured M'Fie, "he is there;" and he pointed towards the filled-in shaft with a despairing gesture. "He must have made a rush for the ladder when she started to run, and he's under the reef. It's all UP, boys!"

Something like a groan broke from the lips of the men, but they seized their shovels and went to work again — all but one man. Graham turned away and walked towards the working shaft. He went up on the cage, and in less than five minutes returned and drew M'Fie aside. He whispered a few words in the manager's ear, and Mack followed him with an amazed look in his face. The two men got on the cage, and Graham pulled the knocker, signalling to the engine-driver to drop them at No. 2.

Graham led the way along No. 2, in which drive no work had been done for some months, and presently stopped and threw the light of his candle full upon the recumbent form of a man sleeping heavily upon a few slabs, his head pillowed on his arm. Mack turned the face towards the light, and beheld Bill Brierly, the supposed dead man. Graham, and M'Fie stared at each other for a moment. Graham grinned feebly but Mack breathed a mighty oath. Brierly's tea-flask lay near. The manager picked it up and brought it to his nose.

"Drunk!" he ejaculated, kicking the sleeping miner.

"As a jackass," responded Graham, tersely.

Ten minutes later the brace-man called to the men below to knock off and come up.

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"We have got Brierly. He is alive!" he cried.

The men rushed the cages, cheering, and wondering. On top a circle of disgusted miners stood round Bill Brierly, who lay sprawling on the floor before the boilers, grinning inanely in his drunken sleep. The truth was told in constrained whispers. Brierly was probably "half-screwed" when he went on at 12; he had made his way to No. 2, the driest and warmest drive in the mine, early in the shift, taking his flask of rum with him, and intending, no doubt, to "do a comfortable loaf" up there; and there he had lain, stupidly drunk, throughout those dreadful hours of anxiety and toil. The men thought of their long struggle and their wasted sympathies, of the reef piled everywhere about the workings, yesterday so orderly and correct, and each man glanced into his neighbour's face, but none spoke; no one even ventured to swear, and they could not laugh — the situation was too tremendous for any form of expression of which they were capable.

One by one the worn-out miners dragged themselves away towards their huts and houses, but M^r Fie remained, sitting on a log, glowering at the drunken man, his mind full of the choked winzes and drives below, and of young Stevens cheek by jowl with death on the buried ladder.

"Ain't you going to turn in, boss?" someone asked.

"No," he said, angrily. "No. I'm goin' to sit here till Bill Brierly sobers up, an' then, by thunder, I'm goin' to kick him from here to the Piper, an' back again!"

"But, man, this is better than having to fish him from under the reef."

"I dunno, I dunno!" snarled Mack, striking his knee fiercely with his great gnarled fist, "but I must kick that man or blow up!"

A Vain Sacrifice

"A BIG fire down on the flat!"

It was after midnight. Petersen, Manly, Collier, and Grigg had been playing euchre for the last five hours, and drinking Cody's hand-made, chain-lightning whisky. They were heavy-eyed and heavy-headed, and did not seem to realize the significance of the shout for a few moments. Then they placed their cards carefully on the table, face downwards, and filed out, blundering along the passage to the hotel verandah.

A fierce red glow burned against the western sky, and far down amongst the black gum-trees a tongue of flame danced in the darkness.

Petersen, his tall form steadied against the verandah post, gazed for a moment, and the heaviness passed out of his eyes, succeeded by a keen interest, the flush in his handsome bearded face, induced by the heat of the room and the poisonous liquor he had drunk, died out, and his cheeks became ashen-grey in the dim light reflected from the bar window. Suddenly a cry burst from his lips:

"It is my house! Oh, God, my wife!"

He sprang off in the darkness, and rushed at full speed along the rough track leading down the hill in the direction of the fire, and his friends followed swiftly on his heels.

Petersen had only become even a moderately good customer to Cupid Cody, the preternaturally ugly landlord of the Wallaby Arms, and patentee and sole proprietor of the Gehenna brand of whisky, within the last three months;

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but of late he had been a very frequent visitor at the hotel, and had developed an appetite for Cupid's noxious liquors and a fondness for euchre which Mr. Cody was not slow to encourage.

Bert was a native of the Pea Creek district, and after living a sober and industrious life to take suddenly to vitriolic whisky and combative euchre parties two years after marriage was to excite curiosity and comment. The comment was not complimentary to Mrs. Bert. His few scattered neighbours seemed to find a sneaking satisfaction in the belief that Petersen was not happy in his married life. This, they contended, was only in accord with the fitness of things. In the first place young Petersen had gone to town for his wife, an action that was considered extremely unneighbourly, and was accepted as a reflection upon the marriageable young maidens of Pea Creek and district. In the second place Mrs. Petersen had shown no disposition to "make up to" her neighbours' wives and daughters, and consequently had the reputation of being "stuck up," and that is a sin unpardonable amongst bush people, to whom sociability means so much.

Bert's married life had not been the happiest. The girl he loved and the girl he married was quite unsuited to the life his wife was called upon to lead. She was a small, fair, town-bred girl, fond of gaiety and admiration, and used to little work and much amusement. He had won her in his best clothes, in the course of occasional trips to the city, and he took her to his home out in the silent bush, where the nearest neighbour was a quarter of a mile off, and then a big, plain, motherly person, with a great contempt for "Sunday clothes," and few ideas above the dairy.

Lately Mary's discontent had shown itself in petulant outbursts, in fits of the sulks, and a callous indifference to her husband's feelings, She grew to despise Petersen in his coloured moleskins and heavy boots. Bert fought against it good-humouredly, striving to make her life pleasant, and to retain her affection, but latterly her temper had driven him almost to despair, and as he still loved her he preferred the savage delights of Cody's bar parlour to the childish querulousness of the disappointed woman and her eternal twitching at his heartstrings.

Petersen's house was quite two miles from the Wallaby Arms, and throughout the long race the fear that had sprung into the man's soul never left him for a second. A conviction that his wife was in the burning house possessed him, and endowed him with extraordinary speed and strength.

He had left his wife at five o'clock in the afternoon, suffering from the headache that seemed to have become perpetual, and that filled his house with wailing, and called down upon his head tearful reproaches without reason and without end.

"What can I do?" he had asked, helplessly.

"At least you can go away," she answered, with fierce petulance.

When Petersen reached his burning home two or three men were running about hopelessly with buckets of water, and two pale-faced women stood before the house, watching it burn, stupid with fear. To these Bert appealed:

"My wife! where is she?"

The women shook their heads dumbly, and one pointed a long, trembling hand towards the leaping flames.

"No, no, no!" the husband cried, and he called his wife's name again and again, running wildly from place to place. The men had seen nothing of Mrs. Petersen — they believed she was in the house.

Distracted with fear and grief, Bert rushed once round the home, seeking amongst the saplings, crying his wife's name in a voice pregnant with pain and apprehension, and then the watchers saw him stop at the front and survey the burning house for a moment. The fire had now seized upon every part of the building, and threw up great

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tongues of flame against the black sky. Only for a second he stood, and then they saw him dash at the door and drive it in with his shoulder, and presently he disappeared amidst the flames and smoke.

The people who had now collected about the burning house drew closer and gazed into the flames, speechless and pale with terror. The moments dragged by, and they waited, the great fear growing upon them as the walls trembled, and the long, spiral flames were flung higher and higher into the windless night. Still they waited, scarcely breathing. The suspense became intolerable. Men looked into each other's eyes with fearful meaning, and dry tongues passed over drier lips. At length an overwrought woman shrieked aloud, and sank upon her knees, hiding her face in the folds of her dress. And then the roof was seen to rise upwards and outwards, the whole building vibrated, and, with a roaring and hissing of flames, collapsed into a glowing ruin, from which the sparks rose in clouds, and about which the flames ran and curled like great serpents.

The watchers knew now that Bert Petersen would never come forth again. The women sobbed, crouching on the ground. The men, white-faced and dumb, stood gazing stupidly into the fire, paralyzed by the sense of their impotence.

Not till Ragan, the mounted constable from Magpie, arrived did they find tongue, and as the tale was told Ragan's face grew grey under its accustomed bronze.

"Was burned trying to rescue his wife, you say?" he murmured.

"It was a mad attempt," said the now sobered Collier.

"'Twas," continued the constable in a harsh voice; "for his wife wasn't there."

"Not there!"

"She's eloped with young Arthur Grey, the dude at the post-office, damn her. They cleared out from Magpie together on the up train!"

Glover's Little Joke

"AIN'T she a dainty bit o' stuff?" The senior member of the firm of Slack and Samson, quartz-miners, Mount Moliagul, Victoria, sat on the windlass-handle, with his elbows on his knees and his sharp, angular jaw in his palms, and gazed with a mournful regret after the trim little figure in cool and tasteful print sailing through the saplings under a great spread of straw hat that fanned the air like the wings of a bird as she buoyantly stepped along. "She's immense, don't you think, Bill?"

"Spiffin!" responded the junior partner, with gloomy enthusiasm.

"Got a fine eye," continued the senior member, envious and meditative.

"Rippin' golden hair!"

"An' teeth. Say, Glover's luck's in."

"My oath!"

The senior partner got up, stretched his ridiculously long limbs, sighed heavily, and incontinently slid below, using the paid-out rope as a medium. The junior partner sighed with greater intensity as he caught the last

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dove-like flutter between the trees, and stationed himself at the windlass for an hour's pulling combined with grave meditation.

Lucy Davis was nobody in particular to the firm of Slack and Samson. The emotions excited in the honest souls of the partners when that charming young creature smiled up at them in passing, from out the grateful shade under the wide brim of her sun-hat, were felt in a like manner by the majority of the single men on the lead every time Miss Lucy's natty summer dresses came flitting through the bushes, and might be defined as a momentary discontent with their own loneliness, and a vague hope that fate might some day bestow upon them just such another little mate as Lucy Davis. These emotions were, however, combined with a sense of personal ill-treatment, for it was felt that the prize was not bestowed with discrimination in this instance.

Fate, however, has few like Miss Lucy in stock; the supply is small and the demand unlimited. She was nineteen, below the average height, fair, with a glorious burden of bright chestnut hair, which, despite her impatient efforts to brush it down smooth, in accordance with the prevailing style, would persist in running up in soft, regular ripples again almost immediately, to the great satisfaction of all beholders. She had large, shy blue eyes, with long lashes, and arched brows two shades darker than her hair. It is, perhaps, after all, a waste of effort to attempt to describe a face — we may say this feature is thus, and that is so and so, and every reader will picture a different countenance — but Miss Lucy's was perfection glorified. It had that light that seems to invite protection, and which proud, arrogant man so appreciates in the woman he loves. Her figure was slight but well rounded, there was a touch of native dignity in her walk, and her natural gaiety was demurely restrained by a due appreciation of the enormous responsibilities of a young lady of nineteen who had to keep house — no, tent — for father.

Miss Lucy wended her way along the brow of the hill towards the head of the lead until she reached the claim of Messrs. Davis and Glover. Here she seated herself on the reef, under the shade of the "win'sa'l" that hung limply in the shaft, and, producing materials from her basket, proceeded to knit a stocking to a merry tune, sung very softly, whilst the strokes of picks drummed faintly in the bowels of the earth below, and the rosellas, swinging, head downwards from the boughs of an adjacent white gum and burying their heads in the abundant blossom, murmured an occasional twitter of gluttonous satisfaction. The belle of Mount Moliagul had not been knitting many minutes before a spasmodic jerking of the windlass rope caused her to drive her needles at express speed and assume a deceitful air of pre-occupation. The oscillations of the rope became shorter and quicker, and presently a hairy arm came into view; it was followed by a hairy face, and a small, bright man of about 45, with splashes of clay on his face and in his whiskers, and alternate patches of clay and candle-grease pretty well all over him, drew himself up quietly and seated himself on the edge of the shaft; he watched the young lady for a few moments, and marked with apparent satisfaction the delicate briar-rose pink of her cheek, and the little moist curls upon her brow and about her small ears. Miss Lucy's preoccupation was now very intense indeed.

"Ello, ugly!" said the small, bright man. "You here?"

"Ello, dad! that you?" Lucy was surprised.

"That's me; s'pose you expected someone better, eh?"

"Someone better, dad! There's no one better on this lead. Goin' t' pull dirt?"

"No; goin' over to Buckley's forge t' point these picks." Davis had now landed several used-up tools.

"There ain't much haulin' t' do, Loo. Th' durned reef's ez hard ez iron; if she don't make fresh we'll have t' do some shootin'. When I come back I'll send George up t' get th' water out, though; I suspect that'll do you."

Miss Loo insisted that she was not particularly anxious to have George on the surface, but her loving parent was incredulous, and retreated, grinning in an old-fashioned way. It would have been difficult for the young lady to

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explain exactly how she felt towards Mr. George Glover. She was going to marry him, she believed, and had never entertained any serious objection to the arrangement. He was a fine big fellow, good-looking enough, young enough, steady enough, and suitable enough for a miner's daughter; he had been her father's mate for two years, and she liked him. They had associated a good deal during their acquaintance, had taken long walks together, and there was a tacit understanding that they were to be husband and wife "some day." George had never taken her in his arms, and said — "I love you — be my wife;" he was not that kind of young man. He was a heavy sort of fellow, physically and intellectually; he thought that when a man visited a girl frequently and they strolled together and were civil to each other for a certain length of time they naturally meant matrimony, and there was no necessity for any excitement about the matter. He was immensely pleased with the state of affairs, but he was unworthy of his luck — it is ridiculous to waste champagne on a man who would be as well pleased with beer. Mr. Glover could not appreciate the pretty, piquant damsel whom fortune was about to lavish on him as she deserved.

"Halloa! on top there!"

"Be-e-low!"

"Er yer goin' t' send down that blessed pick, or must I stick here an' freeze?"

This was Mr. Glover; he was in a bad temper evidently. Her father had forgotten the pick, but she could send it down easily enough. It was a simple matter to fasten the pick on the rope; she had seen it done times out of mind, and knew how perfectly well.

"Hi, hi" she responded in her father's voice.

There was a sharp pick by the windlass-stand — that must be the one; in a few seconds it was on the rope.

"Look up, below!"

She gave the rope a pull and the windlass revolved rapidly, but, to the great horror of the girl, the pick had no sooner swung into the shaft than it keeled right over and slipped out of the hitch. There was a whiz, followed by a cry and a splash, and then silence. In that second of time every vestige of colour had fled from Lucy's face. She fell on her knees and peered wildly down into the darkness below.

"George!" Something in her throat choked the cry, and it was only a harsh whisper.

"George! George!" Her voice had broken its bonds now and was shrill and agonized.

"Speak, George! dear George, why don't you answer me?"

Not a whisper came back, and the girl arose to her feet again and gazed towards the other claims along the load with desperate eyes. Her face was strangely transformed by the agony of fear that possessed her — it looked old and drawn. The thought that flashed upon her was that the pick had struck her lover as he waited to receive it at the mouth of the drive; the well-boards were off, and he would assuredly be driven into the water by the blow, so that if he were not already dead, he would drown before assistance came. Her mind was made up in an instant; there were no men on the surface at the other mines, and there was no time to call them up. She had a horror of the dark, echoing shafts, but that was forgotten now. She paid out the rope with desperate energy, and when that was done seized it with her small hands and started down as she had often seen the men do. Her feet slipped mechanically into the toe-holes on either side of the narrow shaft, and no touch of fear, no thought of her danger, entered her soul. There were rough sets of timber at various distances upon which she might have rested, but she did not pause for an instant. Down, down, with a numbed body and a mind so confused that she scarcely realized

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what she was doing, and at length her feet struck upon a slab that had been thrown across the well, and she stood upright, her eyes yet blinded by the sudden transition from the bright sunlight.

"Jerusalem! Loo!"

She could now dimly discern a dark figure moving in the drive before her. The exclamation of amazement was followed by a roar of laughter that lasted nearly a minute and shocked the girl terribly. She was leaning against the side of the shaft, trembling in every limb, and from the tips of her lacerated fingers large drops of blood fell into the water.

"You — you were not hurt, then?" she contrived to whisper.

"Hurt, no! I thought I'd scare you. But who'd a—thought you'd have the pluck to come down! By thunder, it's rich!" And again he laughed immoderately.

She could comprehend at last. He was safe, he had played a brutal joke upon her, and that coarse merriment was the reward of her action. She despised him for it. The revulsion of feeling left her weak and sick.

"Be quick," she said; "you must pull me up. I can't breathe here!"

"I didn't reckon on you comin' down, you know," he said apologetically, struck by the peculiar tone of her voice.

"I must go on top!"

He hooked the hide bag on the rope, showed her how to ride by placing one foot in the bag and steadying herself with the other, and then hastened up the shaft.

"Look up, below!"

She felt the rope tighten, and was drawn up again towards the surface. Her father returned whilst Glover was at the windlass, and he was now kneeling at the mouth of the hole, peering anxiously down at the set white face slowly rising out of the subterranean gloom.

"Quicker, man!" gasped the father, something in that face striking a thrill of horror through his frame.

"Quicker, for the love of heaven! Almighty God!" Davis clutched madly at the bleeding hands, but they slipped down the rope from under his fingers, the girl sank back, the windlass whizzed, and she was gone.

She was still breathing when they brought her broken form to the surface, but on the following afternoon she died.

A Child Of Nature

A FEW years ago the peaceful solitude of a sequestered locality near the north coast of Tasmania was abruptly violated by the sudden eruption of a small but extremely lively mining township. A couple of enterprising youths pottering about the surface a few months earlier in pursuit of nothing more valuable than wallabies or "devils" became deeply interested in the unexpected discovery of a very promising-looking outcrop of quartz. The direct result of this interesting circumstance was an immediate and enthusiastic trend of public feeling towards that retired locality, and a speedy pressure of population along the line of reef. A startling transformation ensued; with wonderful alacrity "pubs." and poppet-legs sprang upon the scene, the forest trees fell back, and huts, and tents, and paling stores took their places; the rattle of trucks, the clang of knockers, the heavy beat of batteries, and the

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united clamour of a dozen whistles buried their echoes in the surrounding bush; and beer, and rum, and politics, and policemen abounded, in conjunction with other enervating evidences of civilization.

Among the early arrivals on Lefroy was a long, bony, weather-beaten man with a large and varied experience of goldfields, culled in his wanderings hither and thither across Australia from one diggings to another. Mr. Barney Brown, in common with most nomads of his class, was extremely resentful of authority, and much disliked managers and captains of shifts, preferring the freedom of action and liberty of speech that are the privileges of the man who is his own boss. These independent sentiments led him to turn his attention to the shallow alluvial along the creek, which hitherto had been little heeded. Having procured a miner's right, and chummed in with a congenial soul, Barney marked out a claim in a promising locality, and before sundown had the pleasure of bottoming on wash 18 inches thick and giving pennyweight prospects. The panning-off of the first dish was eagerly supervised by several unattached diggers, and the immediate result was a rush on the postmaster for "rights," and a pro-miscuous pegging-out of claims. With a soft, pipe-clay "bottom," a foot and a half of rich stuff, easily shifted, and an unlimited supply of Cascade beer in an adjacent "pub.," the mates took things extremely easy, and cheerfully surveyed the certainty of a little pile when their holding should peg out.

Mr. Brown was thirty-eight years of age, and, as previously intimated, long and loose; he had pale ginger hair and whiskers, and a mild air of self-deprecation and pensive bashfulness, which, however, was very delusive, and tended to decoy facetious strangers to their own undoing, as he was prepared to maintain his standing against "anything that walked on end," and to resent an infringement of his rights by the prompt and judicious application of a pair of fists of enormous size and fortified with horny encrustations like horse-warts; and the placid urbanity with which he undertook to knock the incautious party out of his boots, and fulfilled the obligation, was a matter of the deepest interest to the men of Lefroy. But Mr. Brown's most pronounced feature was his implacable distrust of unmarried women. A spiteful treatise on the girl of the period, written by some acrimonious philosopher, combined with an extremely unpleasant legal experience with a red-haired young female who had become convinced that he ought to marry, despite his belief to the contrary, and who established her opinion in a court of law, obtaining considerable of his savings as a recompense for the loss of his name, had served to inspire him with a wholesome dread of the sex early in his career, and observation and deduction only intensified his sense of the malignity of Woman. He entertained a hazy notion that every single girl with whom he came in contact had intentions the reverse of honourable, that she harboured a deep-laid scheme either to inveigle him into a state of bondage or rob him by legal process, so he regarded the sex with an eye of doubt, and held himself severely aloof.

Mr. Brown's hut-mates did not share his unseemly prejudice; they appreciated the young woman as an admirable institution, and beheld her with adoration, and gave way to such weaknesses as white shirts and hair-oil in pursuit of her. Barney strove eloquently to convert them, and feelingly indicated the error of their ways, and foretold breach of promise cases and conjugal infelicity; but they heeded him not, and he held his way alone. He felt that in Lefroy he had reasons to be especially watchful of the common enemy, his bright prospects and the abounding zeal of the local damsels necessitating every precaution in protection of the rights of man. Divers susceptible young females cast large languishing eyes upon the unprepossessing Brown, and, remembering the rapidity with which his capital in the little wooden bank attached to a local grocery was swelling, strove, by dint of gorgeous raiment and captivating smiles, to overcome his stoical reserve; but Barney gave them every discouragement, and always forsook them for the society of the bar or the billiard-room at the earliest opportunity.

One Saturday afternoon, Barney and two chums, armed to the teeth with supplies, ammunition, and guns, departed into the bush, intending to travel a few miles back and spend the Sunday in kangaroo and duck shooting. They had excellent sport, and were homeward bound, well laden with the spoil of the chase, late on the Sunday afternoon, when Barney, who was in the lead, had his attention attracted by a moving body that disappeared behind a tree immediately after catching his eye. Supposing it to be a wallaby, and intent on having another shot, Mr. Brown dropped his load and advanced warily to the encounter. When well within distance, he took advantage of the first glimpse of the animal to shoot. Horror! a human being rolled into view, and immediately sprang to its feet. Barney was almost paralyzed with terror. The figure was that of a girl of about nineteen — the

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wildest-looking girl and the tallest he had seen. She was bare-headed and bare-footed, and clad in a rag of a jacket and an abbreviated skirt that was rapidly yielding to the ravages of time. For a few moments the uncanny creature, wild-eyed and trembling, surveyed her assailant, then turned and fled with the speed of a deer. About a hundred yards off she stopped again and looked back like a curious animal, but, when Barney moved to advance, she turned and rushed away, regardless of his cries. To follow would have been useless — she was soon lost to view amongst the saplings. On the tree and on the grass where the girl had stood there were traces of blood.

"I reckon I'll be jugged for this lot!" groaned Barney.

His mates had no opinion to offer, they had only capacity for intense amazement. They were eight miles from the township and had never heard of a dweller in those wilds. The only feasible solution of the phenomenon that presented itself was embodied in the supposition that the bush was haunted by a stray female who had escaped in her early childhood and been missing ever since.

The story was received with derisive incredulity at Lefroy, but on the Monday afternoon following the strict veracity of Mr. Brown and his chums was established to the satisfaction of the inhabitants, and at the same time the mystery of their adventure was much abated. Twice a week a large, hairy savage used to come crawling out of the leafy solitudes, laboriously hauling on a rope to which was attached a screwed and bony quadruped which had the consummate audacity to pretend to be a horse, and to which in turn was attached an antiquated shay. This bucolic curiosity used to tow his out-of-date animal round the town, peddling butter, eggs, and vegetables. He was big-boned, skinny, and of uncertain age, having apparently been sun-dried at a late stage of his existence, or preserved for immortality by the action of smoke or some other curative process; he was solemnly taciturn and uninviting, and nobody troubled him with questions. Nobody seemed to know anything about him; when he had completed his circuit, he shuffled off amongst the trees and darkness enveloped him.

On the afternoon mentioned Mr. Brown was greatly concerned on observing this strange specimen desert his conveyance on the track and bear down upon him with every demonstration of excitement; he roared with bovine ferocity, and brandished a whip, which our hero was distressed to observe was loaded. He and the astonished digger clashed and clinched at the mouth of the shaft, there was a brief struggle, a wild upheaval of pipeclay, a dull thud, and when the dust rolled by, Mr. Brown was revealed astride his fallen foe, who still foamed and roared in inarticulate rage.

Barney's first thought was to send for whisky, and when the potent drug arrived, he, with the assistance of a couple of friends, administered a large dose to the intemperate hawker by force of arms. This treatment was repeated several times, the patient taking to his medicine very kindly when he caught its flavour, and when it had calmed his angry passions he graciously explained that he had heard Barney was the man who shot his daughter, and he had intended, in the heat of his feelings, to exact summary vengeance, but now he was prepared to accept explanations. Satisfactory explanations were forthcoming, and the pedlar, who introduced himself as Abram Tooley, under the exhilarating influence of the grateful liquor, developed a spirit of festive geniality little to be expected in one so ancient, and departed, after inviting the boys out to his farm, leading his beast of burden in a reckless and erratic manner, and enthusiastically carolling a bacchanalian ditty long out of favour.

Mr. Brown and his friends were filled with an exceeding great curiosity regarding the agricultural recluse and his wild, untutored daughter. A man from George Town was found who knew that old Tooley had been settled on a few hundred acres somewhere down near the sea for over fifteen years, and that before the outbreak of the diggings he used to journey into George Town at stated intervals for supplies; but as to his family, he knew nothing about any daughter — never heard or supposed he had any. This only further excited Barney's inquisitiveness, and he determined to visit the eccentric Tooley and have another interview with the wild woman. A desire to ascertain if the girl had been much hurt, Abram's invitation, and a bottle of whisky, he thought, would be excuses enough. He had no apprehensions about visiting an unconventional young lady who ran bare-footed in such a skirt, showed manifest dread of his sex, and had been reared beyond the degrading influence of

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fashion—plates and the ways and wiles of civilized woman.

True to his determination, Barney, with his mate, Croaker, set out in search of the Tooley homestead on the next Sunday. They followed the track of the old shay, and after a walk of about two hours and a half discerned the slab establishment they were seeking. As they drew near they were attracted by the spectacle of Miss Tooley sitting on a log fence, sunning herself, but that young lady no sooner caught sight of their advancing figures than she rolled promiscuously off her perch, and cut across the paddock, showing wonderful action and phenomenal speed; and they saw her a few minutes later surveying them with great curiosity from fancied security in the fork of a tree. Mr. Tooley did not manifest any great delight at the sight of his visitors, and asked them in with a look of sulky suspicion; but a glimpse of the whisky—bottle improved his temper, and a few nips served to impart a genial conviviality and make him rather communicative.

The residence was a miserable hovel, furnished with a suite hand—made by an amateur and fashioned from saplings principally. A smoked old woman of most uncouth appearance arose in speechless amazement from a three—legged stool as they entered, and drifted furtively from the room. This was Mrs. Tooley, as her lord indicated with a nod and a growl. When the whisky had paved the way, the diggers ventured a few interrogations. They were gratified to hear that "Mur Jane wasn't hit bad" — merely a trifle of half—a—dozen pellets through the fleshy part of the arm.

"Ain't she a sort of retirin' young woman?" ventured Croaker.

"D—d if I've noticed much," replied her interesting parent slowly. Then, with the air of a man imparting an important truth, he added: "She's a wonder t' eat."

"She skipped from us 's if we was goin' t'shoot agen 's we come along," continued Croaker. "Seems to me she's bashful."

"Maybe, p'raps, she is a bit backard," said Mr. Tooley, rattling his pannikin as a delicate intimation that it was empty. "She hasn't seen a young fellow since she was five year old, an' I suppose she's got a notion they're given to shootin' that way."

Here Abram afforded his guests a sketch of his career, from which they gathered that for 15 years his wife and daughter had been drifting into savagery in that wretched hole, not having seen half—a—dozon strange faces in the whole of the time.

"Towns ain't no places for girls," said Mr. Tooley in conclusion, "where they're allus wantin' boots an' dimunds an' tooth—powders. Girls comes dear in towns."

This sentiment Barney seemed prepared to endorse, but Croaker denounced it with great vigour, asserting that it was an injustice to keep a girl from communion with her kind, and advising Abram to let his daughter visit Lefroy and obtain some polish.

"I don't see as Mur Jane wants polish," observed Mr. Tooley, with some paternal pride; "she'll cut scrub with the best of 'em, I bet, an' there ain't her equal at milkin'."

These things were all very well, said Croaker, but it was against nature to see a girl running away from a young man as if he was a cannibal with a large appetite. A girl in her natural state should display a proper leaning towards young men, and rejoice in them.

Mr. Tooley was in a pliable frame of mind, and it required little argument to induce him to bring his daughter in — just to convince her that young men were not dangerous, or liable to shoot at any moment, and to break her in

to them, like. Abram went out, they heard him calling "Mur Jane!" and presently he returned, dragging his lank, awkward daughter after him, and he placed her, bashful and trembling, before her visitors, her long, unkempt red hair falling about a very uninteresting face, and her large eyes full of guileless shyness. Barney ventured an apology and an inquiry after her wounded arm, but elicited no response, and Mary Jane, as soon as released, darted behind the door, and surveyed the visitors wonderingly through a crack for a short time, after which she watched her opportunity to escape again into the paddock, and when the young men were leaving she followed them for half a mile at a respectful distance, and then watched them out of sight from the boughs of a peppermint tree.

Mr. Brown was peculiarly interested in "Mur Jane." It was a fascinating experience to him, this contact with a young woman who beheld him with awe and fled from him in fear and trembling. He visited the Tooley homestead again. He went often, and in time the timorous daughter of the house became somewhat reconciled to the innovation, and no longer fled at his approach, but would sit in the room, looking extremely ungainly on the low bush stool, surveying the visitor with steadfast attention, and giving way to giggling paroxysms of bashful confusion whenever he caught her eye or addressed towards her the most trivial remark. The spectacle of the child of nature posed there in various acute angles, breathlessly regarding him as if he were something out of a menagerie, was a novel one, and the situation was extremely gratifying to his feelings as a man and a lord of creation. Hitherto he had found the female element demonstrative and inclined to "boss the job;" pert little misses in short frocks always overawed him with their aggressive conceit and airy nonchalance; in the presence of "young ladies," despite his six feet of muscular manhood, he dwindled into insignificance, and felt meek and constrained, whilst they prattled cheerfully and maintained a superior mental calm. With "Mur Jane" the position was reversed; she plainly acknowledged him a greater being, and did humble homage to his majesty. Thus his dignity as a man was restored, and he fully appreciated the sense of authority he enjoyed in her company. Besides, Miss Tooley, being untutored in the deep deceits that communion with her kind alone could engender, was not likely to attach undue importance to his visits or concoct matrimonial schemes or deep designs for damages for breach of promise. Truth to tell, Barney — despite his innate bashfulness — harboured more than an average fondness for the other sex in the secret recesses of his being, and his dread of connubial bondage was only apparently implacable. Meanwhile, his comparative ease in the presence of Miss Tooley rested partly on his inability to accept that large, uncouth young lady, with her native timorousness, tanned face, wild hair, and palpable muscles, as of the same order as those dainty, designing, self-sufficient damsels who flourish in towns and hamlets.

A friendship cemented by whisky grew up between Messrs. Tooley and Brown. Abram's gloomy taciturnity almost faded away before the warmth and congeniality of Barney's "Old Scotch," and Mr. Brown's Sunday afternoon visits came to be regarded as a welcome break in the dull monotony of "tending" cows and going to bed, then getting up and "tending" cows again. Very soon "Mur Jane" displayed a burning desire to appear to better advantage before the visitor. This intuitive weakness first took form in the shape of a large, battered brass locket which the unsophisticated creature hung about her neck on a piece of braid; subsequently a monstrosity of millinery, a bonnet of fearful ugliness and great of antiquity, was unearthed from the dust of ages; a moth-eaten skirt, which was a relic of Mr. Tooley's late lamented maternal grandparent, and might have had some pretension to style a century ago, was next turned to account; a faded ribbon, a large artificial flower of an unknown species, and a lot of other ancient finery followed, all of which grandeur Miss Tooley paraded with undisguised rapture and innocent artlessness, to the great distress of her parent, who upbraided her extravagance and warned her to be careful of "that 'ere hat," which, he averred, her mother was married in, and cost four and eightpence — "besides the linin'." Barney beheld Mary Jane's assumption of style with an unfavourable eye; he regarded the outrageous bonnet particularly as a wicked frivolity, and as an evidence that Miss Tooley was animated by vanities entirely unaccountable in a young lady reared in the wilderness beyond the insidious influence of her sex. At about this time, too, Mary Jane, without abating her giggling and wriggling, and her timorous diffidence, began to assume an air of having a vested interest in the visitor, which assumption of proprietorship gave rise to painful conjecture in the mind of Mr. Brown, and caused him to have serious doubts and misgivings about the advisability of continuing his visits to the Tooley homestead. Whilst yet doubting he was one Sunday morning assisted to a

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decision by the conduct of his hut-mates. These facetious gentlemen had long amused themselves with ironical conjectures regarding Brown's intentions in pursuing the rude, untutored Tooley, and remarks more or less sarcastic anent his pronounced antipathy to matrimony. On the Sunday morning in question, assuming unconsciousness of the subject of their observations, they indulged in sotto voce soliloquies and interesting speculations regarding hypothetical nuptials in which Mr. Brown and Miss Mary Jane Tooley, eldest and only daughter of Abram Tooley, Esq., of Piper, Tasmania, figured conspicuously in conjunction with an imaginary parson. The bride's trousseau was minutely if inelegantly described, and Home and Victorian papers were earnestly requested to "please copy." Croaker, in a deep mental abstraction, was heard to observe that it was understood the happy man intended augmenting his collection with a three-legged duck and a two-headed wombat and opening a menagerie of living curiosities. Barney could not stand much of this badinage; he uplifted himself in his bunk, swore at his mates collectively and in turn and visited Tooley's no more.

A few weeks went by and Abram passed no remarks; he made his usually bi-weekly visits, dragging after him his bow-legged and cross-eyed horse and back-dated shay, remained as saturnine as of yore, and gave no indications of having noticed Barney's neglect. One fine morning, however, the people of Lefroy were astonished to see Mr. Tooley emerging from the trees hauling his horse more desperately than was his wont, whilst the shay swayed dangerously under the additional burden of a long, fantastically-dressed female disguised in a scoop-shaped bonnet. Near Brown's claim the apparition dismounted, and Barney, who was on top pulling wash, was distressed on recognising "Mur Jane" in the awful tile her mother had handed down to posterity and the worm-eaten skirt that had been in the family nearly a century, and displaying the battered brass locket and the artificial flower to the best advantage. He was much more concerned to see her advance hesitatingly towards him, coyly chewing the faded ribbon and grinning her old grin of shy distress. She mounted the tip and stood there, looking supremely absurd, and giggling vacantly in response to his salutations, whilst he felt that a sudden attack of something fatal would be a relief from the strain he was undergoing. Old Tooley had gone on his round and left "Mur Jane" to keep Barney company, and all the men "on top" had taken up commanding positions to enjoy the interview, and the men from below were swarming to the surface like startled ants, in evident anticipation of entertainment. Barney maintained his stand for five minutes, then Miss Tooley's painful diffidence in a public place, her bonnet, and those dumb but appreciative spectators, became too many for him, and he deserted the windlass and fled ignominiously off the field.

After that Miss Tooley often visited the township with her parched sire, and, while he pushed his business, she sought out Mr. Brown, and blighted him with her bonnet and her abashed giggle. She descended on him at unexpected moments, and stared aimlessly at him, and followed him purposelessly, till he was laughed and chaffed to the verge of insanity, and fought two men every day in desperate endeavours to relieve his feelings. Mary Jane looked him up two or three times during the week, and visited the hut on Sundays. She would seek him in the bars and billiard-rooms and other public places, and afflict him with her pensive baby stare and her maidenly confusion, till the homage that had once been a source of gratification to him became the bane of his existence.

At length an expedient occurred to Mr. Brown. He decided to remain below, and would have slept below had "Mur Jane" rendered that course necessary. On Sunday the sight of Miss Tooley's aggravating smile was the signal for him to bolt for the claim, and he would sit away in a drive till sundown, playing Yankee-grab with himself, or earnestly speculating on the outrageousness of women in every walk of life. Of course this brought more ridicule on his devoted head, but it secured his object, and very soon after Miss Tooley's visits ceased.

A short time later Barney was looking quite cheerful once more, and resting placidly under the assurance that he had seen the last of Mary Jane, and was not likely to be again haunted by her ungainly person or troubled by obtrusive attentions, when one day, as he and his mates were sitting at dinner, a digger who had been up to Launceston bounced in with an air of great importance and a mission that would admit of no delay.

"Say, Brown," gasped the intruder, "hev you seen Tooley's girl lately?"

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Barney arose, sadly, slowly, but with a determined purpose; he crossed over the hut, and running the knuckle end of his large fist along the digger's jaw with a suggestive gesture he said:

"Now, Spooner, that game's stale — it's worked out and hung up, an' if there's anythin' more said I'm goin' to start a fight."

"No larks, Barney; 'pon me soul I was jest askin' you. Ain't ye, though?" continued the excited Spooner in apologetic tones.

"Naw. Don't want to."

"I have."

"Don't care a hang."

"By thunder, you do though. She's up town — I saw her. Up town in a big bustle and a fashionable hat that high, takin' out proceedin's fer a breach of promise."

Barney's fork stopped half-way to his lips (he had resumed his seat), his mouth remained open for a moment, then he made a desperate gulp at the atmosphere, swallowed nothing with great difficulty, and whispered earnestly:

"Against who did you say, Spooner?"

"Agin you."

That was enough. Barney wanted no more dinner; he laid down his knife and fork, took up his hat, and went out. Presently he returned, and thrust his pale face in at the door.

"You're sure it's a breach of promise and agin me, Spooner, are ye?" he queried.

Spooner was sure, and Barney retreated again. He went to the local bank and drew his money, then he sought the hut again and rolled up his swag without a word. That done, he remarked tersely:

"I'm off, boys, tip us yer fist."

"What! goin' right away?" gasped Croaker.

"My eye. Goin' to catch the boat at the Heads and get right out of this. So long!"

They tried to persuade him there was stuff enough in his claim to see him through the suit, and that "Mur Jane" had no case, but he was determined.

"I tried it once before," he said. "Breaches of promise is h----."

And he went.

The Whim Boy

SHE has sprung upon a corner of the rough table in the chock-and-log hut that is her new home, and sits

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swinging a small, bare, brown foot and pleading with a big sun-tanned woman industriously churning at a wash-tub just without the door of the hut.

"Are you on, Aunt Jem?" she queries, eagerly pressing a matter that has been long in debate. "I think it's spiffin'. I could manage that ole black horse what you talk about, King Billy, easy as winkin'. Usen't I drive et the Parker's Miners, anyhow, when the boys'd let me?"

"You could drive right enough; 'tain't that," answered Aunt Jem in a deep, manly voice, assumed, like most of her mannish attributes, for so long that at length it had become natural to her. "There's the night shifts" — Aunt Jem paused, grimacing inhumanly over the wringing of a crimean shirt — "an' besides, it's breakin' the law, I'm thinkin'."

"But the law won't know — nobody won't know, 'ceptin' you an' me. An', then, think uv the thirty-five bob a fortnight, seventeen an' six a week — what lux'ries we could buy fer dad with that!"

This triumphant assertion of the advantages of the proposition was not without its effect upon Aunt Jem. She ceased work to muse, and she pensively scratched her chin the while. Aunt Jem's chin was not innocent of a certain vagrant stubble, and Aunt Jem's breath was suggestive of tobacco. Aunt Jem was large of limb and muscular and masculine. She had fought her own battle and taken excellent care of herself in the "early days;" she had roughed it at Ballarat, Bendigo, Blanket Flat, Eaglehawk, Fiery Creek — in fact, on most of the Victorian diggings in the "fifties" and "sixties;" she had washed dirt as well as clothes, and still boasted herself as expert on a sluice-box with the fork as any man living. In short, this worthy woman had faced the world "like a man" for twenty odd years, and at fifty-four was little disposed to set up any sentimental bounds to woman's sphere.

"Are you quite certain no one knows you're here?" she asked, after a few moments' cogitation.

"Sure's death," replied the girl with enthusiasm. "Ain't been away from the hut further'n them saplin's there since I landed on the mine. Ain't seen a soul, bar you."

"The people down et the township might 've noticed us come through in the coach, then agen they mightn't. Anyhow, there're not likely to come pokin' round here. By thunder, we'll do it."

The girl bounced off the table, danced about the room in a paroxysm of delight, and performed an extraordinary feat of tumbling, finishing in a huddled heap on the bunk.

Kitty Bennet was the only child of Mat Bennet, a digger whose luck was always out — a man who had dug and delved his way through Victoria — north, south, east, and west — without unearthing more gold than sufficed to provide the necessaries of life from year's end to year's end. Mat married late, and his wife died soon after Kitty's birth, leaving her child to the affectionate but not very discriminating care of its nomadic father. Aunt Jemima "lent a hand" in bringing up the girl, "for natural love and affection," as the lawyers put it; but, as the aunt's ideas of conventional refinement had suffered much in the course of long familiarity with, and acquiescence in, the rough and ready customs of society in the camps and about the diggings, it may easily be understood that Kitty's exuberant character was neither tamed nor toned by her fond maternal aunt, and the girl "had her fling," whether sharing her father's tents on some alluvial field, or living with Aunt Jem in whichever part of the wilderness that massive relation happened to be situated for the time being.

A week or so previous to the opening of our story Bennet was stricken down by the fossicker's bane, rheumatic fever, and compelled to go into the hospital at Sale. His sister Jemima had recently accepted an honourable and responsible position on a mine in a comparatively new reefing district, in the hills about twenty miles beyond Bruthen, where she officiated as housekeeper for the manager, in consideration of which service she received fifteen shillings a week and the use of a "furnished" hut standing on the company's lease, a wage she increased by

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washing for the men working on the Old Identity. Here Kitty found herself on the third day following her father's, departure to the hospital.

Shortly after making the resolution recorded, Aunt Jem wrung out the last article in her tub, and half an hour later she departed for the township on the grocer's waggon. This meant a walk back of eleven miles "by moonlight alone," but Jem was superior to all feminine weaknesses, and too thorough a bush-woman to let a trifle like that trouble her. She returned in due time, bearing a bundle under her arm — returned over Camel Hill, having left the track and cut through the bush to save the long turn round.

Next morning Spence, the manager of the Old Identity, was bailed up at the dam by a bright-eyed, brown-faced boy, with closely-cropped hair, an intelligent if not particularly clean countenance, and an air of complete assurance.

"Say, boss, can you give us a job?"

The old miner looked down with surprise and amusement at his diminutive petitioner.

"Tendin' ducks?" he queried with a grin.

"Naw!" (with sublime contempt) "drivin' the whim."

"And who are you anyhow, cherub?"

"Name's Christopher Bennet, called Kit. That's my Aunt Jem over to the log hut, an' I want a job bad."

"Too small."

"You bet I ain't! I'll 'tend whim with any kid round here. Used to drive onst. Give 's a show, will you, please?"

"Well," said Spence reflectively, "we do want a boy; the lads we've got are workin' long shifts, and boys are scarce articles here. What's yer age?"

"Sixteen," answered Kit without a blush (she looked fourteen). "Aunt Jem brought me up from Bairnsdale, knowin' you wanted a boy, an' if you don't put me on — well, you'll lose a ringer on a whim, that's all."

Spence grinned.

"Your cheek has outgrown you, sonny," he said, "but you're spry. Go on with the afternoon shift."

"With the old black horse, King Billy?"

"Yes; he's the quietest an' best edjikated. Take him."

"Oh, boss, you're a brick! What screw — seventeen an' six?"

"A quid a week."

"That's great. My colonial! I am erbliged."

The boy set his hat further back upon his handsome head, thrust his hands deeply into the pockets of his new "moles," and swaggered on to the brace. He presently engaged the braceman in conversation on mining matters

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generally, and the Old Identity in particular. He desired to know the depth of the mine, the nature, the extent, and the "lay" of the lode, whether "she" was wet or dry, the quality of the air below, and the character of the explosives used. These questions were asked with the freedom of an interested party and the air of an expert, and with a quaint use of miners' slang that pleased the braceman immensely.

With the ready faith of youth Kit conceived an immediate liking for the braceman, who was a young man of about nineteen, tall, strongly built, and clean limbed, with the easy but decisive movements of an athlete. His well-tanned face expressed a lively intelligence and betrayed his kindly disposition and his geniality at a glance.

"What's your monicker, mate?" asked Kit after five minutes' acquaintance.

"Charley Coleman, alias 'Professor.'"

"Professor?"

"Yes," apologetically; "you see, I play the fiddle a bit."

This explanation appeared to be quite satisfactory.

"Wish I was on with you, 'Professor,'" continued Kit; "you're jest my sort. What kinder bloke's on the brace my shift?"

"Faith, he's a sweet mahn; he'll be a father to you, so he will." Coleman's whim boy, Tim Canty, offered this information. Tim was a large-headed, big-footed youth, with wonderfully wild hair, and great, obtrusive yellow freckles -- a Bungaree-bred boy, blessed with the intense brogue of his father.

"Go on!" ejaculated Kit, who detected the sarcasm.

"Sure, yes," continued Tim, "he'll barrack the life out av yiz. He bosses the byes like he owned the bloomin' mine -- makes 'em yank all the timber fer him, an' truck the mullock, an' shovel the quartz. We calls him 'The Bunyip.' Be the holy, he's ez ugly ez sin, an' he shwears an' curses loike fifty bullockies in a bog."

Kit blew a long, melancholy whistle. "That is tough," he murmured.

"You'll be all right," Coleman broke in consolingly. "Stick to your whim, and be as deaf as a stump when he begins to rip out. There is more bellow than anything else in 'The Bunyip.'"

"S'pose I'll pull through," said the boy, brightening up.

The prospect of having an ill-tempered, lazy bully for a mate did not serve to dampen the youngster's enthusiasm, and after going over the mine, scrutinizing the whim with the eye of an authority, and enlightening Tim on the points and merits of the big, sleepy roan horse trudging solemnly round and round the ring, he walked across to the hut to communicate his news to Aunt Jem, bearing himself with a gravity that became a worker with a grave responsibility and twenty shillings a week.

Kit found, when he went on with the 4 o'clock shift, that Tim Canty had not over-coloured the unlovable characteristics of "The Bunyip." The man's name was Pope; he was large and unwieldy, and common report credited him with an uncompromising antipathy to water, whether applied externally or taken as a beverage -- a report which was wholly substantiated by his general appearance, and the vinous flavour of the atmosphere in his vicinity. Mr. Pope walked with the attitude of a gorilla, which amiable animal he also somewhat resembled in his habitual expression. His long arms swung loosely from his narrow shoulders, his face was nearly covered with

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short red hair, and his small eyes peered out through the slits where his puffed cheeks and bushy brows almost met. "The Bunyip" was said to possess great strength, but he never exerted his powers. He was naturally a tired man, and loved to "doss" upon the reef, or to sit, propped against one of the poppet-legs, smoking like a furnace, whilst the whim boy did his work. This, of course, during the night shifts or such times as the boss happened to be absent from the mine. He also enjoyed a local reputation as a pugilist of extraordinary staying powers and surprising science, till Welsh Harry, a man of little more than half his weight and with none of his bluster, whipped him to a standstill in a nine-round "mill" after he had been convicted of carrying superfluous cards in his shirt front one night in M' Cubbin's humpy.

Pope's antipathy to exertion induced him to look with no favourable eye upon Kit. He wanted a strong boy, and one big enough to be trusted to land the bucket when bailing was going on, whilst he dozed on the chaff bags by the fire through the long, cold nights.

Kit, radiant with pride, led King Billy on to the whim-ring at 4 o'clock, relieved Tim, and harnessed the black horse in the iron bow, and "The Bunyip" scowled down upon him from the brace.

"Say, youngster," he said presently, "who sent you round here?"

"Boss," replied Kit shortly.

"An' ev I gotter nuss yer?"

"Let the boy down easy," interjected Charley Coleman, who was forcing his crib-bag under the billy-lid, preparatory to leaving. "He's a smart little chap, and will pull through all right if you don't scare the heart out of him."

"Nice he'll look humpin' a cap-piece," growled Pope.

"I reckon you're paid to haul the timber," said Charley, with a laugh. "Anyhow, if you don't get along I'll be agreeable to exchange boys."

"Well," responded "The Bunyip," "I'll soon be shut of this infant; that's a comfort."

True to his character, Pope lost no opportunity of making the work unpleasant for the boy. He bullied, cursed, and complained incessantly; but Kit affected to disregard his ill-humours, and whistled or sang with provoking complacency throughout, attending strictly to his fair share of the work the while.

The whim is only used on the Australian gold mines after the windlass and the "whip" have been abandoned, and before the proprietors feel justified in placing costly machinery upon a claim. It is simply an elevated drum around which the rope that hauls the buckets — one on each end — up and down the shaft is wound. The whim is turned by a horse harnessed under a crossbeam, and travelling in a circle below. The horses soon become so accustomed to the work that they will go through all the necessary evolutions when spoken to, and "back up," "turn," "pay out," or "take up slack" as the order is given. Kit's charge, King Billy, was, as Manager Spence expressed it, "edjikated;" he had worked in a whim for years, and performed his task with machine-like regularity. The "demnition grind" had become so much part of his nature that when turned out in the paddock 'tween shifts or during his "long shift off" — from Saturday morning till Monday afternoon — the old horse would doze at times, and suddenly start off as if in a dream, ambling round and round on an imaginary ring, till Kit rushed forth, and drove him back to his pasture by pelting him with sticks and clods of earth. King Billy was as intelligent and docile as he was industrious, and soon accepted Kit as his best friend, came to know the boy's footstep and the sound of his voice, and would greet him with clumsy but unmistakable demonstrations of goodwill whenever he approached. All of which was a pride and delight to Kit, and his work at the mine would

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have been a continual pleasure were it not for the unamiable qualities of "The Bunyip," complaints of whose behaviour were often made in the chock-and-log hut, and received by Aunt Jem with many expressions of enmity, and such demonstrations of a craving for vengeance as might have made Mr. Pope a little more reasonable in his conduct had he been there to see and hear. It was one of Aunt Jem's manly boasts that she could "use her hands" when occasion required, and strike a blow the weight of which she told in pounds and ounces with unwomanly pride; besides, she had something of "a record," and stories of her pugilistic efforts in her own defence had enlivened more than one mining camp in the past.

"I'll go along an' lay that man out one o' these fine days!" cried Aunt Jem after an unusually bitter complaint of Pope's cruelty, and she struck an attitude, and sparred at the hut door with her big, strong hands, looking really capable of fulfilling her threat.

"That 'd jest serve him right," said Kit, with thoughtful gravity. "Only," and he squared his small shoulders, "it'd make me look a baby before the men, havin' a woman fightin' fer me. Best let's wear him out."

Matters remained in this unsatisfactory state for several weeks, when at length Pope's desire to be rid of the boy was satisfied, but not without a disagreeable experience on his own part. "The Bunyip" was suffering the results of loss of sleep and of money at a card party at M' Cubbin's sly-grog shanty on the previous night, and his native unpleasantness was much aggravated in consequence, and he naturally sought to relieve his feelings on his whim boy, Kit being the only person near who was forced to put up with his nastiness. Throughout the morning he had vented all his choicest expletives on Kit's devoted head, and had harassed him at his work, without, however, producing any apparent effect, and now, galled beyond bearing by the boy's seeming cheerful imperturbability, he was bent upon taking satisfaction "out of his hide." Kit was well aware of the man's intention, and contrived to elude him for some time, but was captured at last.

"I'll teach ye t' give yer elders lip!" said Pope, shaking him by the neck.

"Never guv no lip," protested Kit breathlessly.

"Oh, didn't you but. Take that."

"An' you take that, you great cur!"

Pope received a heavy blow on the jaw that sent him sprawling off the whim-ring.

"Hit someone yer size — hit me!"

It was Aunt Jem; she stood in a scientific position, her sleeves rolled back, her powerful brown arms steaming from the wash-tub.

"Hit me, why don't yer?"

Pope staggered to his feet, mad with rage, and made a rush at his assailant, but another arm interfered, and put him back. Charley Coleman, who happened to be on the mine, and who had seen the rise of the quarrel, stepped in, and took Kit's cause upon his own broad shoulders, rather to Aunt Jem's disgust.

"Stand back, Pope," said the young man. "You deserved all you got. You have no right to knock the boy about."

Furious at the thought of being overthrown by a woman, and galled out of bearing by the laughter of the surfaceman, Pope swore a great oath and plunged at Coleman like a wild beast.

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Kit saw the men meet, saw blood flow, and heard the heavy thuds of their quick blows, and then shut out the dreadful sight in the folds of his aunt's skirt. When he looked again, Pope lay on his back in the dust, his face badly cut and bruised. Three men held him, but he did not seem anxious to get up on his feet again. Charley was standing near, waiting; he was not marked, but all the amiability had gone from his handsome face, which was fierce and drawn with an ugly scowl.

The manager had now arrived upon the scene.

"What's all this?" he asked.

Half a dozen voices offered an explanation.

"You see, sir," said Charley when they had done, "Pope doesn't like the boy, and doesn't treat him fair. Suppose you change Kit on to my shift; I'd be glad to have him."

"Anythin' for a quiet life," growled Spence, scowling at "The Bunyip." "And see here, Pope, next time you feel like makin' a disturbance on this mine you'd best trot up to the office and draw your money."

The braceman did not answer, but slouched up to his place, wiping the blood from his mouth.

"I'll mark you for this, Coleman," he said to Charley a few minutes later, with a black frown. Charley laughed.

"Don't do anything foolish, old man," he said.

So Kit and Tim Canty changed shifts, much to the latter's disgust, and Kit worked for the future under "Professor," between him and whom a warm friendship now existed. Kit was grateful to Charley for many kindnesses, and Coleman liked the boy, and found pleasure in his characteristic whimsicalities and his joyous nature.

The Old Identity claim was situated between two precipitous and heavily-timbered hills. The magnificent white gums on the side of Mount Mooney towered away above the whim in evergreen luxuriance, and across Brandy Creek, whose peculiar red waters rippled in the willow-like shade of the silver gums, Camel Hill arose in impassive grandeur and shut out the southern sky. On a clearing at the foot of Mount Mooney, about a quarter of a mile from the mine, stood the stringybark huts of the miners, and higher up the more pretentious weatherboard skillion of the manager looked painfully out of place and a sad blot on the primitive grandeur of the range.

In the beautiful summer days, when the gully was sweet with the fragrance of the gum blossom and the heavy perfume of the wild musk; when the parrots, the "keets," and gorgeously-plumaged blue mountains and rosellas chattered and whistled amongst the honey-laden bloom, Kit, like a true child of the bush, reflected its spirit of light and joy, and darted hither and thither, with the mercurial gaiety of health and youth, mimicking the calls and tunes of the birds with marvellous fidelity, or singing till the gorges echoed back his song in a bewildering chorus. But there were times during the long night shifts when the ghostly moonlight flooded the gully, and the mountain lowered above them dark and forbidding, with the black pall of bush upon it; when only the faint rumble of the small battery up the creek, or the cry of a lone mopoke far up the range, broke the solemn stillness, and then the whim boy sat by his mate on the brace, awed into reverence, and called softly to the shadowy horse moving noiselessly on the bark-strewn ring below.

Charley's conquest over "The Bunyip" served to intensify the great admiration Kit had for him, and the feeling increased with acquaintance. The young braceman had read a good deal of lighter literature, and the stories he could tell and the knowledge he was able to impart indicated to Kit, whose acquaintance with "the three R's" was very superficial, an amount of learning that was positively stupendous.

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Kit asserted Charley's superiority over all other men with the placid assurance of simple faith, and frequently expressed surprise that he didn't go down to Melbourne and own a big hotel. To own a big hotel was, to Kit's mind, the pinnacle of greatness and magnificence.

But there were times when the whim boy became strangely reserved, even diffident, towards his mate, when he would sit for hours silently and dreamily upon the cross-beam, swinging his bare, sun-browned feet, regarding Charley occasionally with a shy glance as he circled by. These fits of abstraction were so foreign to the boy's real nature that they puzzled the braceman not a little.

"What's the matter, Kit?" he asked one day, after an hour's silence. "Sick?"

"Naw," replied Kit, blushing a little. "I was jest thinkin'."

"About what?"

"Everythin' like. Say, 'Professor,' did you ever have a sweetheart?" The question was asked with a timorous reluctance so peculiar in Kit that Coleman laughed aloud.

"Well, I suppose I've had a dozen or so, all told."

"But I mean a reg'lar one — real M`Ginnis, you know!"

"No; I was never particularly serious!"

"Oh!" said Kit, and relapsed into meditation again.

"What a peculiar kid it is," was Charley Coleman's mental comment.

On Sunday nights it was necessary for the brace-man and whim boy due on the 12 o'clock shift for the coming week to be at work an hour or so earlier than the rest of the hands in order to bale the water out of the drive in readiness for the men going below. The Old Identity was a comparatively dry mine. Kit and Charley went on to do this duty one particular night for the third time since their association as mates. It was a beautiful, bright night, and the boy was in excellent spirits, but, to his surprise, found his mate little disposed to respond to his merriment. Coleman was looking pale and depressed and feeling, as he told Kit, "a bit off." The boy expressed his concern, and was silent in sympathy with his friend.

They had been at work about an hour; Kit was riding on the beam, directing his horse mechanically, and musing, with a thoughtful face. He and Charley were as yet the only people on the mine; it being still Sunday, the battery by the creek had not started crushing, and the night was unusually still. Not a sound broke the silence except the creaking of the king-post and the muffled tramp of the old horse. The candle in the lantern dangling from the poppet-legs over the brace burned with a pale, golden glow in the clear, white light of the moon, and the shadow of the whim cast upon the pipeclay below looked to the meditative Kit like a great-headed giant, tirelessly and vacuously throwing out his long arms and folding them again as the beam revolved. Suddenly the quiet was broken by the sound of angry voices near at hand. The boy sprang from his seat, and turning saw "The Bunyip" on the brace. Pope had been drinking; his face was an angry red and stamped with malignancy. He threatened Coleman, brandishing his gorilla-like arms, and cursing hoarsely.

"Keep off, madman!" cried Charley, "or one of us will be down the shaft."

"What d' yer think I'm here for, damn you?" spluttered the drunkard.

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Pope struck at the young man, and they closed. They struggled for a brief moment, and then Coleman's legs went from under him on the wet surface, and the next instant he had disappeared, and Kit heard the splash as his body struck the water in the shaft below.

For a short time 'The Bunyip' stood staring, then he turned, and staggered down the tip, and went blundering through the thick undergrowth along the foot of the mount.

Kit was at the mouth of the shaft in a second, peering into the dark depths. He called twice, but no answer came back to him. Then an appreciation of the situation flashed upon him. If Charley were not killed by the fall, without help he must drown in the well. It remained for him to act. Whilst busying himself he called for help, but there was no man within hearing. The long, iron-rimmed canvas bucket lay empty in the shoot; Kit seized it, and threw it into the open shaft.

"Back up!" he called in a firm voice, and the old horse backed till the top of the bucket was level with the surface.

Snatching the lantern from its hook, the boy took his stand upon the rim of the baling bucket, holding the rope with one arm, and calling to the horse —

"Get up, Billy!"

The next instant Kit was travelling down the shaft, steadying himself in the descent by touching the dripping slabs and centres with one foot every now and again. His idea was to save his mate if possible. He knew that King Billy would continue round the ring till the up bucket appeared above the surface, and then would come to a stand, and remain perfectly still — would go to sleep probably. The whim boy thought that if he could get hold of Charley in the water, by clinging to the rope, he might be able to support him until the night shift came on.

Down, down he went, the black slabs lining the shaft dancing up past his eyes in a seemingly endless procession, and the water raining upon him in great drops, stinging his cheeks and ears like stones. Splash! There came a rush of ill-smelling, brackish water into his ears and throat, and Kit was plunged into the well and carried down into the black depths. Even now the boy retained his presence of mind, and when he came to the surface again, gasping and kicking, no thought of his own danger entered his head — his object was still vividly before him. The rope was now stationary. He clutched it, and, drawing his head well out of the water, felt about the shaft with his feet, and, to his great joy, presently touched something that yielded to the light pressure. Reaching out, he grasped an arm and drew it towards him, and presently held the head of the braceman upon his shoulder. He was surprised to find it so easy to bear up such a big fellow.

Now it occurred to the boy that perhaps his efforts were in vain, and that in all probability Coleman had been battered to death against the timbers of the shaft ere he struck the water. He placed his ear against the cold lips of the unconscious man and listened, but could not detect the faintest respiration. He called Charley's name, and screamed with a sudden terror, feeling something warm flowing on his hand. But the momentary fear was followed by a feeling of childish contrition, and he touched the wet cheek near him with his lips.

Several times Kit cried out, thinking he heard foot-steps on top, but no answer came down the black shaft. Looking upwards, far, far away he saw a large star glittering in the sky, and the sight of it gave him hope; there was a sense of companionship in it. Time abides with us in our trouble. The men were a long time coming. Kit felt that he had been in the cold water half an hour at least when it really was not ten minutes since he was riding comfortably on the whim-beam. The head upon his shoulder dragged heavier and heavier as the moments crept by, and the small hand clutching the 5-in. rope ached with an intolerable pain.

In a flash, at the moment his candle was extinguished, Kit had seen that the water was only about an inch above the flat sheet on the plat in the drive. He knew that if he could only get on to the plat there would be a better

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chance of his holding out till the men came. He acted upon the idea at once. Driving himself with his feet from the opposite side of the shaft, he suddenly let go the rope and succeeded in clutching the sole-piece. He had some difficulty in dragging himself into the drive whilst still holding his mate, but he managed it. Once safe in the drive Kit made an effort to pull his mate to the plat, but found himself too weak. Sitting with his back against the frame and his legs hanging in the water, the boy clasped Coleman under the arms, clutching his jumper at the back, and held on with the determination of a hero.

The drive was filled with a dense darkness; strange, low sounds echoed along its length. The water chilled Kit's limbs, and pains were darting in his back and up and down his arms -- pains that presently settled into an abiding torture; but he clung to Coleman, and waited. Burns and Harvey were the facemen on the night shift. It seemed as if they would never come. Two or three times the whim boy tried to cry out, but his voice was very weak and whistled in his burning throat. A dread that perhaps the miners were off on the spree flashed upon his mind, and he muttered a little prayer, a very little prayer, disjointed and irrelevant in its wording, but potent with Him to whom only the heart speaks.

The boy's strength was leaving him, the pains in his back increased, and his arms felt as if being dragged from his shoulders. He spoke to his mate in piteous whispers, implored an answer, and wept; but his determination never failed nor flagged. At length he heard someone stirring on the brace, and his heart gave a great bound.

"Hello, below there!"

A hoarse gasp broke in Kit's throat -- he could not answer. And now all his limbs were trembling violently, and the agony of the strain was intensified with every second. Why didn't they come down? What were they doing?

A long time seemed to elapse before he heard the bucket surge out of the well, and the water splashing down as it was borne quickly up the shaft. Kit made another effort, but his muscles failed to respond, and he could only cling to Charley's form with frozen, tortured hands as it slipped, inch by inch, down deeper into the black waters.

Now came Kit's greatest trial, the last terrible moments of waiting. He knew when the bucket reached the surface and when it started down again by the plunging of the other bailer into the water in the next compartment, which was not open to the drive, and the splashing of the falling water as it drew out again. But what long, wearing moments those were. How slowly the old horse crept round the whim-ring. Charley was sinking, sinking all the time, and Kit felt himself going down too, powerless to resist the weight that drew him, but ready to die rather than release his hold.

There came a flash of light, and Harvey's candle showed him the drawn face of the whim boy, chalk white against the blackness of the drive, with wide, gleaming eyes and tightly-set teeth.

Kit knew nothing after the apparition of the face-man until he recovered consciousness in his aunt's hut at midday. His limbs were aching, and there was a strange bewilderment in his brain, but as that passed away he recalled the incidents of the adventure in the shaft, and wondered how Coleman had fared. He was about to call for Aunt Jem, when he heard the voice of Spence, the manager.

"Coleman's head's knocked about a bit, an' he's had a bad soakin', but he'll be round agen in a few days, right ez rain. How's the youngster, missus?"

"Sleepin' like a lamb," came the reply in Aunt Jem's strong voice. "He ain't none the worse that I can see." A happy smile played about Kit's lips when he heard the good news of "The Professor's" escape, and he turned his face to the wall, and soon slept again.

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During Monday and the whole of the next day the miners from the Old Identity, and men working at the New Chum and other mines further up and down the gully, who had heard of the lad's extraordinary action, called to inquire after him, and to express their admiration to Aunt Jem. Most of them asked to be allowed to have a peep at Kit as he lay upon his bunk, looking very small for so great a hero, and rather white and shamefaced.

The trooper from the township and a party of miners were out scouring the bush in pursuit of "The Bunyip," who had not been seen since the Sunday night.

On Wednesday morning Charley Coleman limped to the door of the hut, where Aunt Jem was up to her elbows in the foaming suds, as usual. Charley's head was swathed in an unnecessarily large and very unworkmanlike bandage, the handiwork of an amateur surgeon, and he was still pale and weak.

"Feelin' O.K. agen, ole man?" cried Aunt Jem, in a hail-fellow tone of voice.

"Shickery here," answered Charley, touching his legs, "and I've got a head on me, but otherwise pretty correct, thanks. S'pose I can see the boy?"

Aunt Jem's head went down over the tub, and she churned up the water with unwonted energy.

"Yes," she said, "I reckon you can; he's there waitin'." She pointed within.

Charley entered the hut, and saw only a little girl sitting on a camp-stool by the wide fireplace. She stood up to meet him. She was decidedly a handsome little girl of about sixteen, he thought; rather pale, with short hair that curled crisply over her small head, and with large, shy eyes. The braceman gazed at her wonderingly, and not without some youthful diffidence. It seemed that he should have known the girl, and yet he did not remember having seen her before.

"Beg pardon, miss," said the braceman; "I've called to see Kit."

The extraordinary little girl clasped her hands over her face, and then buried both hands and face in the pillow on Aunt Jem's bunk. Presently she peeped out with one eye at Charley standing awkwardly in the middle of the hut.

"I'm Kit," said a smothered voice from the depths of the pillow.

"What!" Charley strode to the side of the bunk, half-guessing the truth, and wild with astonishment. "What is the meaning of this, then?" He touched her skirt.

"Oh! 'Professor,' I was a girl all the time!"

"Kit a girl! Jerusalem!" Coleman dropped his hat. "My whim boy a girl!" He collapsed, overcome with amazement, and sat on the stool, dumbfounded, glaring at the back of Kitty's head, which alone was visible above the pillow.

After a minute or so Charley arose and turned the girl's face towards him.

"Let me see you, Kit."

But Kitty covered her burning cheeks and her eyes with her hands, and tears oozed through her fingers.

"I can't, Charley; I'm ashamed."

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"Kit a girl!" repeated the young man in a low voice. "You are Kit, and you did all the men have told me — you went down the shaft, and rescued me from death? How was it possible?"

"I just went down and caught hold of you," murmured Kitty vaguely.

"I don't understand it all, Kit," Charley continued, taking her hand in his, " but you have saved my life, and you must be the bravest girl that ever lived. I can't say anything, but 'Thanks, thanks!' and that seems mean and little. I feel a fool, but I'm just full of gratitude, Kit."

"I'm glad I done it — so glad!"

Kitty was transformed; a few weeks earlier the idea of assuming boys' clothes and taking a job on the whim afforded her only delight; now she could not think of what she had done without a blush, and mention of it covered her with confusion. She had a suddenly-developed sense of propriety, of which the neat shoes and the stockings she now wore were an eloquent confession. There was coquetry, too, in the pretty ribbons at her throat and the flower in her hair. Nothing would ever again induce Kitty Bennet to ape the boy.

Aunt Jem was proud in her manly way of Kitty's bravery, but could not understand that the fact of her proving to be a girl should cause anything more than a passing surprise. No harm had been done by the masquerade; it was a good joke, played out, that was all. This sense of the matter induced her to leave Coleman to discover the truth for himself; to have prepared him for it would have been to spoil a humorous situation, and Aunt Jem was a bigoted humorist.

Pope was found, four days after Coleman's fall, lying at the foot of some high, precipitous rocks on the side of Camel Hill. He was quite dead, and this was held to be very considerate of him by the men of the Old Identity.

Charley and Kit have since married, but of late years Mrs. Charley has developed so keen a sense of propriety that the affair of the Old Identity is strictly tabooed in her family circle.

Spicer's Courtship

SPICER was a selector. Why he chose to be a selector rather than enjoy comparative ease and affluence as a corporation day labourer or a wharf-hand or navvy is inexplicable. He had taken to the wilderness, built his smart bark hut in the centre of an apparently impenetrable forest, and was now actively engaged eating his way out again. Along the bank of the trickling creek he had cleared an acre or so where a few fruit trees flourished and a methodical little vegetable garden looked green and encouraging. Dick Spicer was a methodical man; what he did he did well, and he was always doing. Dick was small, and he looked puny lifting his pigmy axe to those mighty gums, and patiently hewing splinters out of the compact bush. Having little or nothing to say to his scattered neighbours, he exchanged small talk with his hens, and favoured Griffin, the low-comedy dog-of-all-work, with his opinion of things.

Mr. Spicer was a bachelor, approaching 50, wiry, leathery, deliberative, and very diffident in company. But, despite his apparent uneasiness when chance threw him into the society of females, Dick was looking about for a wife. The stillness of the long evenings and the solitary Sundays implanted a great yearning for the companionship of a good wife in his lonely heart. In looking about the selector's view was very limited. There was not an unmarried woman of suitable years within a radius of twelve miles. Of all the approachable females, he admired Mrs. Clinton the most, and his only hope lay in the fact that Clinton was in feeble health and reported to be sustaining life precariously with one lung.

Clinton held a block about a mile up the creek, and Spicer paid him occasional abrupt and unceremonious visits

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there. Sometimes he would lean against a door-jamb, with not more than his head inside, and pass a few remarks relative to nothing in particular, in an irresponsible sort of way; but more frequently he just stood about outside, and criticised the poultry in audible soliloquy, or reflected aloud upon Clinton's ridiculous notions about dairy work and vegetable-growing. However, he always displayed a proper neighbourly concern in inquiring after Clinton's health before leaving.

"Y'ain't feelin' no better, I s'pose?" he would ask, with an appearance of anxious interest that quite touched the sick man.

Clinton was always feeling "pretty bad." He said as much in his dull, heavy manner, and Dick would go off to indulge in contemplation, and consult his dog.

Spicer did not wish Clinton to die, he did not want to hurry him up; he was a patient, dispassionate man, and the possibility of his neighbour's early demise entered into his calculations merely as a probable circumstance which, however regrettable, could not reasonably be overlooked.

Clinton substantiated predictions, and obligingly died within a reasonable time, and Dick rode solemnly in the funeral cortege, behind the drays, on a lame cart-horse borrowed from Canty for the occasion.

After the funeral he looked in upon the widow and, feeling inspired to say something consolatory and encouraging, expressed his belief that she wouldn't mourn much about Peter.

"'Tain't worth while," he said.

Dick's command of language was only sufficient to enable him to say the thing he meant once in a dozen tries, and on this occasion he was conscious the moment he had spoken that the sentiment expressed was hardly appropriate to the occasion. Before he could frame an apology the disconsolate widow attacked him with a spear-grass broom and stormed him out of the house. He walked home thoughtfully, afflicted with a nettle-rash and a vague idea that perhaps he had not made an altogether satisfactory beginning.

But Spicer was not cast down. He had resolved upon a plan of courtship, and the object of his first manoeuvre was to break his intentions gently to the widow. This he thought to accomplish by hanging round the house a good deal. He would haunt her selection in the cool of the evening, or, in his more audacious moments, perch himself on the chock-and-log fence running by the side of the house, and whistle an unmelodious and windy jig, which was intended to convey some idea of his airy nonchalance and peace of mind.

It was a long time before Dick progressed from the fence to the wood-heap, and meanwhile the widow had not seemed to pay any particular attention to his movements. He sometimes addressed her with a portentous truth bearing upon the dieting of laying hens, or the proper handling of cows, or the medical treatment of ailing chickens; but usually satisfied himself with a significant grin and a queer twist of the head that was his idea of sheer playfulness and waggery. The neighbours came to notice him over-looking the selection or perched on the fence supervising the weather and things generally, and predicted that there would be "a marryin'" up the creek presently.

Presently! Spicer did nothing hastily, nothing to lead anybody to believe that he had not all eternity to come and go on. He never considered the flight of time, and had made many calculations that carried him on to the end of the next century without discovering any incongruity.

He did arrive at the wood-heap eventually, though. Mrs. Clinton's boy John was too young to wield an axe with any effect, and one afternoon Dick lounged over to the logs, took up the axe, and examined it with an air of abstraction. He weighed it carefully in his hand, and satisfied his curiosity by trying it on a log. When he had

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chopped about half a ton of wood he appeared satisfied that it was a pretty good axe. That evening he chuckled all the way up the creek, and all the time it took to prepare his tea, and towards bed-time confided to Griffin, with more chuckles, his opinion that it was "'bout's good 's done."

"She can't go back on that," he said with assurance.

But Spicer lingered at this stage for a long time; he cut all the wood the widow needed, and did other little things about the selection, and often sat on the fence, as usual, and gradually grew to be quite at home there. The widow accepted his services now as a matter of course, and though she was often betrayed into expressions of great impatience, Dick remained oblivious, and worked out his courtship in his own ponderous way.

His next step towards strengthening his position was when he took it upon himself to put several palings on the roof of Mrs. Clinton's house. This was a decided advance, and when the buxom little woman thanked him, his odd screw of the face and sidelong nod clearly conveyed the impression that he was beginning to regard himself as a "perfect devil amongst the women." There was more chuckling that evening, and further confidences for the dog. After this Spicer ceased working seriously on his own selection, and slowly extended his sphere at the widow's. He did some gardening, and repaired the fences, and dictated improvements, but it was not till eighteen months after Clinton's death that he made his great stroke. It was on Sunday afternoon that Dick discovered Mrs. Clinton in hot pursuit of the boy John, with one shoe in her hand and one on her foot. John was in active rebellion, and yelling his contempt for the maternal authority. Spicer rose to the occasion. He secured boy John, took off his belt, and proceeded to strap the unfilial youth — to give him a grave, judicious, and fatherly larruping — under the eye of his mother. Then the selector drew off to consider and weigh the important step he had taken, with the result that, half an hour after, he hung his head in at the kitchen door, and said abruptly:

"Treaser, when's it to be?"

"Meanin' which?" asked the unconscious widow.

"Meanin' marryin'."

The widow thought for a moment, and said, just as if she were contemplating the sale of a few eggs:

"This day month'll suit me."

"Done," said Spicer.

Then he felt called upon to make some kind of a demonstration, and edged up to Mrs. Clinton in a fidgeting sort of way, and when near enough made as if to kiss her, paused half-way in doubt, and then didn't.

"The man's a fool," said the stout little widow composedly.

They were married though, under conditions of great secrecy, at the parson's house in the township, with the blinds down. It was with great difficulty Dick was convinced of the necessity of witnesses.

The Conquering Bush.

NED "picked up" his wife in Sydney. He had come down for a spell in town, and to relieve himself of the distress of riches — to melt the cheque accumulated slowly in toil and loneliness on a big station in the North. He was a stockrider, a slow, still man naturally, but easily moved by drink. When he first reached town he seemed to have with him some of the atmosphere of silence and desolation that surrounded him during the long months back there

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on the run. Ned was about thirty-four, and looked forty. He was tall and raw-boned, and that air of settled melancholy, which is the certain result of a solitary bush life, suggested some romantic sorrow to Mrs. Black's sentimental daughter.

Darton, taught wisdom by experience, had on this occasion taken lodgings in a suburban private house. Mrs. Black's home was very small, but her daughter was her only child, and they found room for a "gentleman boarder."

Janet Black was a pleasant-faced, happy-hearted girl of twenty. She liked the new boarder from the start, she acknowledged to herself afterwards, but when by some fortunate chance he happened to be on hand to drag a half-blind and half-witted old woman from beneath the very hoofs of a runaway horse, somewhat at the risk of his own neck, she was enraptured, and in the enthusiasm of the moment she kissed the hand of the abashed hero, and left a tear glittering on the hard brown knuckles.

This was a week after Ned Darton's arrival in Sydney.

Ned went straight to his room and sat perfectly still, and with even more than his usual gravity watched the tear fade away from the back of his hand. Either Janet's little demonstration of artless feeling had awakened suggestions of some glorious possibility in Ned's heart, or he desired to exercise economy for a change; he suddenly became very judicious in the selection of his drinks, and only took enough whisky to dispel his native moodiness and taciturnity and make him rather a pleasant acquisition to Mrs. Black's limited family circle.

When Ned Darton returned to his pastoral duties in the murmuring wilds, he took Janet Black with him as his wife. That was their honeymoon.

Darton did not pause to consider the possible results of the change he was introducing into the life of his bride — few men would. Janet was vivacious, and her heart yearned towards humanity. She was bright, cheerful, and impressionable. The bush is sad, heavy, despairing; delightful for a month, perhaps, but terrible for a year.

As she travelled towards her new home the young wife was effervescent with joy, aglow with health, childishly jubilant over numberless plans and projects; she returned to Sydney before the expiration of a year, a stranger to her mother in appearance and in spirit. She seemed taller now, her cheeks were thin, and her face had a new expression. She brought with her some of the brooding desolation of the bush — even in the turmoil of the city she seemed lost in the immensity of the wilderness. She answered her mother's every question without a smile. She had nothing to complain of: Ned was a very good husband and very kind. She found the bush lonesome at first, but soon got used to it, and she didn't mind now. She was quite sure she was used to it, and she never objected to returning.

A baby was born, and Mrs. Darton went back with her husband to their hut by the creek on the great run, to the companionship of bears, birds, 'possums, kangaroos, and the eternal trees. She hugged her baby on her breast, and rejoiced that the little mite would give her something more to do and something to think of that would keep the awful ring of the myriad locusts out of her ears.

Man and wife settled down to their choking existence again as before, without comment. Ned was used to the bush — he had lived in it all his life — and though its influence was powerful upon him he knew it not. He was necessarily away from home a good deal, and when at home he was not companionable, in the sense that city dwellers know. Two bushmen will sit together by the fire for hours, smoking and mute, enjoying each other's society; "in mute discourse" two bushmen will ride for twenty miles through the most desolate or the most fruitful region. People who have lived in crowds want talk, laughter, and song. Ned loved his wife, but he neither talked, laughed, nor sang.

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Summer came. The babe at Mrs. Darton's breast looked out on the world of trees with wide, unblinking, solemn eyes, and never smiled.

"Ned," said Janet, one bright, moonlight night, "do you know that that 'possum in the big blue gum is crazy? She has two joeys, and she has gone mad."

Janet spent a lot of her time sitting in the shade of the hut on a candle-box, gazing into her baby's large, still eyes, listening to the noises of the bush, and the babe too seemed to listen, and the mother fancied that their senses blended, and they both would some day hear something awful above the crooning of the insects and the chattering of the parrots. Sometimes she would start out of these humours with a shriek, feeling that the relentless trees which had been bending over and pressing down so long were crushing her at last beneath their weight.

Presently she became satisfied that the laughing jackasses were mad. She had long suspected it. Why else should they flock together in the dim evening and fill the bush with their crazy laughter? Why else should they sit so grave and still at other times, thinking and grieving?

Yes, she was soon quite convinced that the animals and birds, even the insects that surrounded her, were mad, hopelessly mad, all of them. The country was now burnt brown, and the hills ached in the great heat, and the ghostly mirage floated in the hollows. In the day-time the birds and beasts merely chattered and muttered querulously from the deepest shades, but in the dusk of evening they raved and shrieked, and filled the ominous bush with mad laughter and fantastic wailings.

It was at this time that Darton became impressed by the peculiar manner of his wife, and a great awe stole over him as he watched her gazing into her baby's eyes with that strange look of frightened conjecture. He suddenly became very communicative; he talked a lot, and laughed, and strove to be merry, with an indefinable chill at his heart. He failed to interest his wife; she was absorbed in a terrible thought. The bush was peopled with mad things — the wide wilderness of trees, and the dull, dead grass, and the cowering hills instilled into every living thing that came under the influence of their ineffable gloom a madness of melancholy. The bears were mad, the 'possums, the shrieking cockatoos, the dull grey laughing jackasses with their devilish cackling, and the ugly yellow-throated lizards that panted at her from the rocks — all were mad. How, then, could her babe hope to escape the influence of the mighty bush and the great white plains beyond, with their heavy atmosphere of despair pressing down upon his defenceless head? Would he not presently escape from her arms, and turn and hiss at her from the grass like a vicious snake; or climb the trees, and, like a bear, cling in day-long torpor from a limb; or, worst of all, join the grey birds on the big dead gum, and mock at her sorrow with empty, joyless laughter?

These were the fears that oppressed Janet as she watched her sad, silent baby at her breast. They grew upon her and strengthened day by day, and one afternoon they became an agonizing conviction. She had been alone with the dumb child for two days, and she sat beside the hut door and watched the evening shadows thicken, with a shadow in her eyes that was more terrible than blackest night, and when a solitary mopoke began calling from the Bald Hill, and the jackasses set up a weird chorus of laughter, she rose, and clasping her baby tighter to her breast, and leaning over it to shield it from the surrounding evils, she hurried towards the creek.

Janet was not in the hut when Ned returned home half an hour later. Attracted by the howling of his dog, he hastened to the waterhole under the great rock, and there in the shallow water he found the bodies of his wife and child and the dull grey birds were laughing insanely overhead.

The Elopement Of Mrs. Peters

SIMON PETERS, irreverently called "The Apostle," returned to the railway camp late on Sunday night, and found his tent topsy-turvy and his "missus" gone. On the paling table, weighted with a piece of cheese, was a

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scrap of sugar–paper, on which was written in Fan's dog–leg hand:

"I'm sik. I'm goin' to cleer."

Sim swore a muffled oath under his abundant moustache, and looked around upon the unwonted disorder. The blue blanket and the rug had been stripped from their bunk; the spare, rough furniture of the big tent lay about in confusion; and amongst the grey ashes in the wide sod fireplace was a bunch of reddish hair. Peters fished this out, and examined it with as much astonishment as the phlegmatic, even–tempered navvy was capable of feeling. It was his wife's hair, and had evidently been hacked off in a hurry, regardless of effect. Piled on the bush stool against the wall were Mrs. Peters's clothes. Nothing of hers that Peters could recall was missing; even the big quondong ear–rings, of which she was so proud, were thrown upon the floor. Her hat was on the bed, and her boots were under the table.

Still clutching the mop of hair in his hand, Sim backed solemnly and soberly on to a seat, and sat for a few minutes gravely weighing the evidence. Obviously Fanny had gone off clad only in a blue blanket or a 'possum rug. This was most extraordinary, even for Fanny, but there was some satisfaction in it, since it should not be difficult to trace a white woman so attired.

Presently Peters arose and went forth to prosecute inquiries. On Saturday, before departing for Dunolly, he had asked Rolley's wife to keep an eye on the missus. As he approached the gaffer's tent, however, he heard a woman's voice raised in shrill vituperation, and recognised Mrs. Rolley's strident contralto.

"My poor mother that's in heaven knew you, you ----. She always said you was a ----."

And poor Rolley was inundated with a torrent of his own choice blasphemies. Simon Peters knew by experience that when Mrs. Rolley dragged her sainted mother into little domestic differences, she was at least two days gone in drink, and quite incapable of recollecting anything beyond Rolley's shortcomings, so he turned away with a sigh, and carried his quest into the camp. Half an hour later he returned to his tent and resumed his thoughtful attitude on the stool. He had secured one piece of evidence that seemed to throw a good deal of light on the situation. Late on Saturday night someone had broken into Curly Hunter's tent and stolen therefrom a grey tweed suit, a black felt hat, and a pair of light blucher boots. Peters, putting this and that together slowly and with great mental effort, concluded that Curly Hunter and Fanny were about the same height. He recollected, too, the explanation his wife offered when he discovered her back to be seamed and lined with scars.

"Dad done it," said Fanny. "Poor old dad, he was always lickin' me."

"But," gasped Peters, filled with a sudden itch to beat the throat of his deceased father–in–law, "you don't mean to say the cowardly brute lashed you like that!"

"Didn't he?" replied she, laughing lightly. "He used to rope me up to the cow–bail an' hammer me with a horsewhip. Once when I set the grass on fire, an' burned the stable an' the dairy; another time when I broke Grasshopper's neck, ridin' him over Coleman's chock–an'–log fence; an' agen when I dressed up in Tom's clothes, took a swag, and got a job pickin'–up in M' Kinley's shed."

Early on Monday morning Peters had an interview with Curly Hunter. Hunter was sympathetic, and readily sold Sim the stolen things at a modest valuation, promising at the same time to observe a friendly reticence in the matter; but, for all that, two hours later everybody in the camp knew that Mrs. Peters had run off, and that "The Apostle" was away hunting for her. The general opinion, freely and profanely expressed, was that Simon Peters was a superlative idiot. It was agreed that Peters would have exhibited common–sense by sitting still under the bereavement, and casually thanking Providence for the "let off." Since Mrs. Peters started a couple of ramshackle waggons down the gradient, and nearly smashed up Ryan's gang, the camp had suddenly grown weary of her

"monkey tricks."

Mrs. Simon Peters was a woman of twenty–six, ten or twelve years younger than her husband, more comely, more decent, and more presentable in every way than the other wives of the camp. She did not get drunk in the bedroom end of Wingy Lee's shanty on pay nights, did not use the picturesque idiom of the gangers in ordinary conversation, and in some respects had been a good mate to Peters. But it must be admitted that the camp had further justification in doubting the complete sanity of Simon Peters's wife. She had an eerie expression that was quaintly accented by keen, twinkling, black eyes in combination with light red hair and rather pale brows; and she was possessed of a spirit of mischief that led her into the wildest extravagances. Her devilment was that of an ungovernable school–boy, without his preposterous sense of humour. An uncontrollable yearning for excitement impelled her to the strangest actions. She had another peculiar characteristic, not unknown to the camp, in her apparent insensibility to physical pain. Peters had been astounded by the fact that a burn, a cut, a scald, or a blow provoked no complainings from his wife and scarcely any regard. This indifference extended to the sufferings of others. After the blasting accident in the North cutting, Fanny, of all the women in the camp, was the only one who had the nerve to approach the mangled body of poor M`Intyre, and she placidly worked over the shocking mass, still instinct with life, when the strongest men turned sick at the sight of it.

Sim made no effort to understand his wife, which was well, as he was only an average man, and she was past finding out. He concluded that her extraordinary conduct was just the natural unreasonableness and contrariness of women "coming out strong," and made the best of the situation in which he found himself. Being an average man, Sim was a superior navvy; he only got drunk on big occasions, and, drunk or sober, treated his wife with indulgent fondness, and occasionally Fanny seemed fond of him in return; but then she had been very warmly attached to that father who used to bail her up in the cowshed and lash her with a horsewhip in the hope of converting her to sweet reasonableness.

On the Monday morning Peters first went up the road, seeking his wife, but no one at White's had seen a slim young fellow in a grey suit pass that way, so he tried down the road, with better success. Clark, at the Travellers' Rest, had seen "just sich a feller" as Sim described.

"They had a drink here Sunday, an' left, making for Moliagul, it seemed t' me," said Clark.

"They?" queried Peters.

"Yes. There was two of 'em. The big feller shouted. A brown–faced chap, with a black moustache, an' a deep cut in his chin, here."

Simon's grip made a dent in the pewter he held, and a grey hue crept over his cheeks and into his lips. Never before had he doubted his wife in this way; never through all her mad escapades had he had reason to question her fealty as a wife till now. Peters remembered the man distinctly; he had seen him about the camp, looking for work. The peculiar cleft chin would serve to identify him amongst ten thousand. Striding along the road the fugitives had taken, the navvy recollected hearing Fanny speaking enthusiastically of the tall, brown stranger as a fine man, and the grey in his cheek deepened to the colour of ashes, and his jaw hardened meaningly. His quest had suddenly assumed a terrible significance, and that fierce pallor and grim rigidity of the jaw never left him until its end.

Peters heard of them again in the afternoon, but got off the trail towards evening, and it was not till late on the following day that he picked up the scent. Then he talked with a farmer who had seen them.

"They slep' in an old hut up in my grass paddock las' night," said the man, "an' went up the road at about seven this mornin'."

"Did both men sleep in the hut?" asked Peters.

"To be sure!"

Sim continued his journey, steadily, and with apparent unconcern, but cherishing an immovable determination to kill the brown-faced man the moment they met.

Early on the Wednesday morning Peters came up with the runaway. An old man watering a horse at a small creek told him, in answer to his inquiries:

"A tall chap, with a divided chin — name of Sandler, ain't it? He's here. I let him a bit of ringin'. That's his axe you hear up the paddock."

Following the ring of the axe, Peters soon came upon his man. Sandler stopped working as he approached, and turned towards him, resting on the handle of his axe. Sim walked to within a couple of yards of the stranger, and threw off the light swag he carried.

"You infernal hound!" he said; "where is my wife?"

Sandler started up in extreme amazement. "Keep off!" he cried. "What the devil do I know about your wife?"

Peters rushed at him with the fury of a brute, and the two men exchanged heavy blows. Then they closed, and wrestled for a moment, but Simon's rage lent him a strength that was irresistible, and presently the other man was sent down with stunning force. As he attempted to rise, shaken and almost breathless, Peters, who had seized the axe, struck him once with the head of it, and Sandler fell back again and lay perfectly still, with a long, gaping wound over his left eye, from which the blood poured through his hair upon the new chips and the yellow grass. When Peters looked up his wife stood facing him. She wore blucher boots, a pair of grey trousers, and a man's shirt, and carried an axe. She gazed composedly at the fallen man.

"What have you done, Sim?" she asked.

"You ran away with that man?" He pointed at Sandler.

She nodded her head.

"He did not know I was a woman," she said.

One Night

THE bush a few minutes since turbulent with the calls of a myriad antic birds and the raucous cries of 'possums and monkey-bears, homing in the great gums, was suddenly seized with a grave-like stillness and the silence of a desert — a silence that rang in the ears with monotonous reverberations, and saddened and awed the spirit with a sense of loneliness and isolation. The solitary swagman, camped in a small clearing overhung high above by the clustering boughs of the giant trees, to shake off the awe that came creeping into his heart, roused himself from his reverie and broke out into the refrain of a familiar diggers' song, with a feeling almost of defiance. The unwonted sound provoked guttural murmurs and whispers of protestation from the creatures in the tree-tops, and caused mysterious shufflings in the undergrowth. A far-off dingo answered back with a long, low, mournful cry, and the chorus returned to the singer in such startling echoes that he presently ceased his song and fell to smoking again and gazing at the flames curling about the blackened billy on the fire at his feet.

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The camper's face, ruddy in the glow of the fire, was evenly featured and attractive, impressed with a thoughtful gravity in place of the good-humoured bravado which was so common a characteristic in the faces of diggers in the days of Fiery Creek, Dunolly, Jim Crow, Adelaide Lead, Tarrangower, and Ballarat, when gold was plentiful and no man despaired of fortune. Lying near was his unrolled swag. A damper baked in the white ash before the fire. Fred Cadden's luck as a miner had been good on the whole. Although he had never "struck it rich" as richness was understood in those auriferous times, he had followed the rushes for three years, ever since his arrival in Australia, without once losing credit at the stores or finding himself short of an ounce or two to go and come on, and an occasional patch of wash good for several ounces to the tub had enabled him to mail large sums to his patient little mother at Home.

A vision of the wistful face of that mother peered into his eyes out of the glowing logs as his thoughts reverted to England and to her. She was the only parent he had known; he was her only child, and his affection for her had much of a daughter's tenderness. They had lived an exclusive life together. As a boy he had often wondered at this; but he understood later, and the story his mother told him on his twenty-first birthday was quite as influential in determining him to visit Australia as the thrilling rumours that came around the world of virgin gold glittering in the running streams and yellow nuggets glowing on the hill-sides in the far-off land. He went, hoping to win fortune from the creeks and gravel beds, but also on a mission — a mission his mother could not oppose, although in parting with him she parted with all that was dear to her in life.

"Go, my boy," she said, "but if you fail you must come home again in three years. If you succeed I will come to you."

He promised faithfully, and now the three years had expired, and his mission was a failure, and he was returning. He and Paul Lahffe, his mate, had done well at Clunes, and had parted there, Paul turning his face toward a new field in the north, and Fred travelling south towards Geelong, where he intended taking passage on the next homeward-bound vessel. The belt about his waist was so loaded with gold that it had proved a trying burden throughout his long day's tramp, but the fact that his quest had never since his arrival in Australia seemed to have the remotest chance of being realised filled him with discontent.

The lugubrious cry of a mopoke near at hand, breaking suddenly in upon the silence, recalled the young man to a sense of his position, and the fact that the billy was boiling. He lifted the utensil from the fire, threw a handful of tea into the water, and set it to brew. Then he seated himself upon the log again and looked around him into the heavy shadows gathered about the big boles of the gums, and up at their towering, plume-like tops, and shrugged his shoulders, with a muttered exclamation of dissatisfaction. Fred was by this time familiar with the bush by night, and knew all its uncanny voices and its more uncanny moods of silence, but he had never been alone in the mighty heart of it as he was now. His thoughts turned instinctively to the many stories he had heard of shepherds out back on immense runs being driven to madness by the solitude and the weird mystery of the bush; of prospectors on the desolate ranges losing all their desire for human fellowship, and becoming taciturn recluses, powerless to shake off the influence of the funereal and desolate forest.

Cadden turned with an effort from these unpleasant thoughts, and gave his attention to his meal again. He had walked fifteen miles since noon, and was uncommonly hungry. Drawing the nicely browned damper from among the ashes, Fred was about to turn to his swag for the other materials for his tea, when he uttered an exclamation of surprise and sprang back a step, dropping the steaming bread in his amazement. A stranger stood facing him within the circle of light cast by the camp fire — a tall, sinewy man of about fifty, dressed in a cabbage-tree hat, a blue Crimean shirt, cord trousers, and Wellington boots. The stranger stood with his right hand thrust lightly in his pocket, and his left toying with the point of his long iron-grey beard, and he smiled broadly under the profusion of hair on his weather-tanned face at the young man's consternation.

"Night, mate!" he said.

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"Good-night," responded Fred, recovering himself.

"You jumped up like a ghost."

"Don't grow ghosts in Australia, my boy," said the other, still smiling. "Reckon you're something of a new chum."

"If three years' hard digging from Buninyong to Bendigo count for anything, I am not a new chum. But where have you sprung from, mate?" Fred felt somewhat uneasy under the other's close scrutiny, and regretted that his revolver was out of reach, in the folds of his swag.

"Name's Coburn," answered the man who had the curtness and assurance of an old hand — "makin' for Ballarat."

"Your swag?" queried Fred, suspiciously.

"Got none. Thought to strike old Copper-top Egan's shanty to-night, but my horse fell lame. He's hung up down by the creek. Saw your fire, and suspected you would be good enough for a smoke, a pannikin of tea, and a feed — eh?"

"Of course," said Fred, drawing forth his plug, and tossing it towards the stranger. To refuse the hospitalities of the camp to a traveller would be to outrage an honoured tradition of the country. Besides, the young man was quite reassured by the smiling countenance and easy demeanour of his guest, and was secretly glad of company.

"I was just going to have tea myself," he continued, "and to such as there is you are welcome."

Coburn nodded his thanks, and young Cadden resumed his preparations for the meal. A gridiron extemporized from a scrap of fencing wire was brought into requisition, and presently the miner was busy grilling chops, with a facility born of experience; and whilst he busied himself in this manner his companion stood opposite, leisurely chipping at the tobacco, and keenly scrutinising him from under the wide brim of the well-seasoned hat he wore.

"Bought them up at Pablo's at noon and hawked them along in my billy, but they are as fresh as paint," said Fred, indicating the chops.

The young man looked up as he spoke, and encountered the six black pips of a long revolver pointing at him across the fire, and two stern eyes beyond, burning with a feline lustre.

"Bail up," commanded Coburn.

Fred's impulse was to spring for his swag, but at the first stride a bullet clipped through the shoulder of his jumper, bruising the flesh and bringing him up standing.

"Stir a peg and I'll drop the next six inches lower," the stranger said, coolly, but with convincing emphasis. "Now that's sensible, and to convince you of the wisdom of standing just so, I don't mind mentioning that I am Jack Hogan — the notorious Hogan, you know, alias Peetree, alias Lone Hand, alias Coburn, et cetera, et cetera."

Fred Cadden started and flushed, and his eyes turned involuntarily towards the spot where his revolver lay. Coburn noticed the glance, and smiled.

"Heard of Hogan, I see," he said. "Met some of my cripples, perhaps."

Fred had heard of Hogan, notorious as Lone Hand, a bushranger of great audacity, whose exploits with the revolver were told of in a hundred stories by more or less appreciative diggers; a cool, cunning scoundrel who

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prided himself on never taking life, but who, when necessity arose, disabled an enemy with a bullet as expertly as a surgeon might with a lancet. This sobriquet had been given him by reason of the fact that he had neither mates nor confidants, which also to a great extent accounted for his success in having eluded the mounted police for over five years. An exaggerated courtesy towards women, and occasional acts of liberality towards hard-up diggers, combined with an avowed and demonstrated vindictiveness towards the "lordly squatter" and all officialdom, served to win Lone Hand the admiration and respect of the majority of the rough diggers — honourable men, most of them, in their own dealings, but bitterly hating law that was made manifest to them only in license hunting and extortion.

Cadden faced Hogan's revolver, firm lipped, and with kindling eyes. He had no admiration for the gold robber, and the mention of his name only fired the young man with a resolve to sell his life dearly and warily, but, if it must be, to lose it rather than to be the meek victim of the desperado of Murdering Flat and Fryer's Creek.

"Any shootin' irons?" queried Hogan.

Cadden gave no answer, and the outlaw, holding his revolver ready for instantaneous service, walked towards the swag. He shook out the rug, and discovered a revolver, which he thrust in his belt.

"Now," he said, "hand over that gold-belt under the slack of your jumper."

The blood burned in Fred's cheeks, and his eyes flashed, but he made no movement, and as he gazed a devilish vindictiveness grew in the eyes opposing his, and the finger on the revolver that gleamed between them moved with vital significance.

"I don't like your damned airs, mate," Hogan continued. "I will have to maim you before I can take that belt myself. Will you hand it over, or be left here with a bullet in your carcase to run your chances with the bull-ants?"

It would have been madness to have defied Hogan further under the circumstances. Fred unbuckled the belt, and threw it towards him. Lone Hand picked it from the ground, and weighed it in his hand, and laughed grimly.

"Devilish heavy, my boy," he said. "You ought to be thankful to be rid of it."

Hogan buckled the belt about his own waist; but during the operation never lifted his keen eye from the alert figure of the young man.

"Now," he said, blandly, "S'pose we have tea? Hang it all, mate, those chops are burning."

He seized the gridiron and assumed the duties of cook, turning the chops with the muzzle of his revolver, and keeping the fire between himself and his victim, whom he continued watching closely all the time.

"Come," he went on, "don't be so cursed unsociable! Hand out the plates. Take the pannikin yourself, I can drink from the billy lid. I'll pay for my tea — there's nothing dirty mean about Lone Hand."

He opened the mouth of the belt, and drew forth a couple of coarse pieces of gold, and threw them towards Cadden.

"There," he said, "that's liberal pay for a little mutton and damper."

Hogan, confident in his great strength, and in the fact that Fred was unarmed, rejoiced in this bravado, and Fred, perceiving that his only chance lay in humouring him, picked the gold from the ground, and brought forward a

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couple of tin plates.

"Very good — you have the whip hand to-night," he said; "some day the positions may be reversed."

"If they ever are, mate, and you are the man to do it, skin me like a bandicoot, and I won't whine a whimper."

Hogan divided the chops, and for a time the men ate without exchanging a word, both seated upon the ground, Fred watchful, and eager for his opportunity, Hogan, apparently indifferent, but wide awake, and alive in every nerve with the instinctive alertness and caution of a long-hunted man.

"Going to Melbourne for a spree, eh?" he asked presently.

"No, I intended shipping for England."

"Then I've done you a good turn. Go back on your tracks, young man; take Cobb and Co. for Eaglehawk or Castlemaine — they're panning out thousands of ounces there daily. Or rob fat old Macarthur, of Black Boy, of one of those blood colts of his, have grit, and go prospecting in other men's pockets. I invite competition."

"It's a madman's trade," said Fred. "Anxiety till the end, and then — a hempen comforter."

"It is glorious," cried Hogan fiercely — "a vindication — a sweet and lasting vengeance!" Fred was surprised at the quick change in the man; his sardonic humor had passed, and his face twitched and his eyes burned with a sudden malevolence. This was the opportunity for which the digger had been waiting. Whilst still sitting upon the ground he had drawn his legs into the best position for a spring. Leaning forward upon his hands, with a pretence of lifting a burning twig for his pipe, Fred bounded with a tremendous effort right over the fire. Hogan fumbled his revolver in the attempt to discharge it, and the next instant the two men were writhing upon the grass, with interlocked limbs and set, stern faces, fighting for life.

The miner was young and athletic, possessing all the reserve power of a vigorous constitution unimpaired by any excesses. He had worked just hard enough of late years to toughen the sinews and develop his muscles to their greatest capacity. But the older man was bigger, his strength was talked of as something extraordinary, his frame was of iron, and he had learned many cunning tricks in a dreadful school. Fred clung desperately to his pistol hand, and so, panting and straining every thew, the men fought like tigers, but noiselessly, under the brooding trees. Several times their legs scattered the embers of the fire, and once Hogan's hair flamed and singed his cheek, but they wrestled on, regardless of everything besides. At length a slip, a turn of luck, gave Cadden a brief ascendancy. His right hand grasped his enemy's throat, with his left he pinned his pistol hand to the ground; fighting still, he strove to plant his knee upon the outlaw's breast; but at that instant a shot was heard. Fred's grip relaxed and he pitched forward on his face by Hogan's side, and his extended hands dug at the yielding turf.

The bushranger's first action when he felt himself free was to dart for the cover of the nearest tree. The shot had not been fired by him. Presently he heard another shot, followed by four more in rapid succession. And then he understood. The revolver he had taken from Fred's swag and thrust in his belt, had in the course of the struggle been jerked into the fire, and the heat had discharged the cartridges. It was a bullet from one of these that had struck Cadden. Hogan knelt by the side of the young man, and turned his face to the light, and an exclamation broke from his lips.

"My God! man, is it as bad as that?"

He had witnessed the approach of dissolution too often to be mistaken now, and the sight of the handsome boyish face drawn with agony, and already ashen from the touch of death, and the dim eyes gazing into his own with dreadful fixity, flooded his soul with a great compassion.

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"I didn't shoot, mate!" he cried, "so help me heaven, 'twasn't——"

He stopped short, and with a face as ghastly as that of the dying man, glared for a moment at a photograph that had fallen from the inside pocket of Cadden's jumper. He took up the card with a trembling hand, and gazed upon the pictured face, that of a young man. Under the picture were written the words, "To Mary, from Paul." Hogan was now beset by an uncontrollable emotion. He drew the likeness before Fred's face.

"Where did you get this? What is he to you? For the love of God, answer me — answer me!"

During Hogan's examination of the picture a strange, eager light had grown in Fred's eyes, overcoming for a moment the filmy dulness of death, and the bushranger's agitation seemed to awaken a kindred feeling in his own breast.

"Speak, speak, man!" gasped Lone Hand.

Cadden's lips moved, he raised his body a little from the sustaining arm, a few broken, whispered words fell from his lips, and then his head dropped heavily back, every muscle relaxed, he breathed a sigh, and was dead. One distinct word only reached Rogan's ear:

"Father!"

Dazed and astounded, the bushranger knelt beside the dead man, gazing upon the grey face, and through his tense lips issued the names of God and Christ with incoherent reiteration, instinct with spiritual agony. Presently, moved by a kind of frenzy, he arose and darted towards Cadden's swag, and bent over it, throwing its contents right and left till he discovered a small packet of papers. Crouching by the fire, he tore open the packet, and referred to the signatures in the letters it contained. "Your loving mother, Mary Cadden," was signed to each missive, and each signature wrung from Hogan's heart the same low, moaning cry:

"My wife! my wife!"

A paragraph of one letter he started to read:

"Oh! my boy, I too have heard dreadful stories of what men have become who escaped from those horrible, horrible prisons. It is a difficult task, but if it should yet succeed, and you find him, whatever he may be, my darling, remember he was an innocent man, unjustly sentenced. Only the undying conviction of your mother, who knew him best, and loved him, can be offered in proof of this; but that will suffice for you. I have read with such pain as I may never tell of strong, true, proud-spirited men being converted into fiends, fired only with a raging hate against society, and a thirst for vengeance upon their oppressors by the inhuman cruelties and the nameless degradations of the convict system; and, I confess, when, after hearing of his escape, the long years went by without bringing me word of him, that I feared the worst. A consciousness of his own degradation alone would have kept him silent so long if he still lives. But if you find him in evil ways, do not forget what turned him to evil, and be kind to him — love him for my sake. Nothing could make him so bad but that we could reclaim him, dear, you and I."

Hogan (for we will still give him that name) ceased reading, and pressed the paper to his lips, and falling upon his face in the grass, grovelled there in a passion of remorse and despair. In a few moments he crept to the side of the dead man, and gazed long and earnestly upon the rigid features — gazed till his eyes filled with unaccustomed tears, and then the fierce, revengeful man, whose hand for years had been against his fellows, and whose heart had acknowledged no tender sentiment, but had nurtured a devilish cynicism and a religion of hate, wept, and sobbed, and pleaded, and protested over the body, with the hysterical and unreasoning anguish of a weak woman.

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The storm of feeling passed, and Hogan arose. He unbuckled the gold-belt from his waist and fastened it about Fred Cadden's body. Then he placed the letters and the likeness in the pocket of Fred's jumper, turned without allowing himself another glance and rushed from the spot, and a minute later he swept by, riding his big, spirited horse with mad recklessness along the ill-defined track, where the trees reached out their treacherous limbs to dash the unwary rider from his saddle.

The moon rose and passed, the camp-fire flickered to a few red embers, and Fred Cadden lay, cold and stark, staring with unseeing, glassy eyes, up at the grey heavens as the day broke, and the bush rang with the chattering, the shrieks and whistlings of newly-awakened beasts and birds. Then the outlaw came again, limping painfully, dragging himself from tree to tree. There was blood upon his hands, and his pallid cheeks were streaked with blood, and blood dripped from the point of his long beard.

An immense 'guana hung its, hideous head over a log and eyed the body curiously. Hogan scared it away with a fierce oath, and fell on his knees by the side of the dead man. All night he had ridden aimlessly, furiously, inviting death at every stride, his soul a tumult of fragmentary thoughts and memories that scourged him with hell's torments. Two hours before dawn he had left his horse, huddled in a heap under the butt of a fallen tree, with a broken neck, and, mangled and torn himself, he had tottered and crawled back to the camp, inspired with a wild hope. Perhaps a spark of life remained -- perchance in his amazement and horror he had mistaken a fainting fit for death. That hope fled with his first touch upon Fred's rigid cheek, and Hogan raised himself upon his knees, clinging to the dead hand, and drew his revolver from his belt.

"Not my bullet, my boy," he murmured. "Thank God for that!"

He placed his revolver to his breast and fired. He remained rigid for a moment, and then his body was flung forward across the body of his son, and a thin line of smoke from the smouldering spot on his shirt directly over his heart, rose up between them and circled in the still air.

His Bad Luck

THE lovers were not animated by any romantic appreciation of the picturesque in selecting the western slope of Magpie Hill for their meeting place. The trysting spot possessed one advantage -- it was secluded. Since the Macdougals had given up their search for the reef, believed to exist in the locality, as a bad job, they were never led in that direction by inclination, and rarely by duty. The coarse grass growing sparingly in the hard, hungry soil seldom enticed the cattle from the flats near the river. On the hill-side the gums grew straggling and strangely contorted, and only a few clumps of drooping, stunted saplings relieved the dull brown expanse of surface with a touch of bright green, and offered anything like shelter from the penetrating rays of the fierce summer sun now glinting upon the motionless leaves and weaving an ebullient mirage far down in the dry bed of Spooner's Creek.

Harry Grey waited at the foot of the hill, evidently in no very gracious humour; with his hands thrust deeply into his pockets, and his back set against a tree, he gazed gloomily at his feet, propped out before him, seeking a satisfactory solution of the difficulty he had in hand, and which for the last nineteen hours, sleeping and waking, had defied his not particularly ingenious mind. His boots suggested nothing, and time was pressing. The girl might come at any moment, and his diplomacy was equal to no better line of action than the bald and brutal truth. Any fool can tell the simple truth. What the young man wanted was a lie that would "fill the bill" and at the same time save him the indignity of a confession of his own weakness. Open confession is good for the soul, but when one's confessor is a pretty young woman, with a reserve of native dignity, to whom a fellow has sworn eternal constancy a thousand times, and undying devotion as often again, and the confession is a cruel renunciation of her affection and her fealty, one is so far lost to the teachings of his youth as to be willing to give all his moral copybook maxims for a really serviceable deceit.

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Harry groaned dismally, and vented his feelings on his horse, but Eaglehawk, accustomed to these impassioned addresses, and stung out of all patience by the voracious flies, continued to paw up the dirt and lash out viciously with his heels, regardless of his owner's ill-humour and his objurgations.

When the young man heard the rattle of a horse's hoofs above on the ridge he abandoned all thoughts of subterfuge, and resolved to make a virtue of necessity. He would be candid — he would give a plain statement of the case. They must separate and endeavour to forget each other; family reasons, rendered it imperative. An air of melancholy, tempered with firmness, was necessary to the explanation. Harry assumed such an air, and awaited the ordeal, but as the sound of the hoof-beats drew nearer his firmness melted into trepidation and his melancholy dwindled into a pitiful shamefacedness, for beneath the veneer of sophistry with which he had tried to delude his better self there was a consciousness of the paltry nature of the part he was playing, and a still small voice told him that selfishness and not filial affection prompted his action.

Comet came over the hill at a rattling gallop, clearing the logs and stumps and clumps of scrub in his long, swinging stride, and his mistress sat him with the ease of a bush-bred girl, to whom a good horse is one of the necessities of life, and with a grace rarely seen in bush or town.

"Whoa, boy!"

Vic brought the nag up standing within a few feet of her lover, and dropped lightly to the ground before he could offer assistance.

No wonder the young man shrank from the idea of offending Victoria Macdougall. The distressing nature of his task came home to him with an increase of bitterness as she stood there, smiling coyly, and curtsying with mock dignity. She looked prettier than ever to-day; her cheeks glowed like newly-blown brier roses after rain, and her beautiful hair clung in exquisite little curls about her white brow and her dainty pink ears. He noted, with a great regret at his heart, the elegance of her slim figure in the light, well-fitting habit she wore. Her lips were even more tempting than usual, too, and he thought, sighing, that her fine eyes had assumed a brighter blue, but were gentler withal. She was sweet and inviting, but he did not kiss her. He leaned against the tree more determinedly, and ruefully congratulated himself upon his strength of mind.

Victoria missed the customary salutation, and noted Harry's reticence, and her manner changed at once. She also could be cold and careless.

"Good afternoon, Mister Grey." They might have met for the first time at the show ball last week.

"Good afternoon, Vic."

Harry felt supremely uncomfortable, and tugged at Eaglehawk's rein and bullied the horse in a poor endeavour to hide his discomposure, and to avoid looking into her beautiful, inquisitive eyes. Harry is a tall, strong fellow, spoken of by most of his male friends as a good fellow (usually with a superfluous adjective, be it regretfully recorded) with an ordinarily well-developed sense of honour, but lacking the moral stamina to act up to it in all cases. He is the first son of old "Jock" Grey, of Wombat. Grey, of Wombat, is a successful farmer and breeder in so large a way as almost to merit the dignity of being included amongst Victoria's "squatocracy."

Vic is the daughter of George Macdougall, a farmer in a smaller way, and not a good farmer at that. He and his big athletic sons are imbued with the digger's passion, and devote more time to prospecting up and down the creek and trenching for the reef than to the prosaic work of cutting scrub, ring-barking, fencing, and putting down crops. A Jew from the city has been seen wandering over their land, and there is much talk amongst the widely scattered neighbours of mortgages and liens on stock.

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After kicking at a tuft of grass, with a brave show of unconcern, for a few awkward moments, and trying hard to control his nerves and his ideas, Harry became desperate.

"Vic," he blurted, "I'm going to make you hate me!"

"Hate you, Harry?" There is much concern in her face now. "You frighten me. You look serious enough to have all the mounted police in the colony on your track," she continued, with a pathetic assumption of raillery. "Have you been bank-breaking or cattle-stealing? Well, sir, don't you see how impatient I am?"

He hung Eaglehawk up to the tree, and, pointing to a log by a clump of saplings, said:

"Hadn't you better sit in the shade?"

He made this arrangement cunningly, that he might stand behind her whilst telling his story. He was afraid of the sudden unveiling of that deeper light in her eyes, which had flashed forth at times to his great discomfort.

Vic turned to obey him, and, sitting upon the log, with a stick she had picked from the ground she played nervously amongst the stony soil at her feet, and Harry Grey stood behind her and faltered through his explanation.

"Vic, I have to give you up. We must meet no more, but just forget all this — this foolishness that has been between us. You know that our fathers are bad friends. Dad expects me to marry Mary Lalor up at Gumleaf, and he has heard of my meetings with you. Sandy Martin dropped to it and reported it to the boss, who tackled me about it yesterday, and I up and told him we were sweethearts, and that I had asked you to marry me. Then dad tore round and went on like a dingo in a snap-trap; said I must drop fooling, or go and punch cattle for my tucker for the rest of my days. He swore that if I did not cut this — this — you know, I could give up all thoughts of working in with him, or of ever owning a shilling of his or an acre of Wombat land. And he means it. I didn't reckon on the old man cutting up rusty about it, but he is real mad, and as he's got the whip-hand of me I had to cry small, and promise him I'd ride across for the last time to-day and square matters up like. We must part for good and all, Vic."

The young woman's face paled, and her head bent lower, but she did not speak; she still played nervously amongst the dead leaves and stones with her stick, and struggled bravely to stifle the sobs that rose in her throat.

"It isn't that dad has any objection to you, Vic — Miss Macdougall," added the young man, clumsily, "or doesn't think you good enough for me, or anything like that; but Wombat needs more cash than he can command to work it properly, and your people are too poor, you know."

The girl started as the last words fell from his lips, but gave no answer for a minute or more. Drawing the dirt and dead leaves back over the small hole she had made in the ground, she dropped the stick, and then, turning her white face towards him, repeated —

"Too poor?"

Harry flushed a deeper red, and looked fixedly from the eyes that turned upon him full of bitter reproach.

"Yes," he muttered, "too poor. I hope you won't feel cut up, and that you'll soon forget."

"I may not soon forget, but I shall not feel our parting much. I never knew you till now, Harry."

He was going on to explain or excuse his conduct in a feeble way, but she gave him no attention.

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Comet, who, throughout the interview, had been fighting the flies at a little distance, came in answer to the call of his mistress, and she sprang lightly to the saddle from the log, disdainingly Harry's proffered assistance.

"Have you nothing to say?" he asked miserably, as she gathered up the reins.

"What need I say? Your father has settled the matter."

The young man winced, and he gazed gloomily after her as she put her horse at the brush fence, and rode at a dangerous pace along the foot of the hill, till her figure was lost to his view beyond the bend. Then he mounted Eaglehawk, and that game little animal broke his record for seven miles in the run to Wombat.

Miss Victoria did not ride straight home; she pulled up and dismounted by a patch of young wattles, about a mile and a half from the trysting-place, and in a familiar shaded nook indulged in a long reverie, ending in tears, and then took herself severely to task, and scolded herself into a proper state of dignity and self-respect.

Two days later the whole of the district was in a fever of excitement over the intelligence that the Macdougals had struck a golden lode at the foot of Maggie Hill, on their sister's selection. The news reached Wombat, and Harry and his father rode across to inspect "the find." Intelligence of gold discoveries travels through mysterious agencies, and flies to every point of the compass as if a staff of a'rial Mercuries were always in waiting to carry the electrifying news from ear to ear. When the Greys cached the paddock there was a great crowd about the cutting in which the Macdougals, father and sons, were at work. Miners and prospectors had gathered from miles around, and scores of envious agriculturists swelled the excited throng.

One glance at the cap of the reef convinced all with the slightest knowledge of mining that the Macdougals had struck it rich and were "in for a big thing." The outcrop showed almost as much gold as stone, and the pure yellow metal shone with dazzling lustre in the bright rays of the midday sun. The men had already laid bare a great quantity of the quartz, showing that the reef widened as "she" dipped, and to the astonished onlookers it seemed that there must be a fortune now in sight.

Harry Grey stood, speechless, staring at the reef. He had some little knowledge of quartz-mining, and had seen golden stone before, but never anything like this. Yet it was not the gold alone that amazed him; he remembered how, only a few hours before, he had stood upon this very spot, within a foot or two of the great treasure glowing before his eyes, telling Victoria Macdougall that she was too poor ever to be the wife of the son of Grey of Wombat.

The young man plucked at his father's sleeve, and backed out of the crowd. His eyes danced with excitement, and the hand on his father's arm shook like that of an old man.

"Great Scott!" he gasped, when beyond earshot of the people standing about. "Dad, listen. I stood on top of that golden pile when I broke with Vic on Monday. My boots must have touched the gold. She sat upon that log which they have been forced to roll aside to get at the reef, while I babbled about her poverty like an inspired jackass!"

Mr. Grey held his chin, and seemed to pull his naturally long visage down to an extraordinary length as he heard this, and a ludicrous expression of intense solicitude grew in his pawky face.

"Couldna ye mack it up again, boy?"

"Good-day, Mr. Grey. How do you do, Master Harry?" It was Vic who had obtruded into their conversation. She looked at Harry with a peculiar little smile that made him flush to the eyes. She wore the dove-coloured riding-dress he had so often admired, and her abundant bright hair rippled from under her hat. The young man noticed with selfish satisfaction that her face was unusually pale, and, despite the faint smile upon her lips, she did

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not look as happy and radiant as might have been expected of one who had experienced great and sudden good fortune.

"They have struck it at last, Vic," said the young man, indicating the cutting with a toss of his hand.

"I have struck it," she answered with emphasis. "At about nine minutes past 2 on Monday afternoon I was sitting on a log over the spot where my brothers are working, playing amongst the dirt with a stick and listening to your story — you'll remember, Harry — when I turned up this golden key to wealth." She held out for their inspection a fine nugget, on which a quaint pattern was wrought in white quartz.

"You see," she said, "it is almost the shape of a broken anchor."

She turned away, but paused after walking a few yards, and looking back, said, with an artfully ingenuous air:

"By the way, Mr. Grey, have you heard of my brother Dick's engagement to Mary Lalor, of Gumleaf? They have been in love with each other for some time, it appears, but said nothing about it till yesterday."

When she had gone father and son stood in thoughtful attitudes for a few moments, and then turned, and each looked into the other's blank face and breathed a great sigh.

"Just my infernal bad luck!" muttered Harry, cutting fiercely at a dandelion with his riding whip.