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THAT SUMMER

FRANK SARGESON

FRANK SARGESON was born in 1903 in New Zealand. During the last ten years he has come to be recognized as one of the most original writers of the new generation in his home country, success has not remained local: .many of his stories have been pufsiished in England and America, and have received high praise from the critics, who recognized in him not merely- a clever interpreter of th| New Zealand scene, but a writer of deep human understanding and subtle artistry. Those who came into contact, on the battlefield or behind the lines, with the New Zealanders who fought with us in the two world wars, will recognize his Kens and Bills and Teds as authentic portraits drawn with rich understanding and sympathy. No author of comoarable gifts has come from the Dominion since Katherine Mansfield.

THAT SUMMER
And Other Stories

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FRANK SARGESON

JOHN LEHMANN
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CONVERSATION WITH MY UNCLE

MY uncle wears a hard knocker. His wife put him up to it. She says it's the thing for a man in his position, and my uncle's position is pretty good. He's a partner in one of those big firms. He grumbles a bit but who doesn't grumble a bit? I admit that these days his trousers are a bit shiny but people don't look at his trousers. They look at his hard knocker.

It's difficult to have a talk with my uncle. You can walk under his nose in the street and he won't see you, and if you sit next to him on a tramcar he'll find out you're there just as soon as you tell him. It chills you a bit if you're a sensitive person. It's because he's got a lot to occupy his mind. He's often told me that. You see he's on the City Council and one of those Boards, the sort you get paid for being on. Once he stood for Parliament but he didn't get in.

It's very difficult to have a talk with my uncle. It doesn't interest him to listen to what you've got to say any more than it interests him to look into people's faces in the street. But he-likes to get going himself. He loves the sound of his own voice and he's all the time waiting for you to finish so that he can get going himself. I know we're all like that a bit, but all of us aren't as commonplace as my uncle. Oh Lord! I hope not. He never reads a book—well, just a murder story now and then.

I've tried talking about lots of things with my uncle but it's too difficult. Once I asked him, suppose he went to a picnic and there was only one banana each, would he try to get two bananas for himself, or three or more? He said he never went to picnics. Now you might think my uncle was trying to be funny. He wasn't. He can't suppose. So I said, say anyone went to a picnic they wouldn't try to monopolise the bananas, would they? Not if they were decent? He said, no, of course not. Then I asked him, what about

the social picnic ? Social picnic ? He repeated the words. He didn't understand and I had to leave it at that. He was so puzzled I felt sorry for him.

Once or twice I've tried talking to my uncle about risky subjects. Just out of devilment. He's an ascetic, my uncle is. He eats only a few mouthfuls of food a day. He's very thin, very cold to shake hands with. His wife says his hard knocker is the thing for a man in his position. I say it'sthe thing for a man with his asceticism too. He dislikes me when I bring up a risky subject. He says, Change the subject. A decent man doesn't let his mind dwell on those things. He looks very serious, very responsible.

Oh Lord! it's a good job everybody isn't like my uncle. We don't want a world full of dead men walking about in hard knockers.

AN AFFAIR OF THE HEART

AT Christmastime our family always went to the beach. In those days there weren't the roads along the Gulf that there are now, so father would get a carrier to take our luggage down to the launch steps. And as my brother and I would always ride on the cart, that was the real beginning of our holidays.

It was a little bay a good distance out of the harbour that we'd go to, and of course the launch trip would be even more exciting than the ride on the carrier's cart. We'd always scare mother beforehand by telling her it was sure to be rough. Each year we rented the same bach and we'd stay right until our school holidays were up. All except father who used to have only a few days' holiday at Christmas. He'd give my brother and me a lecture about behaving ourselves and not giving mother any trouble, then he'd go back home. Of course we'd spend nearly all our time on the beach, and mother'd have no more trouble with us than most mothers are quite used to having.

Well, it's all a long time ago. It's hard now to understand why the things that we occupied our time over should have given us so much happiness. But they did. As I'll tell you, I was back in that bay not long ago, and for all that I'm well on in years I was innocent enough to think that to be there again would be to experience something of that same happiness. Of course I didn't experience anything of the kind. And because I didn't I had some reflections instead that gave me the very reverse of happiness. But this is by the way. I haven't set out to philosophize. I've set out to tell you about a woman who lived in a bach not far beyond that bay of ours, and who, an old woman now, lives there to this day.

As you can understand, we children didn't spend all our time on our own little beach. When the tide was out we'd

go for walks round the rocks, and sometimes we'd get mother to go with us. My brother and I would be one on each side of her, holding her hands, dragging her this way and that. We'd show her the wonders we'd found, some place where there were sea-eggs underneath a ledge, or a pool where the sea-anemones grew thick.

It was one of these times when we had mother with us that we walked further round the rocks than we had ever been before. We came to a place where there was a fair-sized beach, and there, down near low-water mark, was the woman I've spoken about. She was digging for pipis, and her children were all round her scratching the sand up too. Every now and then they'd pick up handfuls of pipis and run over near their mother, and drop the pipis into a flax kit.

Well, we went over to look. We liked pipis ourselves, but there weren't many on our own beach. The woman hardly took any notice of us, and we could have laughed at the way she was dressed. She had on a man's old hat and coat, and the children were sketches too. There were four of them, three girls and a boy, and the boy, besides being the smallest and skinniest, looked the worst of all because he was so badly in need of a hair-cut.

The woman asked mother if she'd like some pipis to take home. She said she sold pipis and mussels. They made good soup, she said. Mother didn't buy any but she said she would some other day, so the woman slung the kit on her shoulder, and off she went towards a tumble-down bach that stood a little way back from the beach. The children ran about all round her, and the sight made you think of a hen that was out with her chickens.

Of course going back round the rocks we talked about the woman and he children. I remember we poked a bit of fun at the way they were dressed, and we wondered why the woman wanted' to sell us pipis and mussels when we could have easily got some for ourselves.

Perhaps they're poor, mother said.

That made us leave off poking fun. We didn't know

what it was to be poor. Father had only his wages, and sometimes when we complained about not getting enough money to spend, he asked what we thought would happen to us if he got the sack. We took it as a joke. But this time there was something in what mother said that made us feel a little frightened.

Well, later on my brother and I made lots of excursions as far as that beach, and gradually we got to know the woman and her children, and saw inside their bach. We'd go home in great excitement to tell mother the things we'd found out. The woman was Mrs. Crawley. She lived there all the year round, and the children had miles to walk to school. They didn't have any father, and Mrs. Crawley collected pipis and mussels and sold them, and as there were lots of pine trees along the cliffs she gathered pine cones into sugar bags and sold them too. Another way she had of getting money was to pick up the kauri gum that you found among the sea-weed as high-tide mark, and sell that. But it was little enough she got all told. There was a road not very far back from the beach, and about once a week, she'd collect there the things she had to sell, and a man who ran a cream lorry would give her a lift into town. And the money she got she'd spend on things like flour and sugar, and clothes that she bought in second-hand shops. Mostly, though, all there was to eat was the soup fromgthe pipis and mussels, and vegetables out of the garden. Tiere was a sandy bit of garden close by the bach. It was ringed round with tea-tree brush to keep out the wind, and Mrs. Crawley grew kumaras and tomatoes, drum-head cabbages and runner beans. But most of the runner beans she'd let go to seed, and shell for the winter.

It was all very interesting and romantic to me and my brother. We were always down in the dumps when our holidays were over. We'd have liked to camp at our bach all the year round, so we thought the young Crawleys were luckier than we were. Certainly they were poor, and lived in a tumble-dovm bach with sacking nailed on to the walls

to keep the wind out, and slept on heaps of fern sewn into sacking. But we couldn't see anything wrong with that. We'd have done it ourselves any day. But we could see that mother was upset over the things we used to tell her.

Such things shouldn't be, she'd say. She'd never come to visit the Crawleys, but she was always giving us something or other that we didn't need in our bach to take round to them. But Mrs. Crawley never liked taking the things that mother sent. She'd rather be independent, she said. And she told us there were busybodies in the world who'd do people harm if they could.

One thing we noticed right from the start. It was that Mrs. Crawley's boy Joe was her favourite. One time mother gave us a big piece of Christmas cake to take round, and the children didn't happen to be about when we got there, so Mrs. Crawley put the cake away in a tin. Later on my brother let the cat out of the bag. He asked one of the girls how she liked the cake. Well, she didn't know anything about it, but you could tell by the way Joe looked that he did. Mrs. Crawley spoilt him sure enough. She'd bring him back little things from town when she never brought anything back for the girls. He didn't have to do as much work as any of the girls either, and his mother was always saying, Come here Joe, and let me nurse you. It made us feel a bit uncomfortable. In our family we never showed our feelings much.

Well, year after year we took the launch to our bay, and we always looked forward to seeing the Crawleys. The children shot up the same as we did. The food they had kept them growing at any rate. And when Joe was a lanky boy of fifteen his mother was spoiling him worse than ever. She'd let him off work more and more, even though she never left off working herself for a second. And she was looking old and worn out by that time. Her back was getting bent with so much digging and picking up pine cones, and her face looked old and tired too. Her teeth were gone and her **mouth** was sucked in. **It made** her chin stick out until

you thought of the toe of a boot. But it was queer the way she never looked old when Joe was there. Her face seemed to go young again, and she never took her eyes off him. He was nothing much to look at we thought, but although my brother and I never spoke about it we both somehow understood how she felt about him. Every day she spent digging in her garden or digging up pipis, pulling up mussels from the reefs or picking up pine cones; and compared to our mother she didn't seem to have much of a life. But it was all for Joe, and so long as she had Joe what did it matter ? She never told us that, but we knew all the same. I don't know how much my brother understood about it, because as I've said we never said anything to each other. But I felt a little bit frightened. It was perhaps the first time I understood what deep things there could be in life. It was easy to see how mad over Joe Mrs. Crawley was, and evidently when you went mad over a person like that you didn't take much account of their being nothing much to look at. And perhaps I felt frightened because there was a feeling in me that going mad over a person in that way could turn out to be quite a terrible thing.

Anyhow, the next thing was our family left off going to the bay. My brother and I were old enough to go away camping somewhere with our cobbers, and father and mother were sick of the bother of going down to the bay. It certainly made us a bit sorry to think that we wouldn't be seeing the Crawleys that summer, but I don't think we lost much sleep over it. I remember that we talked about sending them a letter. But it never got beyond talk.

What I'm going to tell you about happened last Christmas. It was twenty odd years since I'd been in the bay and I happened to be passing near.

I may as well tell you that I've not been what people call a success in life. Unlike my brother who's a successful business man, with a wife and a car and a few other ties that

successful men have, I've never been able to settle down. Perhaps the way I"d seen the Crawleys live had an upsetting influence on me. It's always seemed a bit comic to me to see people stay in one place all their lives and work at one job. I like meeting different people and tackling all sorts of jobs, and if I've saved up a few pounds it's always come natural to me to throw up my job and travel about a bit. It gets you nowhere, as people say, and it's a sore point with my mother and father who've just about ceased to own me. But there are lots of compensations.

Well, last Christmas Day I was heading up North after a job I'd heard was going on a fruit-farm, and as I was short of money at the time I was hoofing it. I got the idea that I'd turn off the road and have a look at the bay. I did, and had a good look. But it was a mistake. As I've said the kick that I got was the opposite to what I was expecting, and I came away in a hurry. It's my belief that only the very toughest sort of people should ever go back to places where they've been happy.

Then I thought of the Crawleys. I couldn't believe it possible they'd be living on their beach still, but I felt like having a look. (You can see why I've never been a success in life. I never learn from my mistakes, even when I've just made them.)

I found that the place on the road where Mrs. Crawley used to wait for a lift into town had been made into a bus terminus, and there was a little shelter shed and a store. All the way down to the beach baches had been built, and lots of young people were about in shorts. And I really got the shock of my life when I saw the Crawleys' bach still standing there; but there it was, and except for a fresh coat of Stockholm tar it didn't look any different.

Mrs. Crawley was in the garden. I hardly recognised her. She'd shrivelled up to nothing, and she was fixed in such a bend that above the waist she walked parallel to the ground. Her mouth had been sucked right inside her head, so her chin stuck out like the toe of a boot more than ever. Naturally she didn't know me, I had to shout to make her hear,

and her eyes were bad too. When I'd told her I was Freddy Coleman, and she'd remembered who Freddy Coleman was, she ran her hands over my face as though to help her know whether or not I was telling the truth.

Fancy you coming, she said, and after I'd admired the garden and asked her how many times she'd put up a fresh ring of tea-tree brush, she asked me inside.

The bach was much the same. The sacking was still nailed up over the places where the wind came in, but only two of the fern beds were left. One was Mrs. Crawley's and the other was Joe's, and both were made up. The table was set too, but covered over with tea-towels. I didn't know what to say. It was all too much for me. Mrs. Crawley sat and watched me, her head stuck forward, and I didn't know where to look.

It's a good job you came early, she said. If you'd come late you'd have given me a turn.

Oh, I said.

Yes, she said. He always comes late. Not till the last bus.

Oh, I said, I suppose you mean Joe.

Yes, Joe, she said. He never comes until the last bus.

I asked her what had become of the girls, but she took no notice. She went on talking about Joe and I couldn't follow her, so I got up to leave. She offered me a cup of tea, but I said no thank you. I wamed to get away.

You've got Joe's Christmas dinner ready for him, I said, and I touched the table.

Yes, she said, I've got him everything that he likes. And she took away the tea-towels. It was some spread. Ham, fruit, cake, nuts, everything that you can think of for Christmas. It was a shock after the old days. Joe was evidently making good money, and I felt a bit envious of him.

He'll enjoy that, I said. What line's he in, by the way?

He'll come, she said. I've got him everything that he likes. He'll come.

It was hopeless, so I went.

Then, walking back to the road I didn't feel quite so bad. It all came back to me about how fond of Joe Mrs. Crawley had been. She hadn't lost him at anyrate. I thought of the bach all tidied up, and the Christmas spread, and it put me in quite a glow. I hadn't made a success of my life, and the world was in a mess, but here was something you could admire and feel thankful for, Mrs. Crawley still had her Joe. And I couldn't help wondering what sort of a fellow Joe Crawley had turned out.

Well, when I was back on the road again a bus hadn't long come in, and the driver was eating a sandwich. So I went up to him.

Good-day, I said. Can you tell me what sort of a fellow Joe Crawley is?

Joe Crawley, he said, I've never seen him.

Oh, I said. Been driving out here long?

He told me about five years, so I jerked my thumb over towards the beach.

Do you know Mrs. Crawley? I asked him.

Do I what! he said. She's sat in that shed waiting for the last bus every night that I can remember.

He told me all he knew. Long ago, people said, Joe would come several times a year, then he'd come just at Christmas. When he did come it would be always on the last bus, and he'd be off again first thing in the morning. But for years now he hadn't come at all. No one knew for sure what he used to do. There were yarns about him being a bookmaker, some said he'd gone to gaol, others that he'd cleared off to America. As for the girls they'd married and got scattered, though one was supposed to write now and then. Anyhow, wet or fine, summer or winter, Mrs. Crawley never missed a night sitting in that shelter shed waiting to see if Joe'd turn up on the last bus. She still collected pine cones to sell, and would drag the bag for miles; and several times, pulling up mussels out on the reefs she'd been knocked over by the sea, and nearly drowned. Of course she got the pension, but people said she saved every penny of it and lived on the

smell of an oil rag. And whenever she did buy anything she always explained that she was buying it for Joe.

Well, I heard him out. Then I took to the road. I felt small. All the affairs of the heart that I had had in my life, and all that I had seen in other people, seemed petty and mean compared to this one of Mrs. Crawley's. I looked at the smart young people about in their shorts with a sort of contempt. I thought of Mrs. Crawley waiting down there in the bach with her wonderful Christmas spread, the bach swept out and tidied, and Joe's bed with clean sheets on all made up ready and waiting. And I thought of her all those years digging in the garden, digging for pipis, pulling up mussels and picking up cones, bending her body until it couldn't be straightened out again, until she looked like a new sort of human being. All for Joe. For Joe who'd never been anything much to look at, and who, if he was alive now, stayed away while his mother sat night after night waiting for him in a bus shelter shed. Though, mind you, I didn't feel like blaming Joe. I knew how he'd been spoilt, and I remembered how as a boy I'd sort of understood the way Mrs. Crawley felt towards him might turn out to be quite a terrible thing. And sure enough, it had. But I never understood until last Christmas Day, when I was walking northwards to a job on a fruit-farm, how anything in the world that was such a terrible thing, could be at the same time be so beautiful.

IN THE DEPARTMENT

HE didn't have a handle to his name. If you're one of the small fry in a big Government Department you don't have. It's just Beggs get me that file and step on it.

It was like that all day. Beggs got files and stepped on it. He got them from upstairs and down. He arranged them in piles and then he carried them away again.

Files.

Files.

It was a wonderful way the department had of doing things. If you were one of the big fry you never actually did anything yourself. Well, hardly anything. You certainly spent a lot of time writing minutes on files. But the minutes told somebody else to do things. That was why Beggs had so many files to carry around. He had to look and see who the minutes were addressed to. Then he'd carry the files away. And of course the people he carried them to would write more minutes. And that meant more carrying for Beggs to do.

Files.

Beggs didn't know what the files were about. All he knew was that they had to be carried. Beggs saw a file and he had impulse to carry it. The big fry of the department had files put on their tables by Beggs and they had impulses to write minutes. So it went on. It was work.

Files.

Work.

The girls banging their Burroughs and typewriters.

Beggs was kept hard at it all day, but he didn't mind. He'd got used to it. It was just work. You had so many hours of it to do each day. And all afternoon you watched the clock. And it was lucky there were one or two places you could go and loaf in if you got the chance. Because it helped to keep the clock moving.

All day carrying files.

One of the loafing places was the basement. That was where the stationery was kept, and the two old duds were in charge. They were called the two old duds because years ago they'd had every opportunity to learn the knack of writing minutes on files, and they never had. Instead they'd turned out duds. Here they were getting on to be old men, and all they did was look after the stationery. While upstairs quite young men were writing minutes on files, and doing it so well they had chances of a future. In years to come they'd be so high up they'd have to go to the opening of Parliament.

But down in the basement there was no one to see if the two old duds lit up for a smoke, or took their coats off in the hot weather. And they could always look at the newspaper photographs of the opening of Parliament.

Anyhow the two old duds weren't busy all day writing minutes on files, so when Beggs went down there he didn't get his head bitten off. But sitting about, smoking and talking, passing the time of day. It wasn't work. Beggs didn't feel happy about it.

Files.

Carrying files.

The girls banging their Burroughs and typewriters.

The two old duds just wasted time.

And the two old duds had a way of talking. You never heard anyone else talk like it in the whole building. They talked just like your own father and mother might talk at home if they happened to be a bit broad-minded. Only more so. And you could talk the same way back. It gave you a shock. Upstairs nobody talked to you except to tell you to get a file, or to bite your head off if you didn't step on it. But of course there was nothing wrong with that. It was work. It had to be.

Files.

Work.

No time for talking or any silly nonsense.

The basement was a home away from home. The two old duds never talked about stationery and files and writing minutes on files. One of them was Mr. Flyger, and the other was Mr. Birtleberry. Mr. Flyger did most of the talking and he talked like something out of the Bible. Everybody in the building knew the way he talked. He was getting on to be an old man and he sat there licking his thumb as he went through a pile of stationery. Yet everyone knew he'd fallen in love with a young girl. He told everyone about it, and everyone said he had a tile loose.

I've fallen in love with a young girl, Mr. Flyger said.

Mr. Birtleberry never took any notice. He'd heard it all so often. But Mr. Flyger always looked as if he was nearly crying, and Beggs had to look away.

And there was the time this happened.

Whatever shall I do ? Mr. Flyger said, I've fallen in love with a young girl. I've gone to her people and they say no. My life is dry sand, and my heart has withered up.

You couldn't laugh. Not in front of Mr. Flyger anyhow. It affected everyone the same way. Nobody laughed. But behind his back they said he had a tile loose.

Beggs said he wished it was half-past four.

Files.

Upstairs files to be carried.

And the girls banging their typewriters.

Ah ha, Mr. Birtleberry said, she waits for you.

Beggs coloured. As a matter of fact she did wait for him, and in the tramcar going home they'd begun holding hands.

My heart has withered up, Mr. Flyger said. My soul is in hell.

Well, why didn't a man laugh ?

You'd better look out, Mr. Birtleberry said, or you'll end up the same way.

And Beggs said, Says you. But he went on colouring.

When I was a lad, Mr. Birtleberry said, I learned my lesson. That one and only time gave me hell.

Yes, Mr. Flyger said, my soul will abide with the damned for ever.

All my life, Mr. Birtleberry said, there's been that one and only time. It got me down that time but it taught me a lesson. Never again, says I to myself, I've had my fill of being miserable.

And Beggs said, Gee, I don't want to be a bachelor allmy life.

Well, that made Mr. Birtleberry laugh, and Mr. Flyger who hadn't been known to laugh since he'd fallen in love with his young girl laughed too.

Boy, Mr. Flyger said, I'd have you know our friend here has a missus and a family of five.

Files.

Upstairs files to be carried, and Beggs went upstairs. The files would take your mind off anything you couldn't understand.

Life was dry sand.

Life was files. You didn't know what they were about. You kept on carrying thsm.

Endless files to carry.

Files.

Files.

THAT little piazza in Genoa was a popular place in the evenings, quite a lot of people would be strolling there. There were several cafes, and one side was a terrace where you could lean over the parapet and see the people in the streets lower down, and the harbour in the distance. Of an evening I often went there to stroll and lean over the parapet, to sit at a table and smoke and drink coffee. Sometimes an enormously fat man who carried a straw hat in his hand would go among the tables outside the cafes and sing *La donna e mobile.* That wasn't so good. But if you gave him a few *lire* he'd soon move on, though nobody took much notice of him, and the less money he got the more renderings he'd give.

It was outside a cafe one evening that I met the two girls, Mathilde and Madeleine. They were young, quite nice looking in their own way, done up to the nines—nails lacquered and plenty of make-up. They came and sat at my table and asked me to buy them wine and cigarettes. They were quite cool about it, no beg your pardons. But they were quite good company. We sat in a row with our backs against the cafe, the girls one on each side of me, and they passed remarks about everybody that went by. They weren't Italian, they came from Marseilles. They said they didn't like Italy, or Italians. They'd turn round and make faces at the Duce's picture stencilled on the cafe wall. Discreetly though, so as not to attract attention. Mathilde said her father was a socialist, and Madeleine said hers was too.

So he called you by a saint's name, I said.

It's a good name, she said. It suits me.

She looked straight at me, and I didn't feel like contradicting her.

After the first evening they'd come along fairly often, but not every evening. I used to look forward to their coming

even though it cost me more than I could afford in wine and cigarettes.

But before I met Mathilde and Madeleine I had made another acquaintance in the piazza. She was much older than the two girls and quite plain, with her hair done into a bun at the back; and compared to the girls you might have said that she was prudishly dressed. She wore always the same plain white dress that reached from her neck to her ankles and had sleeves that were tight round her wrists. She looked quite odd, and I think I would have been interested in her anyhow, but it happened that she was English. The first evening I noticed her she came and leaned over the parapet beside me. She smiled, yet not confidently—she seemed to be very shy. I offered her a cigarette, but she said she didn't smoke.

Yon are English, she said, I can tell, I am English too.

I asked her to have something to drink, and she said she'd have only coffee as she never touched anything stronger. We went and sat outside the cafe and she didn't give me much opportunity to talk, she talked herself. She told me her name was Rose, though now she called herself Rosa. She asked me if I was born in the country, and said she was. She was born in Devon, her father had been a farmer, and she spoke of the cows and the fields and the flowers in the hedges. Tears came into her eyes and I felt most uncomfortable. When the fat singer came along she told me it made her think of the time when she had sung in the choir of the chapel she had gone to many years ago. Her eyes filled again and I managed to change the conversation. Presently she said she must go, but perhaps she would see me another evening.

So it happened that sometimes I would see Mathilde and Madeleine, and sometimes Rosa, but for quite a number of evenings the three of them were never in the piazza at the same time. And the difference between them was astonishing —it was like being in two separate worlds. Mathilde and Madeleine would walk into the piazza as though they owned

the place. Taking no notice of anybody, they'd make straight for my table and call the waiter and order what they wanted almost before they had greeted me. Then they'd sit back and begin their comments. Italian women were so stupid, they had no idea how to dress. And Italian men were pigs, they were mean with their money, and they ate sausages that made them smell. They were no better than beasts. They were even worse than that, they were *bourgeois* beasts, which besides being something unmentionably low, was the reason for their all having turned into fascists.

But it was all quite pleasant to listen to. It would be a change from the tears that had been in Rosa's eyes an evening or so before.

I don't think I could have stood Rosa for long if it hadn't been that she was English. I was curious. No matter how much she told me about herself it was always of her life long ago. I had no idea how she came to be living in Italy, and she brought Genoa into the conversation only to remark that the Italians spelt it Genova. I could only guess what her life was like at the moment. She never came into the piazza in the confident way that Mathilde and Madeleine did. I would see her in the distance, walking slowly, looking at everyone that passed, perhaps stopping to speak to some man who might be leaning over the parapet. But I never saw her make a hit. The man would move away and she'd turn and look across to see if I was in my usual place, then she'd slowly work her way round to me. And if she talked of the people in the piazza while she sat at my table her attitude would always be sympathetic. Didn't I think that young woman who went by had such a sweet face? And that old man at the table over there, what nice eyes, but so sad and tired—what a lot of sadness there was in the world, yet one met people who were kind, too. Oh yes, she had had her ups and downs, and such a lot of people had been kind to her. I'd avoid looking at her for fear of seeing the tears. Conversation was diflicult. She embarrassed me as much by her sympathy for other people as for herself.

Then the crucial evening arrived when Mathilde and Madeleine and I were sitting in a row and I saw Rosa enter the piazza. As usual she moved slowly, and over by the parapet she looked across our way. She looked for some time, apparently not seeing me, but made her way round until she was quite close. Then I heard the girls exclaim.

Look! Mathilde said.

It is that *bourgeoise,* Madeleine said.

She is disgusting, Mathilde said.

For some moments Rosa didn't come any closer. She stood there smiling at me, looking helpless and forlorn. I tapped the table in front of me, inviting her to come and sit down. She came closer, but the girls protested.

Go ! Mathilde said.

Quick ! Madeleine said. Or we will call the police.

Rosa walked away slowly, looking back, and Mathilde and Madeleine made faces at her.

What manners! Mathilde said.

To address you in front of us, Madeleine said. It is truly disgusting.

I didn't comment. Mathilde and Madeleine ordered more wine, and Rosa went on round the piazza. It was some time before she was near again, and this time she hurried towards us. The girls became quite excited, but Rosa sat down and leaned across the table towards me.

I must tell you something about these two poor girls, she said.

Won't you have some coffee? I said.

Please no, she said. You see, you are so kind and good, and so innocent.

Thank you, I said.

The girls were shouting at her, and people were looking at us, and I was wondering what sort of a situtaion was going to develop, but just then there passed in front of us a hotel porter, with the name of his hotel written across his cap. He was carrying two portmanteaux and followed by a woman who was begging him to give the portmanteaux back to her.

She was frightfully distracted, almost in tears, and you could tell from her voice that she was American. A little girl clung to her skirt, and Junior, who was somewhat older, followed behind with a pair of binoculars slung over his shoulder. He was the only one of the group who didn't appear at all upset. Quite close to us the porter stopped to argue with the woman, shouting that it was a good hotel of the second class he was taking her to, but she only begged for her portmanteaux.

Mathilde and Madeleine were amused, but Rosa's sympathies were aroused.

Oh, the poor soul, she said.

She left us and went over to the group, and when she spoke English the anxiety of the American woman was very much relieved. Rosa began to argue with the porter and wasn't long in getting rid of him, and while she talked to the American woman Junior inspected us all through each end of the binoculars in turn. Then Rosa came over to wish me good-bye.

The pour soul, she said. She's a Mrs. Wentwater, and she's so frightened. I'm going to take care of her.

That's kind of you, I said.

She's such a nice lady, Rosa said. Her hubby's waiting to meet her in Geneva, but when the boat got to Marseilles, what do you think she did? She went and took the train to Genoa by mistake.

Too bad, I said.

Yes, Rosa said, Mr. Wentwater's a minister in the Baptist Church, and he's been sent to a big meeting at Geneva.

You must tell her how you used to sing in that choir, I said.

Yes, Rosa said, won't it be nice ? She's going to stay with me, because I have a big room, and the children can sleep on the floor.

You're a real friend in need, I said.

Yes, she said. Aren't I ?

She went back to her friend and they took a portmanteau each and walked along. Rosa put her spare arm round **Mrs.**

Wentwater's waist, and Junior, several paces behind, turned round for a last look through the binoculars.

It was not until some weeks later that I left Genoa, but I never saw Rosa again. One evening in the piazza I enquired from Mathilde and Madeleine, but they had not seen her either.

Without doubt she is in gaol, Mathilde said, because certainly she would rob the American woman.

And Madeleine was of the same opinion.

But I thought perhaps Mrs. Wentwater had engaged her as a companion, Who could say ? Perhaps she was on her way to America, where she would sing in Mr. Wentwater's choir.

A PAIR OF SOCKS

I WISH I'd never gone and bought that pair of socks. That was what started the row between me and Fred.

Fred and me were cobbers right from the time we were kids. We used to go to the same school, and we both used to be little blokes. People used to ask why didn't we grow, and said it must be because we smoked cigarettes. It'd make us lay off smoking cigarettes for a bit. At any rate we always said we'd grow up to be jockeys. And everybody said jockeys had to smoke cigarettes so they'd grow up little blokes. But I suppose it's only a gag like that about Eskimo kids eating candles.

If the teacher would let us we'd always sit together. But it was no good sitting together in one way, because I couldn't do sums no more than Fred could. We'd want to tell each other how to get the sums out right and we couldn't. So we always had to cheat off somebody else or we'd get kept in. But I could do compositions real good and Fred couldn't, so I'd tell him what to put.

You know, it's a queer thing that just because a man goes and buys a pair of socks he loses his cobber. But that's what happened to me. I went and bought a pair of socks for Bill Thomas, and Fred turned me down. I'll tell you about it.

Bill was a trainer, and me and Fred used to be his strappers. It was lucky for us we both got jobs with Bill. After we left school we couldn't get jobs nohow. We just used to kick around the town together. Then some days we'd, go and hang around the racecourse, and after a bit Bill wanted a couple of strappers so he took me and Fred on. That was just for a start. He said he'd make good jockeys out of a couple of little blokes like us. Only we'd have to be apprenticed first. Bill used to give us fifteen bob a week and we had most of our tucker out at his place. And after a time we went and

lived at his place too, because the racecourse was a good distance out of town, and Bill and his missis rented a house out that way.

Well, if life didn't begin then for me and Fred. Gee, our education began then I can tell you. But maybe I learned a bit faster than Fred did, because Fred always was a shy little beggar. And I wasn't shy a bit. Mrs. Thomas could see Fred was shy too, and she used to tell him he oughtn't to be. She was a real nice woman.

As for Bill, he was the hardest case bloke you ever came across. He was tough. He looked like a racehorse himself. He was all muscle, but not bulgy sort of muscle. And his face was just skin stretched over some bone. He had a gold tooth, too. And the things he used to say. If he saw a lady with a fat stomach he'd say she must have been eating new bread. And if a man had whiskers Bill'd say how he'd swallowed a grey horse and had the tail hanging out of his mouth. He would. Struth, he was a dag.

Bill had some good horses in his stable too. They were bosker horses. Until I went to work for Bill I didn't know how good racehorses are. The way they get fond of a man ! They want to lick your hands, and right up your arms too. And bite at you, playful-like. It sort of gets you.

Well, Fred and me had plenty to do. We had to take the horses out exercising, and dress them, and shake their beds up and do things like that. And of course Bill would always come round to give them their feeds, even if some other times he didn't come round much. He was a bit of a one for going on the booze, Bill was. And naturally he had a lot of things to fix up with owners and bookies and other people. But Fred and me always used to get a kick out of him coming round and cracking his jokes. Once we were talking about what it would be like to be dead, and Bill said, When I go to sleep I want to wake up dead. That's how I want to die. Struth he was a dag, Bill was.

Of course later on Fred and me used to go round the meetings with the horses* Those were the times. We'd go

in a G truck with the horses, and most times Bill would come with us in the truck too. And if he had a win he'd shout us plenty of beer and cigarettes, though he never drank anything except gin himself. And didn't Fred and me *get* a kick out of taking the horses into the birdcages and leading them round. I'll say we did. Only Fred was always a bit shy with so many people looking at him.

Well, d'you know, now it's all over I can tell you Fred and me didn't use to appreciate properly those times we had. Not by a long chalk. It was an education like I've said. We were so bloody happy all the time. And yet we didn't know we were happy and that's a fact. And we got on that well together. Fred was a lot shyer than me. He was never much of a one to talk and I was. He never even used to talk to me much. He wasn't so shy if nobody took any notice of him, but if he saw anyone looking at him too much, he'd always get in close to me. He sort of depended on me that way, and I'd always try to take anyone's attention off him that was looking at him too much.

There were times I'd feel like getting off on my own for a bit but I never used to know how Fred would take it. You see I used to feel sometimes that I'd like to pick up with a sheila, so I'd tell Fred I'd be going off on my own, and he'd say O.K. And I'd ask him, wouldn't he be going off somewhere on his own too ? And he'd say no, he'd be waiting for me when I came back. And sure enough he always would be. I'd feel it sort of put me in the wrong, and I'd feel a bit narked with Fred. But he was such a decent little beggar you couldn't feel narked with him for long. Anyhow, when he'd say he'd just wait for me I'd feel sorry for him, so most times I'd forget about the sheila I thought I might pick up and tell him to come along too. Then he'd hop round happy as Larry while he was putting his clothes on, and I'd get a kick out of thinking what a hell of a good joker I was.

You'd hardly credit I could bust up all that life Fred and me used to have just because I went and bought Bill a pair of socks. Would you ?

It was one night when Mrs. Thomas and Bill and Fred and me were having a game of poker. Bill kept on cracking his jokes and saying other things, and Mrs. Thomas said how he'd demoralise us. Though I don't know what demoralise means. Bill said, Shut up you old hen. He did. He used to say things like that to her. And she'd just give him a raspberry, or else she'd lean over the table and kiss him fair on the mouth. Anyhow Bill said how we'd have to play good to beat him because the next day was his birthday, so he was sure to be lucky.

Well, I never thought another thing about it, only the next day Bill sent me into town to do a message, and it just came over me like a flash how I ought to give him something for his birthday. So I went into a shop and bought that pair of socks. They only cost me a bob too.

Now you know. It wasn't two weeks after that Bill gave me and Fred the sack. I didn't blame Bill. Fred was awful. He wouldn't do a thing Bill told him to. He'd do things wrong too, and every chance he got he'd pick on me and go off pop. And of course I'd tell him off back. In the end Bill got fed up so he sacked us both.

Of course it's a good while ago since it happened. But I can't get it out of my mind. I never see Fred now. They say he's got a job on a scow. I couldn't get on with any other trainer either. It was because of the slump. I've got a job in a grocer's shop and I'm trotting a sheila. She's a pearl of a sheila too. But when I think of the life Fred and me used to have, gee, if I don't kick myself and wish I'd never gone and bought that damn pair of socks.

WHITE MAN'S BURDEN

IT was a long road, that road up North, but I'd been told I'd find a pub there. I did. You may know the sort of pub. It sometimes has a notice up, FREE BEER HERE TO-MORROW.

I found I knew the barman and I felt bucked when I saw him. When you're on the road and you see someone you know you feel that way. You can't explain it. I asked him how he was, and he said that he was a ball of muscle. I said it was a hole of a place. Oh boy, but it's a quiet dump, he said. All Dagoes. Do I have some long serves !

We talked and he pumped some air into a benzine lamp and it fizzed and lit up bright enough to blind you. Then I couldn't see out the window but I didn't mind that. The mudflats had looked too fat and juicy, and the hills had looked starved. Why, coming along the road I'd watched a cocky ploughing, and he was turning up yellow clay. If you ask me there's a hell of a lot too much of this land of hope and plenty like that.

I asked Bill if there weren't any *pakehas* and he said there were a few. I can't describe what they're like, he said, except they wouldn't wake up if——It was a good crack, but there's a law against putting such things in print.

We heard a car pull up and Bill said it would be only his third or fourth serve that day.

They came in, about six Maoris. They were the fleshy sort, their trousers held up by leather belts that finished with only about half an inch of leather to spare. They asked for hard stuff. They asked me to have some too, and I did. They asked Bill what about him, but he said no. He told me he was keeping strictly off the hops. If you once went on the bust in a place like this it was good-bye McGinnis, he said.

A lot more Maoris came in and a few white chaps. Gosh, Bill was right. They were rough, rougher than the Maoris.

Bill said that one of the Maoris wrote the best hand he'd ever seen. I noticed he spoke nicely too. He told me that at one time he was going to be a parson. They all started on hard stuff and went on to beer later. There wasn't a radio, but Bill put an H.M.V. portable on the counter and a pile of records, and they took turns in putting the records on. Puddin' Head Jones was popular, then someone wanted Clara Butt to sing Daddy, but Bill couldn't find the record so for a joke he put on Gipsy Smith singing one of those Blood and Fire hymns.

Talk, there was plenty of talk. You may know the sort of talk. And plenty of cigarettes too. They were all chain smokers. Sometimes they crooned with a crooner and did fox-trots.

Then a woman looked in the door. She gave me a nod. Then she caught Bill's eye and I caught her giving me another nod—a reverse one. Bill winked. He said that I was O.K. When the woman went I asked Bill how he knew I was O.K.

Well, you are, aren't you?

I suppose I am, I said.

A man's got to think first of his living.

I told him that was true enough, but a man had the feeling it was the devil's gospel all the same.

There was a young Maori who came and talked to me. He told me he made money ploughing for whoever would give him any ploughing to do. Then he'd go to town and blow his money in, usually at the races. He told me it made him sick to look at a race. When he'd put his money on he went and stood behind the tote. He liked the talkies too, he said. Joan Crawford was the best actress. If it showed her in bed you always got a better kick out of seeing her in bed than you did out of seeing anyone else in bed. Well, I told him that so far as I was concerned Joan Crawford was just a gangster's girl. Then he asked me if I had a sweetheart. He said he had a sweetheart. She lived in town, a *pakeha* girl. She was very good and very young, he said, but too dear.

While Bill went and had his supper the woman came and looked after the bar. She was a titian blonde and the lipstick she was using didn't match. She told me the Maoris were good customers, and when they'd spent all their money they didn't want you to let them go on drinking on credit like the Europeans do. And another thing, they *did* have a sense of refinement. Why, some evenings when a few *pakehas* she could name were down it wasn't safe for her to put her head outside the front door.

Before Bill came back about half a dozen Maoris had shouted her, and each time she had less than half a glass beer and the other half she put in out of a bottle that didn't have a label. Bill told me afterwards that it was squash. Oh, she was keen enough on the hops he said, but she was like that. Never missed a chance of making a bit.

I slept out in a shed that night but it was hard to get to sleep because the row in the bar came across the yard. At any rate I had Maoris on the brain. You see I was brought up in the South and never saw many Maoris. But I've seen the press photos of the Arawas turning out for Lord what's his name, and the pictures in the Art Gallery. And once I read a couple of books by a man called Elsdon Best.

Gosh, there's a great day coming for Abyssinia when civilisation gets properly going there.

MISS BRIGGS

THERE'S a woman who lives in my street. Her name is Miss Briggs.

There must be thousands of such women. Such streets too. If you take the whole world, hundreds of thousands.

Miss Briggs rents a room from an old woman who rents an old house from an old man. The old man doesn't rent anything from anybody. Unless you can call taking a taxi renting anything. Or buying a grandstand ticket to see the Springboks.

The house is a very old house. Once it was a grocer's shop with rooms to live in upstairs. But the grocer went bankrupt and the old man couldn't get another shopkeeper to take it. So he had the verandah roof pulled down, and the front altered a bit, and a few rooms added on the back. Then he got the old woman as a tenant, and she got a sign-writer to paint up the words, GUEST HOUSE.

But the old woman won't take you as a boarder. You have to rent a room. Though she'll always sell you a pig's trotter. I don't know how big a trade she does in pigs' trotters, but she's always got a window full of them, marked 2d. each.

Whether or not Miss Briggs eats pigs' trotters I can't say. I shouldn't think so.

I've never spoken to Miss Briggs, although I see her nearly every day. Except on Sundays she's always carrying two suitcases. They're heavy by the way they drag down her shoulders. She's a mere sprig of a woman.

The queer thing is I don't know what Miss Briggs sells.

She's never tried to sell me anything. I wonder why. Perhaps she deals in ladies' requisites.

If it's anything masculine why has she never called at my place ? Pooh, she needn't think I'm all that hard-up. If I

wasn't frightened of frightening her I'd stop her in the street and ask her what she means by it.

Now, would anyone whose line was ladies' requisites be likely to eat pigs' trotters ?

Miss Briggs is a goer anyhow. You want to see her on a wet day.

The ladies along at the croquet green have to brave out the wet days too. They have to talk and eat all day without taking any time off to play croquet.

I think I'll write to Mr. Ezra Pound about the ladies along at the crocquet green. He might like to put them in his next Canto.

On a wet day Miss Briggs gets wet. Well, when you've got rent to pay what can you expect? Even the doctors can't put off their calls just because it's raining.

You know those patent windscreen wipers that doctors have on their cars. Miss Briggs would get on much better if she had the same sort of patent for her glasses.

Miss Briggs never smiles. I've never seen her talking to anyone, and who her customers are I don't know. You'd think she'd go to church but she doesn't go, although one night she went past my place singing Abide With Me.

Love?

Who can say? Could a person go through life without loving somebody ?

Sometimes I think Miss Briggs is something I'm always dreaming. But if that is so why don't I dream her coming out of the Guest House eating a pig's trotter ?

Miss Briggs?

My goodness yes, Miss Briggs.

A GREAT DAY

IT was beginning to get light when Ken knocked on the door of Fred's bach.

Are you up? he said.

Fred called out that he was, and in a moment he opened the door.

Just finished my breakfast, he said. We'd better get moving.

It didn't take long. The bach was right on the edge of the beach, and they got the dinghy on to Ken's back and he carried it down the beach, and Fred followed with the gear. Ken was big enough to make light work of the dinghy but it was all Fred could do to manage the gear. There wasn't much of him and he goddamned the gear every few yards he went.

The tide was well over half-way out, and the sea was absolutely flat without even a ripple breaking on the sand. Except for some seagulls that walked on the sand and made broad-arrow marks where they walked there wasn't a single thing moving. It was so still it wasn't natural. Except for the seagulls you'd have thought the world had died in the night.

Ken eased the dinghy off his shoulders and turned it the right way up, and Fred dropped the anchor and the oars on the sand, and heaved the sugar bag of fishing gear into the dinghy.

I wouldn't mind if I was a big hefty bloke like you, he said.

Well, Ken didn't say anything to that. He sat on the stern of the dinghy and rolled himself a cigarette, and Fred got busy and fixed the oars and rowlocks and tied on the anchor.

Come on, he said, we'll shove off. And with his trousers rolled up he went and tugged at the bow, and with Ken shoving at the stern the dinghy began to float, so Fred hopped

in and took the oars, and then Ken hopped in and they were off.

It's going to be a great day, Fred said.

It certainly looked like it. The sun was coming up behind the island they were heading for, and there wasn't a cloud in the sky.

We'll make for the same place as last time, Fred said. You tell me if I don't keep straight. And for a time he rowed hard without sending the dinghy along very fast. The trouble was his short legs, he couldn't get them properly braced against the stern seat. And Ken, busy rolling a supply of cigarettes, didn't watch out where he was going, so when Fred took a look ahead he was heading for the wrong end of the island.

Hey, he said, you take a turn and I'll tell you where to head for.

So they changed places and Ken pulled wonderfully well. For a time it was more a mental shock you got with each jerk of the dinghy. You realised how strong he was. He had only a shirt and a pair of shorts on, and his big body, hard with muscle, must have been over six feet long.

Gee, I wish I had your body, Fred said. It's no wonder the girls chase you. But look at the sort of joker I am.

Well, he wasn't much to look at. There was so little of him. And the old clothes he wore had belonged to someone considerably bigger than he was. And he had on an old hat that came down too far, and would have come down further if it hadn't bent his ears over and sat on them as if they were brackets.

How about a smoke? Fred said.

Sure. Sorry.

And to save him from leaving off rowing Fred reached over and took the tin out of his shirt pocket.

That's the curse of this sustenance, Fred said. A man's liable to be out of smokes before pay-day.

Yes, I suppose he is, Ken said.

It's rotten being out of work, Fred said. Thank the Lord

I've got this dinghy. D'you know last year I made over thirty pounds out of fishing ?

And how've you done this year ?

Not so good. You're the first bloke I've had go out with me this year that hasn't wanted me to go shares. Gee, you're lucky to be able to go fishing for fun.

It's about time I landed a position, Ken said. I've had over a month's holiday.

Yes I know. But you've got money saved up, and it doesn't cost you anything to live when you can live with your auntie. How'd you like to live in that damn bach of mine and pay five bob a week rent ? And another thing, you've got education.

It doesn't count for much these days. A man has to take any position he can get.

Yes, but if a man's been to one of those High Schools it makes him different. Not any better, mind you. I'm all for the working class because I'm a worker myself, but an educated bloke has the advantage over a bloke like me. The girls chase him just to mention one thing, specially if he happens to be a big he-man as well.

Ken didn't say anything to that. He just went on pulling, and he got Fred to stick a cigarette in his mouth and light it at the same time as he lit his own. And then Fred lolled back in his seat and watched him, and you could tell that about the only thing they had in common was that they both had cigarettes dangling out of their mouths.

Pull her round a bit with your left, Fred said. And there's no need to bust your boiler.

It's O.K. Ken said.

You've got the strength, Fred said.

I'm certainly no infant.

What good's a man's strength anyway ? Say he goes and works in an office?

I hadn't thought of that.

Another thing, he gets old. Fancy you getting old and losing your strength. Wouldn't it be a shame ?

Sure, Ken said. Why talk about it?

It sort of fascinates me. You'll die someday, and where'll that big frame of yours be then?

That's an easy one. Pushing up the daisies.

It might as well be now as anytime, mightn't it?

Good Lord, I don't see that.

A man'd forget for good. It'd be just the same as it is out here on a day like this. Only better.

Ken stopped rowing to throw away his cigarette.

My God, he said, you're a queer customer. Am I heading right?

Pull with your left, Fred said. But I'll give you a spell.

It's O.K. Ken said.

And he went on rowing and after a bit Fred emptied the lines out of the sugar bag and began cutting up the bait. And after a bit longer when they were about half-way over to the island he said they'd gone far enough, so Ken shipped his oars and threw the anchor overboard, and they got their lines ready and began to fish.

And by that time it was certainly turning out a great day. The sun was getting hot but there still wasn't any wind, and as the tide had just about stopped running out down the Gulf the dinghy hardly knew which way to pull on the anchor rope. They'd pulled out less than two miles from the shore, but with the sea as it was it might have been anything from none at all up to an infinite number. You couldn't hear a sound or see anything moving. It was another world. The houses on the shore didn't belong. Nor the people either.

Wouldn't you like to stay out here for good? Fred said.

Ring off, Ken said. I got a bite.

So did I, but it was only a nibble. Anyhow it's not a good day for fish. It wants to be cloudy.

So I've heard.

I've been thinking, Fred said, it's funny you never learnt to swim.

Oh I don't know. Up to now I've always lived in country towns.

Doesn't it make you feel a bit windy ?

On a day like this ! Anyhow, you couldn't swim that distance yourself.

Oh couldn't I! You'd be surprised . . . get a bite ?

Yes I did.

Same here. . . you'll be settling down here, won't you, Ken ?

It depends if I can get a position.

I suppose you'll go on living with your auntie.

That depends too. If I got a good position I might be thinking of getting married.

Gee, that'd be great, wouldn't it?

I got another bite, Ken said.

Same here. I reckon our lines are crossed.

So they pulled in their lines and they were crossed sure enough, but Ken had hooked the smallest snapper you ever saw.

He's no good, Fred said. And he worked the fish off the hook and held it in his hand. They're pretty little chaps, aren't they ? he said. Look at his colours.

Let him go, Ken said..

Poor little beggar, Fred said. I bet he wonders what's struck him. He's trying to get his breath. Funny isn't it, when there's plenty of air about ? It's like Douglas credit.

Oh for God's sake, Ken said.

I bet in less than five minutes he forgets about how he was nearly suffocated, Fred said, and he threw the fish back. And it lay bewildered for a second on the surface, then it flipped its tail and was gone. It was comical in its way and they both laughed.

They always do that, Fred said. But don't you wish you could swim like him ?

Ken didn't say anything to that and they put fresh bait on their hooks and tried again, but there were only nibbles. They could bring nothing to the surface.

I'll tell you what, Fred said, those nibbles might be old men snapper only they won't take a decent bite at bait like this.

And he explained that off the end of the island there was a reef where they could get plenty of big mussels. It would be just nice with the tide out as it was. The reef wouldn't be uncovered, it never was, but you could stand on it in water up to your knees and pull up the mussels. And if you cut the inside out of a big mussel you only had to hang it on your hook for an old man snapper to go for it with one big bite.

It's a fair way, Ken said.

It doesn't matter, Fred said. We've got oceans of time. And he climbed past Ken to pull up the anchor, and Ken pulled in the lines, and then Fred insisted on rowing and they started for the end of the island.

And by that time the tide had begun to run in up the Gulf and there was a light wind blowing up against the tide, so that the sea, almost without your noticing it, was showing signs of coming up a bit rough. And the queer thing was that with the movement the effect of another world was destroyed. You seemed a part of the real world of houses and people once more. Yet with the sea beginning to get choppy the land looked a long way off.

Going back, Ken said, we'll be pulling the wind.

Yes, Fred said, but the tide'll be a help. Anyhow, what's it matter when a man's out with a big hefty bloke like you?

Nor did he seem to be in too much of a hurry to get to his reef. He kept resting on his oars to roll cigarettes, and when Ken said something about it he said they had oceans of time.

You're in no hurry to get back, he said, Mary'll keep.

Well, Ken didn't say anything to that.

Mary's a great kid, Fred said.

Sure, Ken said. Mary's one of the best.

I've known Mary for years, Fred said.

Yes, Ken said. So I've gathered.

I suppose you have. Up to a while ago Mary and I used to be great cobbers.

I'll give you a spell, Ken said.

But Fred said it was O.K.

Mary's got a bit of education too, he said. Only when her old man died the family was hard up so she had to go into service. It was lucky she got a good place at your auntie's. Gee, I've been round there and had tea sometimes when your auntie's been out, and oh boy is the tucker any good !

Look here, Ken said, at this rate we'll never get to that reef.

Oh yes we will, Fred said, and he pulled a bit harder. If only a man hadn't lost his job, he said.

I admit it must be tough, Ken said.

And then Fred stood up and took a look back at the shore.

I thought there might be somebody else coming out, he said, but there isn't. So thank God for that. And he said that he couldn't stand anybody hanging around when he was fishing. By the way, he said, I forgot to do this before. And he stuffed pieces of cotton-wool into his ears. If the spray gets in my ears it gives me the earache, he said.

Then he really did settle down to his rowing, and with the sea more or less following them it wasn't long before they were off the end of the island.

Nobody lived on the island. There were a few holiday baches but they were empty now that it was well on into the autumn. Nor from this end could you see any landing places, and with the wind blowing up more and more it wasn't too pleasant to watch the sea running up the rocks. And Fred had to spend a bit of time manoeuvring around before he found his reef.

It was several hundred yards out with deep water all round, and it seemed to be quite flat. If the sea had been calm it might have been covered to a depth of about a foot with the tide as it was. But with the sea chopping across it wasn't exactly an easy matter to stand there. At one moment the water was down past your knees, and the next moment you had to steady yourself while it came up round your thighs. And it was uncanny to stand there, because with the deep water all around you seemed to have discovered a way of standing up out in the sea.

Anyhow, Fred took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves and his trousers as far as they'd go, and then he hopped out and got Ken to do the same and keep hold of the dinghy. Then he steadied himself and began dipping his hands down and pulling up mussels and throwing them back into the dinghy, and he worked at a mad pace as though he hadn't a moment to lose. It seemed only a minute or so before he was quite out of breath.

It's tough work, he said. You can see what a weak joker I am.

I'll give you a spell, Ken said, only keep hold of the boat.

Well, Fred held the dinghy, and by the way he was breathing and the look of his face you'd have thought he was going to die. But Ken had other matters to think about, he was steadying himself and dipping his hands down more than a yard away, and Fred managed to pull himself together and shove off the dinghy and hop in. And if you'd been sitting in the stern as he pulled away you'd have seen that he had his eyes shut. Nor did he open them except when he took a look ahead to see where he was going, and with the cotton-wool in his ears it was difficult for him to hear.

So for a long time he rowed like that against seas that were getting bigger and bigger, but about half-way back to the shore he took a spell. He changed over to the other side of the seat, so he didn't have to sit facing the island, and he just sat there keeping the dinghy straight on. Then when he felt that he had collected all his strength he stood up and capsized the dinghy. It took a bit of doing but he did it.

And after that, taking it easy, he started on his long swim for the shore.

WHEN I called at that farm they promised me a job for two months so I took it on, but it turned out to be tough going. The boss was all right, I didn't mind him at all, and most days he'd just settle down by the fire and get busy with his crochet. It was real nice to see him looking happy and contented as he sat there with his ball of wool.

But this story is not about a cocky who used to sit in front of the fire and do crochet. I'm not saying I haven't got a story about him, but I'll have to be getting round to it another time.

Yes, the boss was all right, it was his missis that was the trouble. Some people say, never work for a woman, women'll never listen to reason. But that's not my experience. Use your block and in no time you'll be unlucky if you don't have them eating out of your hand.

But this time I was unlucky. This Mrs. Crump was a real tough one. She and the boss ran a market garden besides the cows. She'd tie a flour-bag over her head, get into gumboots, and not counting the time she put in in the house, she'd do about twelve hours a day, and she had me doing the same. Not that I minded all that much. The best of working on the land is that you're not always wishing it was time to knock off. Nor thinking of pay-day, either, particularly if there isn't a pub handy. I'm not going to explain. If you don't believe me, try it yourself and see.

But twelve hours a day, every day. I'll admit I used to get tired. Mrs. Crump would see I was done in and tell me to stop working, and that was just what I was waiting for her to do. But there'd be a look in her eye. She'd say **that I** wasn't built for hard work, but she wasn't surprised because she'd never met a man she couldn't work to a standstill. **Well,** after **she'd** said that **I'd just** go **on working, and if I**

was feeling cheeky I'd tell her I didn't mind giving her a run for her money. And before those two months were up I was feeling cheeky pretty often. Once she got going about my wages and everything else she had to pay out. She couldn't keep the wolf from the door, she said. Well then, I said, if you can't you'll just have to keep the door shut.

Now I'm running on ahead so I'd better break off again, because this isn't just a no-account story about how I began to get cheeky and put wisecracks across Mrs. Crump. It's not about Mrs. Crump, she only comes into it. I'm not saying I haven't got a story about her too, but it's another one I'll be getting round to another time.

What I want to tell is about how I sat on a hillside one evening and talked with a man. That's all, just a summer evening and a talk with a man on a hillside. Maybe there's nothing in it and maybe there is.

The man was one of two young Dallies who ran an orchard up at the back of Mrs. Crump's place. These two had come out from Dalmatia and put some money down on the land, not much, just enough to give them the chance to start working the land. They were still paying off and would be for a good many years. There was a shed where they could live, and to begin with they took it in turns to go out and work for the money they needed to live and buy trees.

All that was some years before I turned up. The Dallies had worked hard, but it wasn't all plain sailing. They had about twenty-five acres, but it sloped away from the sun. They'd planted pines for shelter, but your shelter had to make a lot of growth before it's any use on land with a good slope to the south. And it was poor land, just an inch or two of dark soil on top of clay. You could tell it was poor from the tea-tree, which made no growth after it was a few feet high. Apples do best on land like that, so it was apple-trees the Dallies had mainly gone in for.

Of course Mrs. Crump gossiped to me about all this. When I was there the Dallies weren't keeping a cow, so she was letting them have milk at half the town price. She didn't

mind doing that much for them, she said, they worked so hard. And my last job each day was to take a billy up to the back fence. I'd collect an empty billy that'd be hanging on a hook, and I'd always consider going on and having a yarn with the Dallies. It wasn't far across to their shed but it would be getting dark, I'd be feeling like my tea so I'd tell myself I'd go over another time.

Then one evening the billy wasn't on the hook and I went on over, but the door was shut and there was no one about. The dog went for me but he never had a show. He'd had distemper, he couldn't move his hind legs and just had to pull himself along. I had a look round but there wasn't much to see, just two flannels and a towel hanging on the line, and a few empty barrels splashed with bluestone. Close to the shed there were grape vines growing on wires, then the trees began. They were carrying a lot of fruit and looked fine and healthy, but just a bit too healthy, I thought. You could tell from the growth that the Dallies had put on a lot of fertilizer. For a while I waited about, kidding to the dog until he wagged his tail, then I went back.

The next day one of the Dallies brought the billy over but I didn't see him. When we were milking Mrs. Crump told me. He was the one called Nick, and the evening before he'd had to take his mate into hospital. He'd had a spill off his bike and broken some ribs and his collar-bone. Mrs. Crump thought perhaps there'd been some drinking, she said they made wine. Anyhow Nick was upset. If his mate died, he said, he would die too. He'd have nothing left, nothing. And how could he work and live there by himself when his mate was lying all broken up in the hospital ? Every afternoon he would leave off working and ride into town to see his mate.

There's a pal for you, Mrs. Crump said.

Well, up at the fence the billy would always be on the hook, but if Nick was in town seeing his cobber I'd think it would be no use going over. Then one evening he was just coming across with the billy so I went over to meet him.

We greeted each other, and I think we both felt a bit shy. He was small and dark, almost black, and his flannel and denims were pretty far gone the same as mine were. I gave him my tin and told him to roll a cigarette, and when he lit up he went cross-eyed. I noticed that, and I saw too that there was a sort of sadness on his face.

I asked him how his cobber was, and he said he was good.

In two days he will be here, he said. You could see he was excited about it and his face didn't look so sad. In two weeks, he said, it will be just as if it never happened.

That's great, I said, and we sat down and smoked.

How's the dog? I said.

He is getting better too, Nick said.

He whistled, and the dog pulled himself over to us by his front paws and put his chin on Nick's leg, and somehow with the dog there it was easier to talk.

I asked Nick about his trees and he said they were all right, but there were too many diseases.

Too much quick manure, I said.

He said yes, but what could they do? It would take a long time to make the soil deep and sweet like it was in the part of Dalmatia he came from. Out here everybody wanted money quick, so they put on the manure. It was money, money, all the time. But he and his mate never had any. Everything they got they had to pay out, and if the black-spot got among the apples they had to pay out more than they got. Then one of them had to go out and try for a job.

It's the manure that gives you the black-spot, I said.

Sometimes I think it is God, Nick said.

Well, maybe you're right, I said, but what about the grapes?

Oh, Nick said, they grow, yes. But they are not sweet. To make wine we must put in sugar. In Dalmatia it is not done. Never.

Yes, I said, but you don't go back to Dalmatia.

Oh no, he said, now I am a New Zealander.

No, I said, but your children will be.

I have no children and I will never marry, Nick said.

No ? I said, then your cobber will.

He will never marry either, Nick said.

Why ? I said, there are plenty of Dalmatian girls out here. I bet you could get New Zealand girls too.

But Nick only said no no no no no.

If you were in Dalmatia I bet you'd be married, I said.

But I am not in Dalmatia, Nick said, now I am a New Zealander. In New Zealand everybody says they cannot afford to get married.

Yes, I said, that's what they say. But it's all wrong.

Yes, Nick said, it is all wrong. Because it is all wrong I am a Communist.

Good, I said. Well, I thought, spoil a good peasant and you might as well go the whole hog.

I bet you don't tell Mrs. Crump you're a Communist, I said.

Oh no, Nick said, she would never be a Communist.

No fear, I said.

I will tell you about Mrs. Crump, Nick said. She should go to Dalmatia. In Dalmatia our women wear bags on their heads just like her, and she would be happy there.

Yes, I said, I believe you're right. But Nick, I said, I thought you'd be a Catholic.

No, Nick said. It is all lies. In Dalmatia they say that Christ was born when there was snow on the ground in Palestine. But now I have read in a book there is no snow in Palestine. So now I know that they tell lies.

So you're a Communist instead, I said.

Yes, I am a Communist, Nick said. But what is the good of that ? I am born too soon, eh ? What do you think ?

Maybe, I said.

You too, Nick said. You think that you and me are born too soon? What do you think?

He said it over and over, and I couldn't look him in the face. It had too much of that sadness.. I mightn't have put it the way Nick had, I mightn't have said I was born too

soon, but Nick knew what he was talking about. Nick and I were sitting on the hillside and Nick was saying he was a New Zealander, but he knew he wasn't a New Zealander. And he knew he wasn't a Dalmatian any more.

He knew he wasn't anything any more.

Listen, Nick said, do you drink wine ?

Yes, I said.

Then to-morrow night you come up here and we will drink wine, Nick said.

Yes, I said, that's O.K. with me.

There is only to-morrow night, Nick said, then my mate will be here. We will drink a lot of wine, I have plenty and we will get very, very drunk. Oh, heaps drunk.

Yes, I said. Sure thing.

To-morrow night, he said.

He got up and I got up, he just waved his hand at me and walked off. He picked the dog up under his arm and walked off, and I just stood there and watched him go.

But it turned out I never went up to Nick's place. When I was having my tea that evening Mrs. Crump told me about how a woman she kneW had worked too hard and dropped dead with heart failure. But there's nothing wrong with my heart, she said.

No, I said, except that maybe it's not in the right place.

Of course it must have sounded like one of my wisecracks, but I was thinking of Dalmatia.

Anyhow Mrs. Crump said she's stood enough from me, so when I'd finished my tea I could go.

I wasn't sorry. I stood on the road and wondered if I'd go up to Nick's place, but instead I walked into town, and for a good few days I never left off drinking.

I wanted to get Nick out of my mind. He knew what he was talking about, but maybe it's best for a man to hang on.

THAT SUMMER

I

IT was a good farm job I had that winter, but I've always suffered from itchy feet, so I never thought I'd stick it for long. All the same, I stayed until the shearing, and I quit after we'd carted the wool out to the station, just a few bales at a time. It was just beginning December, and I had a good lot of chips saved up, so I thought I'd have a spell in town, which I hadn't had for a good long time, and maybe I'd strike a town job before my chips ran out.

The old bloke I was working for tried hard to get me to stay, but there was nothing doing. I liked him all right and the tucker was good, but him and his missis were always rowing, and there was just the three of us stuck away with hardly any company to speak of. I had to sleep on an old sofa in the kitchen because it was only a slab whare they lived in with two rooms, and I got a bit sick of hearing them fighting, every night when they'd gone to bed. The old bloke told me he'd had money enough to build a decent house long ago, but his missis said if he did she'd be there for keeps. So she wouldn't let him, but they'd gone on living there just the same.

I had to get up early to walk the six miles to catch the train, and I never saw the old bloke, but his missis came out just when I was going. She had a little bag of sovereigns that I'd never seen before and she made me take one, only she said it was to keep and not to spend, so as I'd always remember her. And when I got down the road she came running along and grabbed hold of me for a kiss, and then she stood in the road and waved. She looked a bit of a sketch, I can tell you, with her hair hanging down and her old man's coat on over her nightgown. I felt a bit sorry and wished in a way I wasn't going, because the farm away back there in the valley looked

sort of nice and peaceful with the sun just getting up on such a fine morning, and only a sheep calling out now and then, and the dogs barking because I hadn't let them off the chain when I started down the road. And I looked at the hills and thought what a hell of a good worker I was to have cut all the fern and scrub I had in the winter. But I thought, no, I've got to be on the move. Many a time I've wished I didn't have my itchy feet, but it's never much good wishing for things to be any different.

So I caught the train all right, but I had a few minutes to spare and I talked to the porter. He'd been to a dance the night before ; he was yawning his head off and looked as if he needed a wash.

The old bloke giving you a spell ? he said.

No, I said, I'm going out for good.

What, he said, turning it in? You'll never get another job.

I'll be O.K. I said.

So he told me about how he'd got a letter from his sister, and her husband was out of a job and things couldn't be worse in town. But he hadn't finished telling me when the train came in. So I got on board, but it was a slow train that stopped to shunt all the way along the line, and I was pretty fed up by the time I got into town early that afternoon.

I left my bag at the station, and after I'd had a feed I just walked about the streets looking at the shops and the people. I thought to myself, Now I'll have a good time. I thought maybe I'd pick up with a girl, and with the chips in my pocket I could kick around for a good many weeks before I'd need think about getting a job. I thought I'd go to the flicks, but it seemed better just to be in the streets. I'd have plenty of time to do all the things I wanted to do, so there wasn't any need to go rushing things. Because things never turn out as good as you think they will, so it's always just as well to get all the fun you can get out of thinking what they're going to be like beforehand. I went and sat in the park, and whenever there was a girl came past that I thought might have me

on, I'd watch out to see if she'd look over me. But there was nothing doing. And I said to myself, Well, a knock-back from one of yous isn't going to make me lose any sleep. But I hoped it wouldn't be long before I had a bit of luck, all the same.

After I'd had another feed I thought I'd better look for a place to sleep, so I went and got my bag from the station, and then I found a joint that was kept by a Mrs. Clegg, and I thought it would be O.K. It was a two-storeyed place, standing in between a butcher's shop and a brick warehouse. You paid for your bed and had to get your meals out, but there was a gas-ring at the top of the stairs, and Mrs. Clegg said I could borrow a spare teapot and make myself a cup of tea if I wanted to. So I thought that would suit me fine, because I could buy myself a couple of buns and have a lie-in some mornings just for a change after the farm.

Mrs. Clegg was quite a decent sort, but she had a glass eye that was cracked right down the middle, and it was funny the way she sort of looked out at you through the crack. Her old man was out of a job, and that was why she was running the joint, though seeing she only had three rooms to let she said she wasn't making a fortune.

When she'd fixed my bed up she took me down to the kitchen to give me the teapot, and her old man was reading the paper, and their little girl was saying pretty boy to a budgie that was answering her back. Though sometimes it would ring a little bell instead. Mr. Clegg told me he'd been a cook on a boat, but now he couldn't get a keel. It was hard, he said, because he liked being at sea, though I thought by the look of him it must have been only a coastal or even a scow he'd worked on. He was pretty red, too, though he said he hadn't been until he'd had experience of being on relief.

Of course it was the sort of talk I'd heard a good many times knocking around, so I didn't take much notice. Mrs. Clegg kept on chipping in, and they'd squabble a bit, though not as bad as the old couple on the farm, and the little girl

left off talking to the budgie and started asking her mother if she could have some money to spend. She asked about fifty times before her mother said no, and asked her if she thought money grew on trees. So then she began to ask if money did grow on trees, and when she'd got to about the fiftieth time I chipped in myself and said I'd have to go.

But it was only to go down the street and buy what I wanted so I could lie-in if I felt like it, and then I turned in, because walking about the town in my good shoes had made me feel tireder than if I'd done a day's work on the farm. And I thought I wouldn't need any rocking to get to sleep, but my room was right over the kitchen, and I could hear the pair of them going it hammer and tongs, and then the youngster got spanked and the way she yelled gave me the dingbats. It was too much like what I'd been used to, and for the first time that day I didn't feel so good about throwing up my job and coming to town. Because I thought there wasn't any sense in having itchy feet if they only got you out of a steady job and into a place like Mrs. Clegg's. And there wasn't any sense in having them, anyhow, because they never gave you any peace. Yet all the time I was thinking like that I was asking myself whether I'd get up and clear out right away, or whether I'd wait until daylight, and I knew that wherever I went I wouldn't go back to the farm. But while I was trying to decide I must have gone to sleep because I don't remember anything more.

But it turned out I never shifted from Mrs. Clegg's, not for a long time, as I'll tell you.

The first morning I stayed in bed, and I thought nobody could be any better off than I was. It was a good bed to lie on after the sofa on the farm, I had my chips, and there wasn't a job I wouldn't take on if I got the chance. But for a while I was going to have a good time just kicking around. I laughed when I heard Mrs. Clegg chase her old man out of the house, and I tried to get an earful when I heard somebody out on the landing-place. There was only two other rooms upstairs, but

Mrs. Clegg hadn't said if they were let. I didn't see anyone that first morning, anyhow, because every time I told myself I'd better get up, I thought, No it's too good where I am, though once I sat up to look out the window, and the weather was good, but there was nothing much to see except the butcher's backyard on one side and the wall of the warehouse on the other, and Mrs. Clegg's washing hung out in between.

It wasn't until late that I'd had my tea and was all flossied up, and by that time there was no one about the house except the little girl, and she was hanging the budgie's cage on a nail on the front of the house. She was the thinnest kid you ever saw, with legs like sticks and a real old woman's face. She said her name was Fanny and asked me what mine was. So I told her to call me Bill, and she said :

Does money grow on trees, Bill?

It might do, I said. I couldn't say for certain.

We've got a tree, she said, so you can mind the house while I go and look.

No, I said, but hang on until to-morrow, and we'll both have a look. See you mind the house, I said, because I don't want anyone to break into my room.

Then just along the street I passed Mr. Clegg. He had a waistcoat on over his flannel, and he was leaning up against the wall of a pub talking to taxi-drivers. I bought a newspaper, and one of the taxi-drivers asked me if I wanted to take a double, so I took a half-dollar one, even though all the good ones were filled up. Because taxi-drivers are good blokes to keep in with, they usually know of a house to take you to if you don't happen to know of one yourself. And I thought I ought to stand Mr. Clegg a drink, but what with the taxi-drivers there were too many around, so I put it off until another time. You could tell by the look of him he got a good few anyhow.

There wasn't much I could do before it was time to eat, so I went into the park to read the paper, but instead I watched an old man who was having a wash in the fountain. After he'd finished washing he looked in the water and spent a lot

of time combing his hair, then he came past my seat and asked me if I'd done with the paper, so I said I had and gave it to him. But a young joker got up from the next seat and said he wished I hadn't done that, because he was going to ask me for the paper himself.

Stiff luck, I said.

He said he'd had a date with a sheila the Sunday before, but she hadn't turned up. It was right there where he'd been sitting, and he'd been waiting at the same time every day ever since. She might have put an ad. in the paper, he said. I felt like telling him to forget it, but he was taking it pretty bad, so instead I asked him if he'd come and eat, because by the look of his clothes I'd have said he was up againstit.

I shouted him a bob dinner and I could tell by the way he ate he was in need of a binder, but he never said whether he was out of a job or not. He just wanted to tell me what a great sheila she was that had let him down, so to shut him up I said we'd go to the flicks. But it was a mistake, because after the lights went out a girl came and sat in the seat next to me, and when I put my leg over her way she was willing. I pushed and she pushed back, and it wasn't long before I had hold of her hand, and what with holding her hand and wondering how I'd get rid of this fellow Sam if she looked any good when the lights went up, I never had much idea what the first part of the programme was about.

Well, the lights went up and she certainly looked good. She gave me the onceover and maybe she thought I didn't look so bad either, but she could tell I was with Sam and Sam didn't look so good. I said if he liked he could take my tin and go out and roll himself one, but he said no, he could wait till after. He just wanted to talk about his sheila, she was a bit like the girl in the big picture he said. It made me properly narked but I hadn't got the heart to tell him off. Me and the girl got to work again while the big picture was on and this Sam was that thick in the head I bet he never guessed a thing, but as soon as the lights went up she went for her life while Sam was saying he'd have a fag if it was

O.K. with me. So I gave him my tin, and I thought that's that, but I could have crowned him all the same. He wanted to get going about his sheila again but I said, To hell with all that, let's go and have a drink.

So we got in a pub and we both had a good few in by closing time and then they said we could carry on upstairs if we liked, so it wasn't long before we were properly canned. Sam talked about his sheila and once I'd got canned I didn't mind. I didn't mind doing all the paying either, though I spent a lot more money than I intended, and when it was about ten o'clock we took a taxi and went to a dance that Sam knew about. It was a pretty flash turnout with a lot of streamers and balloons, but what with Sam looking like a proper bum and the both of us being canned they wouldn't let us in. So we went to another place that was a lot tougher, and nobody said anything, not even when we started butting in on other blokes' sheilas. We got a couple of them to come outside for a spot, but they went crook when we spilt beer over their skirts, and in the end there was nothing doing. And so far as I was concerned it didn't matter because I was that canned I wouldn't have had a hope of doing anything. And I don't remember getting home to Mrs. Clegg's but I was there the next morning when I woke up.

It was Sunday and the church bells were ringing, but after the night before I didn't feel so hot until I had a drink out of a bottle I found in my pants' pocket. Then I felt better, and I looked out of the window and the weather was still good, and Mrs. Clegg's washing was still hanging on the line. I thought I might go and lie on the beach in the sun, but Fanny came and asked if I'd go and look at the tree to see if there was any money.

There was nobody about upstairs but Mrs. Clegg was in the kitchen, and her old man had put his chair on the bricks outside and was reading the paper. Fanny and I went down to the fence where there was a pretty good smell, because a heap of sawdust out of the butcher's shop was over the other side. **We couldn't see** any money hanging on the tree **and**

Fanny was disappointed, but I said maybe it was the wrong time of the year. Fanny said perhaps it had fallen in the grass, it would if it was ripe, she said. So we looked and I had my fingers on a sixpence in my pocket and then I thought no, I'll give the kid a real thrill, I'll make it a bob. So I dropped the bob and so help me if it wasn't the sovereign the old lady had given me on the farm. I put my foot out but Fanny was too quick. She didn't know what to make of it but she wouldn't let me have a look, and before I could stop her she'd run up the bricks singing out that it was a money-tree. Her old man looked over the top of his paper and held out his hand, but Mrs. Clegg suddenly showed up and got in first. And then there was a proper hullabaloo, the two of them going it hammer and tongs, and Fanny howling and jumping up and down on the bricks.

Come on, Fanny, I said, those legs of yours will snap off at the knees if you're not careful.

I got her to come back and we had another look, and I took jolly good care it was only a sixpence this time. Her old man wanted to take it off her but Mrs. Clegg wouldn't let him, so there was another hullabaloo. And Fanny wanted to keep on looking but Mr. Clegg said if he caught her near the tree again he'd tan her hide.

Well, I felt a bit sore over the sovereign, but I thought if Mrs. Clegg put it towards buying a new glass eye I wouldn't mind so much. Fanny had just about decided I was her property and wanted me to play penny catches, but her mother came out and started to weed round a row of tomatoes she had growing up against the fence, and I said if she'd tell me where the spade was I'd make a proper job for her. Fanny went to get the spade but Mr. Clegg came out and said he was going to do a bit of digging himself.

You're going to do a bit of digging, Mrs. Clegg said, but he didn't say anything.

It was under the tree that he went to dig, and off and on he'd be down there for a good few weeks after.

I wished I'd gone to the beach because the sun was real

hot and there wasn't a cloud. It had been a dry spring and everybody said it was going to be a hot summer. There was the yarn they always say about how the Maoris had said so. It was getting a bit late in the day to go off to the beach so I played penny catches with Fanny, but the ball kept on banging into the washing and in the end Mrs. Clegg went crook, though she needn't have done because her clothes weren't as clean as all that. So then I told Fanny I hadn't any more time to go on playing, but it was really because I'd seen a smart-looking piece of goods drying her face and having a bo-peep out of the bathroom window, which was upstairs next to mine. I went up the stairs about six at a time and she was crossing the landing place with only a sort of kimono-thing on. Hello, I said, but she only said, How do you do, and went inside and slammed the door of her room. She didn't look nearly so good as she'd looked through the window anyhow, she was a little piece that somehow made you think of a kid's doll and not my type at all. So of course I told myself I couldn't be worried.

I began to feel empty so I, went down town and had some dinner in a place that was run by a Dalmatian. Being Sunday there wasn't much doing, so he brought out his two little boys to show me, though one was so shy he got behind his father's legs and only put his head out now and then. And when his missis brought the tucker he said how she wouldn't learn to speak English. You could only grin at her, though I talked to the kids and they were great kids, the sort of little blokes I wouldn't mind if I had myself.

My wife thinks always of our country, the Dally said. She says that if she learns to talk here I will not take her back to our country.

And you will? I said.

Yes I will, he said. But first I must have a lot of money. My wife she wants us to go now but I say no. It is lonely for her when she will not talk, but she has her little boys and soon they will take her shopping which she will not go now, because she does not talk.

Anyhow *he* talked, and I liked listening to him, and I'd grin at his wife now and then just to sort of include her in the conversation, and the kid that wasn't shy sat on a chair with his legs stuck out and took it all in. I thought they were a real nice family, I promised I'd go there again, and when I came out I was wishing in a way I was settled down myself, because here I was in a town all on my own, and that afternoon I felt at a bit of a loose end. Sunday afternoons on the farm when there was nothing else doing I'd go and shoot pigeons away up in the bush, and I wouldn't feel as much on my own as I did now in a town full of houses and people. But it's no good letting those things get you down, so I went back to Mrs. Clegg's to lie on my bed and read a True Story. I read them sometimes though the yarns are all a lot of baloney, nothing like real life at all. But I'd hardly got started when Fanny came in and I didn't shoo her out because I wanted to do a bit of fishing.

Fanny, I said, who lives here beside me ?

Terry, she said.

Terry ? I said. Isn't there a lady ?

That's Mrs. Popeye, she said.

That's a funny name, I said.

Mr. Popeye doesn't live here, she said, because he's a sailor-man. But he comes sometimes.

I see, I said. And I got the idea all right but I didn't have a chance to ask her any more because Mr. Clegg came up and asked if I felt like having a drink. He'd had a shave and put on a collar, though without any tie.

Yes, I said. But can you get one ?

Come on, he said. And you clear away out of here, he said to Fanny. Look at her legs, he said.

I've got nice legs, Fanny said, and she pulled her dress up to her waist to show me.

Of course you have, I said. Only you want to be careful they don't snap off.

Her old man told her off for pulling her dress up, and we left her talking to the budgie which was kidding to itself in a piece

of looking-glass. But all the way along to the pub Mr. Clegg kept on about her legs.

You look at them, he said, it just shows you the way a working man gets it put across him every time.

Too right, I said, but I wasn't anxious to start talking politics.

We went along to the pub where I'd seen Mr. Clegg the day before and the pub-stiff that was on the door told us to go upstairs where there was quite a few, including all sorts men and women. And we hadn't been there long when the barman got the tip, and we were all shoved up a little stairway on to the next floor. But that was the only scare, nobody was caught, and by the time it was dark the pair of us had a good few in, and each time I paid because there never was a time when Mr. Clegg even looked like paying. And things being what they were I was beginning to feel like calling it a day, only just then a bloke came in that was a cobber of Mr. Clegg's.

He was a cook off a boat too, a tremendous big man, but dressed more like a stoker in dungarees that would hardly button across his chest. He didn't have any singlet on underneath and his chest was all hair, and when he'd had a few drinks he started to sweat, and you could see it oozing out and running down under the hair until it soaked into his trousers. I shouted him and Mr. Clegg, and he shouted back, and then I got talking to the barman and dropped out while the cook went on shouting Mr. Clegg. The both of them talked politics and the cook sounded a good deal more bolshy than Mr. Clegg was. And then a tall bloke joined in. He'd been sitting there on his own listening, and he started off by saying he didn't see anything wrong with capitalism. Well, that got the cook going good and proper, he paid for whiskies for the three of them and they went on and had one after another, the cook always paying and calling the big nobs that run the world for all the names he could think of. Me and the barman just listened, and after the cook had spent about a quid him and Mr. Clegg went off together, and then the tall bloke came

over and asked the barman what the cook's name was. But the barman said he didn't know.

Come on, he said, you know.

I don't know, the barman said.

You heard what he was talking about ?

Sure, the barman said.

He's a bolshy.

Maybe, the barman said.

What do you reckon's wrong with capitalism? the tall bloke said, but the barman wouldn't answer. What's the name of his cobber ? he said.

I don't know, the barman said.

Well, instead of saying anything more he went downstairs and the barman winked at me and said he was a demon, and I wasn't surprised because I'd picked there was something wrong with him right from the start. But it wasn't long before he came back with the boss.

Terry, the boss said, you know the name of that big fellow.

I don't know, the barman said.

You better tell.

No, I don't know, the barman said, and considering the way they were picking on him I felt like having a go at cleaning up the pair of them.

Anyhow the boss saw it was no good so they went out and I asked the barman to have a drink. You could see it had shaken him up and we both had double gins. And seeing there was nobody else there just then he said we'd have another two on the house. It would be good for his cough, he said. He had an awful cough. And once having got started we kept on for quite a while. He was a lot older than me, with one of those hard faces all covered with wrinkles like Aussies have, but I sort of had the feeling he was a decent bloke.

You've got a hard dial, I said, but I bet you've got a kind heart.

I'll say, he said.

I bet you have, I said. But of course I was stunned. Anyhow, I said, isn't your name Mr. O'Connor ?

Sure, he said.

Well, I wanted to tell him I'd been sort of trying to place his face right from the jump, and now I'd suddenly remembered. One time when I was working on a farm he brought out a racehorse to graze. It was a good while ago, but I knew he was the same bloke, though I didn't get the chance to make certain because a crowd came in and he had to get busy. He pushed me over one more double gin which he only pretended to ring up on the peter, but there wasn't a chance to talk. So I thought I'd better shove off or I'd be ending up tight as I was the night before. I said so long to the barman and that I'd be seeing him, and it was only when I was trying to walk straight along the street, just to see how tight I was, that I remembered the boss had called him Terry. Which made me pull up while I tried to figure out whether he might be the same bloke as Fanny's Terry. I thought maybe I'd go back and find out, but instead I kept on along the street to find out how tight I was. I could walk straight all right but it didn't mean anything, because sometimes you get head-drunk, and sometimes you get leg-drunk, and there's a lot of difference between the two.

I thought I'd better cry off the booze for a bit, so all next week I went to the beach. It was too good to miss, specially as it was so baking hot round the streets. The asphalt went soft and there were marks of motor tyres all over the road, and away in front of you the heat made it look as if water was lying on the road, so you'd naturally think of the beach. And it was certainly great to be out there. I'd go on a tram as far as it went, and then I'd walk onto a quiet bit of beach that I knew about.

Most days nobody'd come around, but I had company, because the first morning on a tram I met a bloke named Ted who was doing the same as -myself. I'd meet him every day, and I'd always bring a couple of riggers and he'd buy some buns, and it was certainly nice to have his company. He never had **much to** say so **I couldn't make** out **hardly anything**

about him though I thought he looked a bit of a hard-shot. He wasn't a rangy specimen like me, no, he was nuggety, with one of those faces that is flat on the front of your head. And being dark he didn't get sunburnt nearly so bad as I did. To kick off with we'd fool about in the water, and if there was nobody around we wouldn't worry about any togs. Then we'd fool about on the beach and lie in the sand, and when it was time for the buns and the beer they'd go down well, and in the afternoon we'd just about go to sleep. It was a great life I can tell you, though coming home in the tram we'd be properly tired out, which is what lying in the sun always does to you. Ted'd say, so long, see you again to-morrow, and I'd be too tired for anything except a feed and a talkie, and if the talkie wasn't any good I'd just about go to sleep. And one night the joker sitting next to me had to poke me in the ribs because I was snoring.

Well, it was like that for a whole week, and some nights my sunburn was that bad I could hardly sleep. By Sunday I thought I'd better give it a rest, but the weather was still holding out so I thought no, the going's good, I'll give it one more pop.

And that day Ted was there as usual but he had his girl with him. I didn't feel like butting in but he called me over and gave me a knock-down, and she was certainly the goods, a good-looker and a great figure, sort of streamlined all over though you could tell she had a temper. She wasn't like Ted, she was a mag, and all the way along until we got to our beach she talked about how nice the water looked, and she'd make us stop to pick up shells and look in the pools to see things. But it wasn't long before we were undressed and in the water, and nearly all morning we had a great time just fooling about. Mavis was the girl's name and she'd brought a thermos and plenty of sandwiches, and she made me have some. I'd brought my riggers as usual but Mavis wouldn't have any, because she said drink only brought sorrow into people's lives. Ted said he was willing to take the risk so we drank the beer between us, and then Ted lay on his back

with his togs rolled down and said this sort of life would do him for keeps. Mavis kept on looking his way and you could tell she was nuts on him, but I knew there was something wrong because she couldn't help picking on him every chance she got.

Yes, she said, you can be a sand-boy every day while I go and work in that damn shop.

Forget it, kid, Ted said.

Listen to him, Bill, she said. The first time we made a date he turned up tight in a taxi. He was broke too, and I had to pay five shillings for the fare.

And instead of saying anything to that Ted just rolled over and curled himself round Mavis.

Don't make out you're a smoodger, she said, because you're not.

If anyone knows anything better than this sun lead me to it, Ted said.

He's a baby over the cold, Bill, Mavis said. Last winter I knitted him a woolly and he used it to go to bed in, with his underpants on too. And what's the good of a man when he goes to bed like that ?

Ted rolled away from her then, he lay on his side with his back to the pair of us.

Look at that sea, he said.

But Mavis couldn't stop herself from trying to put nasty ones across him, though I bet she knew she was making him feel sore.

Yes, she said, it's all right for you, but what's a hot day in that damn shop. It only means us girls have to let our stockings down to try and keep cool. If they didn't let you go home at night you might just as well be in gaol.

You'll get over it, kid, Ted said.

Listen to him, Bill, Mavis said. He works about three months a year, so where would he be if he hadn't got me ?

You get your money's worth sweetie, Ted said.

Listen to him, Bill, Mavis said. That's what he says. When I knitted him a woolly and he used it to go to bed in.

Well, Ted got up and went away and tried to see how far he could throw stones up the cliff. And Mavis kept on talking, but I pretended to go to sleep and when I gave a few snores she didn't say anything more. But I looked and she was crying, though when I looked again she was reading a True Romance, but it wasn't long before she gave that up and just stretched herself out in the sun. Ted came back and stretched himself out too, with his arm round Mavis, and we must have all gone to sleep because for a long time nobody moved or said anything.

But when we were sitting up and talking again Mavis must have temporarily got all the dirt out of her system, because instead of picking on Ted she made us laugh with yarns about people she served in the shop, and the way they talked and carried on, and what she'd do with the money if she ever won an Art Union. And afterwards we all went in for another swim, and Ted said he'd bet me I wasn't game to swim round a buoy that was anchored a good way out from the shore. So I took him on, but when I was out there hanging on to the buoy for a rest I got a bit of a surprise, because they'd both gone out of the water and were just about dressed. I swam back fast, but by the time I touched bottom they'd climbed nearly to the top of the cliff, and I could hear Ted swearing at Mavis and telling her to come on. And when I sang out for them to wait Ted sang out that they'd wait at the tram.

Well, I didn't hurry myself. If they waited at the tram that would be all right, but if they didn't that would be all right too. Because I thought it wouldn't be long before Mavis was picking on Ted again, and I wasn't anxious to be there when she started. And it was only when I'd finished dressing that I found out my money was gone.

Of course it was a knock and I certainly felt bad. I thought well, I hope poor old Mavis gets her whack, but Ted being the sort of joker I'd gathered he was I didn't suppose she would. She probably wasn't in the joke. What's money

anyhow, I thought. I'd been in town just over a week and had a good time, even if I hadn't had any luck so far as a girl was concerned. To hell with Ted and Mavis, I thought.

But it was hard all the same. I thought I could go into every shop in town until I found out where Mavis worked. But I knew I wouldn't do that. Ted might be no good but I could tell she was nuts on him, and it'd be rocking it into her properly to put the police on to him. I'd never be able to prove anything anyhow, and my idea of the Johns is that a man wants to keep well away from them no matter what goes wrong.

My sugar's gone, I thought, that's all there is to it. Now I've got to look for a job.

Well, it wasn't the first time I'd been broke, and I knew I'd feel better if I went home and slept on it. The main thing was to stop myself from doing any more thinking. I didn't have the price of a tram fare because Ted had left me a skinner, so I started to walk into town. But I didn't hurry myself, and I kept stopping to look at everything I saw going on in the streets just to keep my mind occupied.

And as it turned out it wasn't long before I got a notion. I went past a house that was hidden behind some trees and just over the fence there was a garden. So I walked up and down and when there was nobody in sight I hopped over the fence and pulled up a plant that looked as if it might be growing into a little tree. I wrapped it in a sheet of newspaper I was keeping because of the acceptances, and I'd only gone a few more streets when I met a lady that looked as if she might do a bit of business.

Excuse me lady, I said, but maybe you're interested in gardening.

Yes, she said, I am.

Well, I said, I'm off a boat and I got this in Jamaica.

Why, she said, it looks like a something or other.

I don't know what you call them, I said, but I've never seen them out here, and you never saw such a pretty flower.

So she asked me if it had got long red petals.

No, I said, the flower's blue-coloured and as big as my head. You don't see many of them even in Jamaica, I said, so I reckon it ought to be worth a good five bob out here.

So then she said she hoped I wasn't telling her a story.

Oh no, lady, I said, I wouldn't do that.

We had a bit more barney and finally she took it for three and six, and soon as I'd got the sugar in my pocket I didn't lose any time in shifting along. But I didn't take a tram, no, I kept on walking and slowed down again after a while, and got into town pretty late, so although I was feeling a bit empty I went straight home to bed and was lucky enough to get to sleep before I had a chance to start doing any more thinking.

And next morning I woke up early and the weather still looked good, though of course I didn't think it looked quite so good as it had other mornings. I hadn't anything to eat but I made a cup of tea, then I thought I'd better get down town to see about a job. I looked at the paper in the Library but there was nothing doing, and I spent the morning going round the registry offices but there was nothing doing in any of those places either. And in the afternoon it was just the same. I tried all the registry offices again and when it was time for the afternoon paper to come out I waited outside where they always stick up the front page to let people see the ads. But I could hardly get near for the crowd, and when I did get a bo-peep there weren't any jobs that I thought I'd have a chance of getting. So I went inside to look at the file, because I'd missed seeing the results of the double I had on with the taxi-driver, and what with going to the beach all the week before, and having plenty of chips in my pocket, I hadn't worried. Well, I'd picked a first and a second, and the second had only got beat by a head. It was the first time I'd ever got so close and I got a bit excited, because I thought if I could get that close I could pick two winners, so I decided I'd see the taxi-driver and take another instead of breaking into my three and six, which I hadn't done even though I was feeling pretty empty inside.

But first I hung round the streets a bit longer, standing on

the corners to roll cigarettes and watch the crowd, though seeing I have my itchy feet I never can stand still for very long, particularly when everyone else is on the move. Then I went up to see the taxi-driver but he wasn't on the stand. His cobbers said he'd be back soon so I waited but he didn't turn up, and I had to go into the pub because I wanted to pick up a bit of counter-lunch. I saw Mr. Clegg there with a half-handle in front of him and he looked as if he was making it last a good long while, but I dodged about in the crowd to keep him from seeing me and asked for a half-handle myself. The eats were late coming out and I had to make my drink last a lot longer than I thought I would, but when the trays did come I was one of the first to be in, and I finished up by putting away quite a good feed. The barman took my half-handle to fill it again but I said, Wait a minute, where can I see Terry ?

Terry ? he said, Terry's left here.

All right, I said, fill her up. Where's he working now? I said.

The barman didn't know, so I had my drink and came out. The taxi-driver was there and I took the double, and he said I was lucky because it was a new chart he'd just got out. There were hardly any taken certainly, so I picked a good one, but at the last moment I decided I wouldn't cough up the sugar just then. The taxi-driver didn't look any too pleased but he said O.K. boy, I'm a sport.

Then I didn't know what to do. I didn't know whether to blow in a bob on a talkie or not, so I put off trying to decide. I thought I'd go and have a lie-down on my bed. But Fanny was just taking the budgie inside, and she showed me the way it could swing a ping-pong ball that was tied to the top of its cage. She'd bought it with the money from the money-tree, she said.

The old man isn't home yet, Bill, she said, we can go and look.

No, I said, not just now.

But she pulled me by the hand, so I gave in and we had to walk on the ground that Mr. Clegg had dug to get under the

tree, but it was only a tray bit that I dropped. Fanny danced up and down and went to show her mother and I went upstairs, and when the old man came home I heard them having a row. And later on I looked out of the window and he was down there digging.

But being all on my pat up there that evening somehow gave me the dingbats properly. I couldn't decide what to do to fill in the time, and I couldn't keep my mind off thinking about a job. I tried reading my True Story but it was no good. I'd just lie on my bed but that was no good either, and I'd have to keep getting up to walk up and down. I'd stop in the middle of the floor to roll a cigarette and listen to them downstairs. I'd think, my God I've got to have someone to talk to, but even after I'd turned out the light and had my hand on the door knob I'd go back and just flop on the bed. But the last time I flopped I must have dozed off because I woke up lying in my clothes, and I wondered where the hell I was. I'd been dreaming, and I still seemed to be in the dream, because there wasn't one sound I could hear no matter how hard I listened. Then somebody started coughing and I knew where I was, but next minute I was back in the dream again, and I kept on dreaming and waking up right until it began to get light, though the last time I dropped off I slept a long time and never dreamt a thing.

It doesn't matter what sort of a night you have, things are always different in the morning. I didn't waste any time hopping out of bed because I didn't want to give myself a chance to start doing any more thinking. And I didn't have much of a chance anyhow, because while I was mucking about getting my bed made, I heard Mrs. Clegg come upstairs and start giving somebody a tongue-banging. It developed into a real ding-dong row, and so help me if the other voice didn't sound like Terry O'Connor's, and so far as I could tell he was giving just about as good as he got.

Shut the door, was the last thing he sang out. And Mrs. Clegg sang out, Shut it yourself.

So I went out to get an eyeful and there was Terry sitting up in bed reading the paper.

Gee, I said, so this is where you hang out.

Hello boy, he said, and I went and sat on his bed and said I'd heard he'd left the pub.

That's right, he said.

You know Terry, I said, I remember you. You remember Mr. Fletcher's farm?

Sure, he said.

Well, I said, I remember when you brought out a horse.

That's right, he said. Well, he said, it looks like another scorcher, and he threw the paper away and did a big stretch, and we yarned for a bit and I asked him who the dame was that lived next door.

That's our Maggie, he said.

She's not my type, I said.

No, Terry said, nor mine either, and he said he wouldn't have her on if she was hung with diamonds. Well, he said, I suppose a man's got to rise and shine.

I've got to go and look for a job, I said. And Terry said he was looking for a job too, and while he was getting dressed I looked in the paper but there didn't seem to be any jobs going. We went down town together anyhow, and I thought it was certainly great to have a bit of company. We passed a coffee and sandwich place and Terry asked if I felt like a bite.

Not specially, I said, but I'll have one.

So we had coffee and sandwiches, and I paid because the girl was waiting and Terry just went on eating. And when we came out we ran right into the taxi-driver that had the double chart.

Hello Terry, he said, how's things?

A box of birds, Terry said, and the taxi-driver brought out his chart. But Terry said he was stiff because the one he would have picked had been taken. Too bad, the taxi-driver said, and I told Terry the double I'd picked, and he said I'd beaten him to it and I'd be in the money there was nothing surer.

So that was all right, Terry made me think my luck was going to be in, and we went round all the registry offices together, but there was nothing doing. So I asked Terry if he couldn't go to his Union, but he said it wouldn't be any good.

I had something to say about the Union boss last meeting, he said, and that's why I'm on the street. That and not letting that bloody dee bulldoze me.

Gee, I said, that's hard.

But Terry said it was best to forget it, and I asked him to come to the Dalmatian's for a feed. So we went along and the place was pretty full, but the Dally was working the peter and he remembered me.

You are back again, he said. That is good for me.

Good for me, too, I said, because I want to eat.

Good, he said, good. It is good to eat.

Too right, I said.

Well, we had three courses and it certainly felt good afterwards, and after we'd rolled cigarettes I told Terry to wait because I wanted to speak to the Dally. Terry said O.K. and I barged into the kitchen and the Dally didn't look any too pleased.

What do you want ? he said.

Well, I said, sort of embarrassed a bit.

Be quick, he said.

Well, I said, I suppose you couldn't give me a job.

No, he said, I cannot give you a job. Already I have too many to pay. They are not too many for the work, but they are too many to pay.

Yes, I said, but I thought if anybody turned it in.

You think somebody will walk out, he said. But nobody will walk out. It is always easy to walk out but to-day it is hard to walk in, so to-day nobody will walk out even if it is easy.

Then his missis put her head in the door and he told me to wait a minute. And soon as he'd gone **the** cook, who was a fat little joker and walked like a proper queen, came over and asked if it was a job I was after.

You come back to-morrow, he said. And when I asked him why to-morrow he said the bloke they had washing dishes out in the pantry would have to go to the quack.

What's he got? I said.

You know, the cook said. He showed me this morning and he's got it pretty bad.

Good, I said, and thanks for the tip.

And then the boss came back. You are still here, he said, but I cannot give you any work.

Never mind, I said.

You can pay now, he said. One dinner, one shilling, and he held out his hand.

No, I said, two dinners, two shillings, and I'll pay you to-morrow.

And he certainly didn't look any too pleased over that, but I walked out the door and picked up Terry, and the Dally came after us right on to the street but he never said anything. Then just to get out of the streets for a bit the pair of us went down on the wharves, and half-way along one wharf we watched while a lot of wharfies worked on a boat that was unloading guano.

There's your chance, Terry said. You get extra pay for working that stuff.

What about you ? I said.

No, he said, the dust's no good to me.

I asked a man and he told me to go on board and ask, and I went on board but I couldn't find the man I had to ask for. I looked down the hold and the wharfies were shovelling the stuff into bags but you could hardly see them for dust. They looked as if they hadn't got a stitch on, and they were sweating properly and the dust was sticking to the sweat, and it was certainly a sight because all you could see was a tangle of bodies nearly the same colour as the guano, except that the colour was darker where the sweat was collecting and running down. The stuff smelt like the bird-dung it was too, it got up my nose and all over me just looking down, so I went back to Terry.

I can't find the man, I said, but the job don't look any catch.

I bet it don't, Terry said, and we walked on to the end of the wharf and sat on the edge with our legs hanging down. And it was great to be sitting there too. For the first time for days a wind had got up and you could sit in the sun without feeling too hot. There were big woolly clouds in the sky, and blowing up against the tide the wind was making the sea choppy, and I thought no man whose belly was full could have said it wasn't good to be alive. I wondered if Terry was thinking the same way, but a man never does ask those sort of questions, so instead I asked him if he'd have a smoke, and he made one but it made him cough. He threw it away and I asked him hadn't he got rid of his cold.

It's not a proper cold, he said.

No ? I said.

It was the war, he said.

I didn't say anything but I thought it was rotten. Terry looked hard and tough, but his face was sunk in, and maybe the wrinkles didn't improve it either, and there was only enough of him to cover his bones and nothing over. But when things are rotten like that what can a man say ? But it sort of made it not so good to be just sitting there on the end of the wharf, and so help me if I didn't begin to start thinking about how I was broke, which I didn't want to do.

Come on, I said. And I wanted to do the registry offices again but Terry said once a day was enough and we had an argument, and in the end I said I was going to do them anyhow, so Terry came along and waited outside. And so help me if there wasn't a job going at the second one I tried. It was a farm job a good way out of town and you had to pay your own fare, but I knew if I took it on I'd get there all right. But I somehow just couldn't say I'd take it on, and it was mainly because I couldn't help thinking of Terry waiting for me in the street outside. So I got the woman to promise she'd keep it open for me if I came back inside a couple of hours. And I never said a word to Terry, but when he stopped outside

the next registry place I said no, because I'd got to go back to the last place later on. So to pass the time we went and had a lie-down in the park and Terry put his hat over his face and went to sleep.

But I didn't feel like sleeping. I kept looking at Terry and I kept wondering what the hell would become of him, and I couldn't make out why he wasn't racing horses any more. He looked sick anyhow, and I was practically certain he was a skinner. Of course it was none of my business, but I thought he was a decent bloke and it was certainly nice to have his company. I thought damn it all, it's none of my business, but I couldn't make my mind up all the same. Then while I was wondering what the hell was wrong with me there was a joker came and sat on the grass right alongside.

I say mate, he said, could you give me the lend of a bob ?

No, I said, and you needn't wake my cobber up.

Sorry mate, he said, and he went and sat down further off.

Well, I thought that showed a sort of nice feeling so I went over.

I'm on the beach myself, I said, but I can make it a deener.

Never mind, mate, he said.

No, I said, you take the dough.

God bless you mate, he said.

That's all right, I said.

Then he got talking and he said he felt like calling me Bill, because I reminded him of a mate of that name. It was quite a yarn he got telling me. This Bill was a pretty good mate he said, and when they were up against it he didn't mind going shares with any money he got. Though later on it was different, it was the joker telling me the yarn that usually did the shelling out. He didn't mind, he said, though he reckoned he shelled out a lot more than Bill ever did. And Bill would admit that. Bill'd say never mind, because he'd make it up when his ship came home. Well, it finally turned out that once when he was away in the country looking for a job he read in the paper how Bill had won a prize in an Art Union. And it made him think. He'd been thinking he'd like to make

the break with Bill if he could without letting him down, so now was a good opportunity. He was up against it at the time and Bill had promised to make it O.K. with him when his ship came home, but he had the feeling that a man can say those things, but it's diflferent when you actually have the dough. So he thought of a stunt, he thought he'd do Bill one last good turn. He sent him a letter and said he'd heard of a job away down south, so he'd decided to go and so long and good luck, and he never mentioned a thing about the Art Union. But he'd hardly posted the letter when he got one from Bill saying so long and good luck because he was getting out of the country and sailing that night. And Bill never mentioned a thing about the Art Union either.

It just shows you, he said.

Yes, 1 said.

A man wants a mate that won't let him down, he said.

Yes, I said. But I wasn't paying much attention because Terry had woke up.

I've got to go, I said.

Wait a minute, mate, he said.

No, I said, I've got to go.

Listen mate, he said.

No, sorry, I said, and I went back to Terry and we went down town again and Terry waited while I went in and told the woman I wasn't taking the job. When I came out I told Terry there was nothing doing and he said I was stiff.

It's O.K., I said, and when I turned into the first pub we came to Terry said he knew of a better one, and it was certainly a good one for a feed. The counter-lunch had just come out, and for the price of our half-handles we put away just about as much as we could hold. Then we had another two half-handles which meant I hadn't a razoo left Terry said let's go, and to finish up the day there was nothing to do except kick around the streets. We'd stand in shop doorways and Terry'd pipe off everyone that went past, and outside the picture theatres he'd make me wait to watch people getting out of their cars.

See that old duchess, he'd say, she wants you to look at her now she's got her feathers pruned, but when she wakes up in the morning she won't look so hot, she won't want anybody looking at her then.

I bet she won't, I'd say, and I'd forgot about being broke thinking what a funny joker Terry was. He didn't seem to be worrying about anything, and we carried on joking all the way up to Mrs. Clegg's.

But when we got to the top of the stairs it was different, because all Terry's gear was in a heap outside his door and the door was locked. And Terry got excited and said he'd bust in the door. But I said he'd better not, he could doss in with me, I said, and have it out with Mrs. Clegg in the morning. So while I made us a cup of tea he put his things in my room, and then we managed to get pretty comfortable in the bed even though it was a pretty tight fit.

Terry didn't waste any time going right off to sleep either, but I couldn't get to sleep. After all, considering the two of us were broke, and what with turning down a job, a man would have been lucky to get to sleep without doing any thinking. It was one of those hot nights too, and I started to roll round and woke Terry up. So I tried to lie still but when I got the cramp I thought no, this is no good. I waited until Terry was snoring again and then I managed to get out without disturbing him. I went and leaned out the window and I could see Fanny's money-tree in the moonlight, and maybe that's what gave me the notion how to pick up a little money before morning. I got into my clothes and borrowed a pair of sandshoes that were among Terry's gear, and out in the street it was nice and quiet and a lot cooler. And a clock said it was going on for one o'clock.

I did a long trek out to one of the suburbs and then I didn't waste any time getting round the back of the houses to clean up any money that had been left for the milkman. Some places I couldn't find any billy, or a dog would bark and put the wind up me properly, but I kept on until I got nearly ten bob all told Then it wasn't so good doing the long trek

back again, and I couldn't stop myself from worrying a bit over pinching money. But I thought when a man's in a jam he oughtn't to let himself be worried, and besides, there were the two of us to consider. Then when I got back to Mrs. Clegg's I knew as soon as I was inside the room that Terry was awake. So when I got back into bed I said I'd had to do a job for myself, and when I was nearly asleep Terry said that sort of job didn't usually take several hours to do.

Oh, I don't know, I said, they say a dog will travel five miles.

No, Terry said, more than that.

Well, you mightn't believe it, but I woke up early feeling just like a box of birds. And it was certainly great to have somebody to talk to, though Terry didn't look any too good so I told him to stay in bed, and while the kettle was boiling I went out to buy him a newspaper, and we looked at the jobs but there didn't seem to be any going. So Terry sat up and read the news out while we had our tea. Then I told him I'd be back in a minute, and I went downstairs and barged right into the kitchen when Mrs. Clegg was getting the breakfast.

Mrs. Clegg, I said, Terry's shifted his gear into my room.

Then he can shift it out again, she said.

No, it's stopping there, I said, and I suppose you don't happen to have another bed.

Who's paying the rent ? she said, and I said I was.

All right mister, Mrs. Clegg said, only it'll be extra for the room.

Good, I said, but what about the bed ?

Well, we fixed it up. Mrs. Clegg said we could have Fanny's bed and Fanny could sleep on the floor. And seeing it was just a stretcher we could fold it up for more room during the day if we liked. I said wasn't it a bit tough on Fanny, but Fanny jumped about and said she *wanted to* sleep on the floor.

So that was all right, and when I went back to Terry there was Mrs. Popeye sitting on the bed in her kimono-thing.

Our Maggie's come to see us, Terry said.

Good, I said. How are you Maggie ?

I'm feeling fit, she said, and the way she sort of slowly blinked her eyes made me think of a kid's doll.

We know what you're fit for, Terry said.

That's right, Maggie said, and she asked how was her back hair.

Bitch, Terry said, and he went on reading the paper.

That's no way to talk to a lady, Maggie said. Me being a married lady, too.

Well, Terry said something pretty rude to her then but she didn't seem to mind. What with her fringe she certainly looked like a sort of cheap doll, though she showed real rabbit's teeth when she giggled.

Fancy you two boys sleeping here together, she said.

That's all right Maggie, I said.

Yes, she said, two's always better than one if you don't like a crowd.

I don't get you, Maggie, I said, but just then Terry hit her whack over the head with the-paper.

Get out, he said.

But Maggie didn't seem to mind. She said she'd be seeing us again and cleared off to her room, and I told Terry I wouldn't mind trying her out even though she wasn't my type, though her being married made a bit of difference. And Terry said she was no more married than he was, and anyhow he wouldn't have her on if she were hung with diamonds.

I thought it was about time I was getting along to the Daily's, so I told Terry I wanted to get down town but he needn't worry about getting up until he was ready, and I told him what I'd fixed with Mrs. Clegg.

I'll meet you at the Daily's at twelve o'clock for dinner, I said, and I gave him half a dollar. And I went off whistling and feeling life was good when a man had a cobber like Terry to kick around with him, and maybe I was feeling good because I was thinking what a hell of a good joker I was. Though if I was I was kidding myself, because when all said and

done I was only doing what I was to please myself, though it might have been a roundabout way of doing it.

I went along to the Daily's anyhow, and besides everything else the weather was still staying good, so I didn't leave off whistling, and the Dally was standing in front of the peter with his hands in his pockets. And he looked a bit worried.

Hello, I said, here I am and I'm after a job.

He looked a bit more cheerful when he saw me but he looked suspicious.

How did you know ? he said.

Know what ? I said, sort of innocent.

Never mind, he said, but what do you know ? Have you ever done the work ? he said.

Sure, I said, I've helped the cook in camps out in the bush.

It's not the same, he said, but he told me to come with him and he took me out the back and told me to get busy on a bag of potatoes.

Wait a minute, I said, what are the wages and how long do I work?

He didn't look too pleased over that, and instead of telling me he said it was no good me starting if I hadn't got an apron. But just then the cook came out of the kitchen and said he'd lend me an apron, so the Dally said what the hours and wages were, and then I got the apron from the cook and got busy on the spuds. And by the time I'd done a few benzine tins full time was getting on, and I had to get the sink all clear to be ready for the twelve o'clock rush. And when the whistles blew I went outside and Terry was waiting, so I gave him the works and told him to meet me when I knocked off. Then I had to go inside again and get busy, and what with being new to the work, and except for time off to get outside the two meals that were thrown in with the pay, I was kept busy without hardly a minute to spare right until the time I knocked off.

It was good having the job though. I came out feeling everything was O.K. and I met Terry and after we'd splashed

an a talkie we went home and the two beds were all set, and Terry had cleaned up the room and made everything real tidy. There was hardly any room to move about certainly, but we didn't let that worry us, no, we made us cups of tea before we went to bed and I said it would be beer once I got my pay. And I wasn't long going to sleep, though I remember Terry woke me up several times with his coughing, and each time I could see the red dot of a cigarette in the dark, and I supposed he felt the need of it but it only made him cough all the worse.

Then each morning it was the same. I'd wake up feeling good and I'd put the keetle on and go and buy Terry a paper, and maybe Maggie would come hanging around cadging cigarettes, and sitting on the beds while she talked. And I wouldn't have minded taking it easy but I'd have to get off the Daily's, and the morning I went after I'd given Terry my last half dollar I was a bit worried because it was still a good few days to payday, and Terry hadn't managed to pick up any sort of job. He just kicked about the town all day and came into the Daily's for his meals, and I didn't blame him if he wasn't trying much for a job because every day he looked more sick, and at night the way he coughed was something awful. I thought if I could get Maggie on her own I might ask her for the lend of a few bob, but I changed my mind because I thought of another stunt.

I got up before it was light and Terry never woke up, and this time I picked on a different locality. It was just getting daylight when I got there, and I picked on a street that ran off the main road from near a bus-stop, and sure enough the papers had been delivered. So I collected the lot and parked them in a heap in a shop doorway, then when the buses began to run I stood at the bus-stop with the papers under my arm, and it wasn't long before I'd nearly sold out. Of course I thought the stunt was a good deal more risky than the last one especially as a good few jokers came out of the street I'd been down and went very crook about their papers not being delivered. So between buses I put what was left back in the

shop doorway, all except one which I kept for Terry, and then I had to do the long trek back because I didn't like the idea of being seen on a bus. And it took longer to do because I kept off the main road as much as I could. So it was late when I got back to Mrs. Clegg's, and I only had time to look in and give Terry the paper and half a dollar and then get along to the Daily's. And I felt a bit windy all the rest of the day, and off and on for a few days after. But nothing happened, so I was lucky, and what with a half-dollar I borrowed from Maggie Terry didn't go short of any meals before payday.

But by the time my second payday came round I was well sick of working for the Dally. He was certainly tough to work for. He was tight with the hot water, and it was hard to make a job of the dishes when there was grease floating thick on the top of a sink full of dirty water. And there were things I saw that put me right off the tucker. If the pumpkin wouldn't cook the cook'd put it out on a big dish and work it through his fingers until he'd squeezed all the lumps out. And a man hardly had time to wipe off his own sweat, let alone roll a cigarette, so for a spell I used to go out the back and pretend to do a job for myself. But I couldn't do that too often, because if there wasn't any cleaning up to do there was always the spuds to keep ahead with. You had to put them in a machine and turn the handle to knock the worst of the skin off, and with the weather like it was it certainly made a man sweat doing the turning.

I never got much chance to talk to any of the girls either, and it was a disappointment because there were several good-lookers among them, and I wouldn't have minded trying to fix a date. But with all of us going for lick of our lives there'd only be time for a wisecrack now and then, though one of them began pinching me on the backside every chance she got. I didn't mind, though I'd rather have done the pinching myself, but the cook got my goat when he started trying to do the same thing. He was a tonk all right, just a real old auntie, and I'd met the sort a few times before. Right from the jump he'd come hanging round me if the boss wasn't about. He'd

want me to let him do things for me, so just to keep him quiet I brought along a big bundle of washing which included Terry's as well and so help me if instead of turning it down he didn't do the best job I've ever seen done. And it was then he started doing the pinching, which made it mighty awkward for me seeing I'd let him do the washing. And what with working alongside him every day he had me a bit worried, and what with the tough work I knew my feet would get itchy and I wouldn't be able to stick it out at the Daily's for long.

And I haven't mentioned it before but it was coming on to Christmas, and it worked out that payday came just the day before. So after I'd knocked off me and Terry had a spree up in our room. We got Maggie to come and be in as well, and so help me if she didn't know how to drink beer. And when the party was going properly we got Mr. Clegg to come and be in too, and even his missis came and had a few. So that night we were all happy.

Then when I knocked off Boxing Day Terry was waiting to tell me I'd landed the double I had on with the taxi-driver. So that was a bit of real All Right. We decided to have another spree, which we did with the same crowd, and we were all happy a second time. Then the next morning I decided to turn in the job at the Daily's. What with my wages and winning the double, I had a fair bit of sugar in my pocket even though the two sprees had knocked me back considerably. And Terry said why not try my luck at the races. Well, the weather was still staying good as gold, and I thought it would be great to have a day out at the Races with Terry. So I told the Dally a yarn about how I had to go home and see my mother because she was sick, and he let me finish up that evening. And when the cook found out I could hardly stop him from sort of getting all over me, and you can believe it or not but he went out and bought me a bunch of flowers. I thought he must have heard the yarn about my mother, but when I said something so help me if he didn't begin to cry. He hadn't bought the flowers for anyone except me, he said.

II

IT turned out a bosker day the day I went to the races with Terry. Though it hadn't rained for so long, each day was just about as good as the one before if you didn't mind the heat. I paid Mrs. Clegg some rent in advance just in case, then we went out in the tram, and there was a tremendous crowd going, all flossied up for a day out and looking a lot different from what they looked like coming home. Though, of course, I wasn't thinking of that at the time. No, like everybody else, Terry and me were out for the day, and you know the feeling. Terry looked good and didn't cough much; he was funny the way he piped off people he saw in the crowd, and I could have grabbed him round the waist and chucked him up in the air. I was that full of beans I was sort of feeling that way.

But once we were on the course, which had all the grass burnt off by the sun and looked hard going for the horses, it was easy to see that going to the races wasn't exactly a holiday for Terry. He took it all very serious. And if I said anything when he was standing in front of the Tote trying to figure out what he'd back, he'd go crook and tell me not to be a nark.

Well, I said, put on ten bob and we'll go down and see them at the barrier.

No, he said, you go.

No, I said, you come, too.

No, he said.

So I said O.K. and gave him a couple of smackers. And after he'd been up to a window we went and got a good possie, and it wasn't long before the balloon came down and then they were off. And it was certainly great to watch; you could see the colours on the jockeys coming round the rail, smooth as if they were birds flying, and I wished Terry had said what we were on, but I felt that way I didn't care. It was only ten **bob,** anyhow, and I got all worked up just out of the fun of **the** thing, **though** Terry **didn't look any different, not even when** they were coming down the straight. Of course, I

thought he'd say if we were in the money once they'd passed the post, but he never said anything, so I thought we must be stiff. He just waited until the judge's placings went up, then we went down to the birdcage to watch the horses coming in for the next race, and I forgot all about being stiff because I was thinking what real good horses they looked. There were a couple I thought I wouldn't have minded backing if I'd been there on my own, but I thought no, Terry knows his stuff, so I'll just leave it to him. But when the prelims were over and we were going back to the Tote, Christ, if Terry didn't pull out four tickets that were duds.

Gee, four! I said. But I knew I'd torn it soon as I spoke, because Terry pretended he was too busy with his card to take any notice. So I just said too bad, and I gave him a couple more smackers.

And so help me if this time it didn't turn out that Terry was on a good thing. But, gee, I felt sore I'd opened my trap, because it turned out he'd gone easy with only ten bob and it was a pretty good divvy. All the same, we went and had a few beers on the strength of it, and I was feeling that sore I had to make Terry let me shout. Then next race he went in solid, but he had no luck, and after that it didn't matter what he did, he couldn't do anything right. And I was trying all the time to laugh it off, but there were times when I'd be feeling bad at the sight of people coming away from the pay-out windows. Because they'd be sticking money in their pockets and looking that pleased with themselves. I knew I'd have looked the same way myself, but I couldn't help thinking it just showed what money does to you .

Then it came on to the last race and Terry hadn't had any luck, so I told him to take my last quid, though I didn't tell him it was the last. He didn't want to take it, but I had to make him, because I was still feeling sore over not keeping my mouth shut.

We better quit, he said.

No, I said, give it one last pop.

No, Terry said, better not.

Go on, I said, you take the sugar.

Well, Terry put the quid on, but we didn't go down to our usual possie. Terry said he was getting done in, and you could go round the side of the Tote where the pay-out windows were and see the finish of the race pretty good from there, So we stood on a seat under the trees and joked about how we'd be first to the pay-out windows, anyhow.

But I never took much interest in the race because I was busy getting an eyeful of a joker that was already waiting ovei by the pay-out windows. He looked a weak sort of joker, just a little runt, though all turned out in his Sunday best, And to begin with I thought he was canned, because fast as he was eating a sandwich it came out his mouth again. 1 told Terry to look, but just then they were coming down the straight, then when I turned round again the joker was coming over our way.

What won? he said, and he stood there with lumps of chewed bread coming out of his mouth.

Teatime won, Terry said, and I believe the joker would have fallen down if he hadn't grabbed us round the legs. Sc we got off the seat and sat him down, and for a while he looked real sick.

I knew he'd be tough, he said. I saw the way he lifted his feet in the prelim, he said, and he had me and Terry staring at a handful of tickets.

I put a tenner on, he said, and he'll pay that.

Maybe, Terry said, and then the figures went up and Teatime had paid a tenner sure enough.

Twenty tickets, the joker said; it was all the money I had, I lost my job, he said, and I've got my mother to keep, bul I did like the way he lifted his feet up.

Well, we got introduced all round and the joker said his name was Reg, and Terry began to get sort of friendly with him, and maybe I began to get an uneasy sort of feeling. But I'd had enough experience of opening my mouth for one day, so I didn't say anything.

Terry said we'd take Reg over to collect his dough, so we

went over and got first at a window, and we all stood in the queue, this Reg in between the pair of us, and Terry talking nineteen to the dozen about racehorses. I'd never heard him say so much before, though I noticed he never said a word about how Reg was going to collect a hundred quid.

Then after a bit the windows went up and Reg got his money and Terry took us out a gate where he said we'd get a taxi, and sure enough we were lucky enough to get one. And the first pub we came to Reg wanted to stop for a drink, but Terry said leave things to him, and we finally pulled up at the biggest pub in town. Reg paid for the taxi, and inside there was a crowd, but Terry pushed up to the counter and Reg stood us drinks just as fast as we could get the barman to serve us, and although it wasn't far off closing time we all had a good few in by then.

But right until we were turned out I hadn't sparked up much, because Terry was still doing all the talking, and he was getting that friendly with this Reg. He certainly had me thinking things, though I admit I couldn't properly get a line on what it was all about. But I didn't want to interfere, so when we were all standing outside in the street I said I was going home.

No, Terry said, you come and eat.

No, I said, I want to have a lie down.

What you want is a bellyful of tucker, Terry said.

No, I said, and I said so long and shoved off, and I thought Terry would go crook, but he just let me go.

I wasn't happy about shoving off, but I was in one of those moods you get in sometimes. Before I turned the corner I took a look round, and Terry and Reg were still standing outside the pub, and it looked as if Terry was still doing all the talking. It made me feel sore, though I couldn't get things at all straight in my mind. Terry's after that boy's dough I told myself, but I didn't believe it all the same. No, I thought, Terry's a decent bloke, and I don't reckon he'd do a thing like that. On the other hand, what did I know about Terry ? He wasn't the sort that ever lets you know much about

himself, though you could tell he always had a lot going on in his mind, even if you had to guess what it was about. Terry wouldn't do a thing like that, I kept telling myself, but I sort of felt it was no good telling yourself that about anybody. Anybody is liable to do anything, I told myself, particularly where there's money concerned. And I remembered how out at the races I'd been thinking what money does to you.

But what was I worrying about, anyhow? Because Terry could 'do what he liked so far as I was concerned. He was up against it the same as I was, and when things are tough a man can't be worried. That's what I thought when I pinched the money out of the milk billies, so where was the difference? And then I thought maybe I was only feeling sore because I was jealous of this Reg. Because I'd thought Terry was the sort of joker who'd go solid with a cobber, and quite apart from the money business I didn't like the way he cottoned on to Reg.

But it was no good letting myself be worried, and I wasn't doing myself a bit of good standing there watching the pair of them. So I turned the corner thinking I'd go to the flicks, but then I remembered I only had a few odd bits of chicken feed left in my pocket, and that made me start thinking all over again. Oh, hell! I said to myself, I'll go and have a feed.

So up towards Mrs. Clegg's place I turned into a quick-lunch eating joint, and so help me if I didn't run into Maggie.

Hello, Maggie, I said. All on your pat, I said, and seeing she was eating a pie I asked for one myself.

Fancy meeting you without your boy friend, Maggie said.

That's all right, Maggie, I said. And who's my boy friend, anyhow?

As if you didn't know, she said, and she started doing the blinking doll stunt.

No, Maggie, I said, I don't know.

Go on, she said.

So I told her not to talk like a blinking idiot, and that

sort of shut her up, though it was a blinking doll I should have said. And I started to kid to her a bit, and you could see she was in the mood for a bit of kidding to. I put my hand on her leg underneath the table, and instead of carrying on and acting silly she just let it stay there, so when we'd finished eating I asked her what she was doing to put in the evening.

I got nothing on, she said.

Then let's go somewhere, I said.

No, she said, I better not. My husband's ship comes home any day now, so I better be a good girl.

Sort of save up, I said.

That's right, she said. Matelots have got to save up, so I ought to, too.

Do they save up ? I said.

Well, she said, you're asking me.

And what about you ? I said.

Well, she said, sometimes. It all depends. Anyhow, she said, what about yourself?

You can save up too damn long, Maggie, I said.

I know, she said. My God ! she said.

Come on, Maggie, I said.

So I paid for the pair of us, which left me practically a skinner, but what with the way things were I was too far gone to care about almost anything, except maybe whether I could do a line with Maggie.

Do you want to go to the pictures ? she said.

No, I said, let's walk, and we just walked, and Maggie was sort of serious; I'd never struck her in the same mood before. She didn't seem to be taking notice of anything I said, and we just kept on walking and turning corners. But she was the one who sort of decided which corners to turn, and seeing I hadn't taken much notice where we were going, I got a surprise when I discovered we'd parked nearly outside Mrs. Clegg's. But I hadn't time to say anything before Maggie said no, let's keep on walking. So we kept walking, but now I was a wake-up to what was in MaggieVmind. I was sitting

up and taking notice, so to speak, while we went on turning the corners, and I wasn't surprised when we pulled up outside Mrs. Clegg's a second time.

And this time Maggie said come on up, and she went up the stairs pretty fast, with me following. And upstairs I followed her straight into her room, and she shut the door. Then when I looked at her and saw the way she was breathing I knew she wouldn't be able to stop herself, so I naturally felt my heart begin to beat a bit.

Take it easy, Maggie, I said, and we sat on the edge of the bed, and she was shivering, but I told her to take it easy, and I put my arm round her and she cuddled up until I got my hand on her bubs. But so help me if she wasn't that flat chested I couldn't even feel anything. And seeing I didn't know what to say, I said something about that. But it made her go crook as anything.

You needn't be personal, she said, and she jumped up and stood there looking at me, and she looked properly hot and bothered.

Don't be silly, Maggie, I said. Come over here, I said.

But she went on standing there, and I was wondering what I did next, though, as it turned out, she didn't waste much time deciding things for me.

Take it easy, Maggie, I said. Struth, I said, but she was too keen. So I just lay back; I thought I'd let her work off steam a bit. And it was just as well I did back-pedal, because the pair of us were wake-ups when we heard somebody coming up the stairs, and when the door opened we were just sitting on the edge of the bed, though I suppose a man has to admit we must have both looked considerably hot and bothered.

Anyhow, it was Maggie's bloke Bert. And he was a big matelot, though not a Pom, it was easy to tell he was a Pig Islander.

Hello, he said; but he didn't look at all pleased to see me there, though, of course, Maggie jumped up and began to make a fuss of him.

You're looking good, Bert, she said, and Bert said he was a box of birds, and until Maggie chipped in he began telling her how his ship had got in late that afternoon and he'd got leave.

Bert, Maggie said, this is Bill. -

How are you, Bill ? he said, and I got off the bed, but he didn't shake hands or anything; he just went on talking to Maggie, and 1 could tell she was worried over the way he was taking it.

Things didn't look any too good to me, so I thought I'd best clear out. I said I was going and Maggie said hooray, Bill, and I went over to my room. And there wasn't any sign of Terry, so I sat down for a bit. I felt I needed to pull myself together, because what with running into Reg at the races, and now this Maggie business coming afterwards, everything seemed to have gone wrong. And the last few weeks things had been that good.

It wasn't a bit of good just sitting there, though; I knew I'd have to get out in the streets. But I'd hardly made up my mind to go when I heard an argument start over in Maggie's room, and I opened the door a bit so I could listen. And, to begin with, I couldn't hear much, and later on, when they'd got to arguing loud enough for me to hear, I didn't want to hear. In a way I didn't anyhow, because my name was being brought in, and the way things were developing it sounded as though there was going to be a serious row. Things didn't ease off any either; they got a lot worse. It was you did and I didn't more and more and louder and louder, and when it developed into let me go and you're hurting me, I knew things were getting serious. He's going to beat her up, I thought, and I thought it was about time I got off down the street. Because what could I do ? Terry'd always reckoned Maggie wasn't married, but who could say? No, I told myself, I'm not going in there. I felt sorry for Maggie, naturally, but I thought it was no good trying to do anything if I was the cause of the trouble. So I went out, and in the street you could still hear the pair of them tearing into each

other, and it only took a minute or two before Maggie began to yell. Christ, I thought. But I knew it was best to keep out of it, and I began walking the streets just the same as I'd done with Maggie.

And I didn't go home for a long time that night. I thought I'd wait until Terry was sure to be home, so I kicked around the streets until it was well after midnight, and it did me good, because there's always plenty to see going on round the streets, and it takes your mind off things when they go wrong. There's lots of other people in the world, you tell yourself, and you start wondering what they're like. And maybe you decide everybody must be pretty much the same in most ways if you could only find out. That's my idea, anyhow, though I admit I may be wrong.

I walked about for quite a while, then I decided I'd go and sit on a seat on the waterfront. And down there I watched some white patches that you could just see rocking on the water, and I decided they must be seagulls. I wondered why you never see them sitting on wires like you do other birds, and I decided it must be because of their feet. And thinking of birds made me remember about the pigeons I used to shoot in the bush, and next minute I'd started calling myself a fool for wanting to come into town. Town's no good, I told myself. A man doesn't have any say; he just gets pushed about. And when I started to go the length of the main street just once more, I was thinking I'd go and try for a farm job first thing next morning. But next minute I was remembering how I'd nearly come a thud over Maggie, and then I forgot everything else because I was thinking about Terry again.

But I got a knock, because up at Mrs. Clegg's there still wasn't any sign of Terry, and all the stuffing sort of went out of me, so to speak. I certainly felt blue. But I thought, chin up, a man can't be worried. I listened, but there wasn't any sound from Maggie's room, and it sort of cheered me up. I bet it all ended up in a good old kafuffle, I thought. Good luck to them, anyhow, I thought. Then I turned in, and

never thought I would, but I went right off to sleep without doing any more thinking.

But when I woke up late next morning Terry still wasn't there. It made me feel bad, but I thought never mind, he'll turn up. Yet I felt sort of jumpy. All sorts of things that might have happened kept coming into my head, and just because there wasn't any sign of life from Maggie's room I worried over that as well. Though I told myself I needn't, because they'd naturally be sleeping in, that was if Bert hadn't had to go back to his ship.

Then when I had a cup of tea I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to go out and miss Terry, yet I knew it would give me the dingbats if I just stayed on there waiting. So I decided I'd leave a note and then go out. Which is what I did, and along the street I caught up to Mrs. Clegg, who'd gone out ahead of me and was pushing an old pram. And walking along I looked in the pram, and it was filled with things out of the kitchen, including a good few tools that must have belonged to her old man.

Gee, I said, selling up the home.

Not yet, she said. It's this weather, she said; it makes that man think he can take things easy.

It makes me lazy, I said. I wouldn't mind if it rained.

You know, she said, he never done that to her before.

Mr. Popeye? I said.

If it wasn't for the money I'd turn her out, she said.

Yes ? I said.

Then next minute she pulled up outside a pawnshop I'd noticed there before.

I go in here, she said, and she wheeled the pram inside. Things must be tough, I thought. And then I turned the corner and ran right into Terry.

Hello, boy, he said, and I couldn't help it, I had to tell him I was pleased to see him.

How are you feeling ? I said.

Good, he said, but I thought he looked pretty crook on it. Have you had your breakfast ? I asked him.

No, he said, I haven't had anything.

Come on, I said, and when we passed the pawnshop I could see Mrs. Clegg still inside. Let's step on it, I said, and soon as we got in I let Terry go upstairs while I went into the kitchen. I couldn't find anything to eat, though; there was nothing that would have fed even the budgie. But Terry said never mind, he couldn't eat, anyhow. So I made him a cup of tea and he drank that, then he took off his coat for a he down, and I was all the time wanting to ask him if he had any money, but I didn't like to.

It was good having him back, though, but while I was wondering whether I couldn't think up another of my stunts for picking up a little ready cash he went off to sleep. So I thought I'd walk about in the streets for a bit and maybe I'd get an idea. But when I got downstairs there were two jokers knocking at the door. I picked them for what they were right away, and so help me if it wasn't me they were looking for, and when they said they wanted to ask me a few questions I told them to go ahead, but I admit I had the wind up considerably.

You'd better come along to the police station, they said.

All right, I said, but what's it all about ? And they said I'd soon find out about that.

O.K., I said, but first I want to speak to my cobber upstairs.

Then I thought no, why worry Terry when he needed to get some sleep. And I wouldn't be away long, I thought. So I told them it didn't matter about my cobber.

Well, they walked one on each side of me, and I tried to talk to them now and then, but they took no notice. Though sometimes they'd have some joke on of their own, they'd talk across me just as if I wasn't there, and it made me feel as if I was some sort of wild animal they were taking through the streets. And occasionally I'd see people we passed who'd pick them for dees, and I knew they'd be turning round for

an eyeful. So, all things considered, I wasn't feeling so good by the time we got to the police station.

I didn't feel any better there either, because it was a big place, not at all the sort of place you feel you can make yourself at home in. We went up a lot of stairs and finally they took me in a room and we all sat down round a table.

You've been interfering with a woman, one of them said.

Go on, I said. Have I ?

But you'd never have guessed the way I was feeling from what I said.

It won't do you any good telling lies, the same one said, and he looked at some papers and said it was a serious something or other. Anyhow, he said, all we want you to do is answer a few questions.

All right, I said, first you give me the works, then I'll tell you my story.

And it was Maggie who'd been putting it across me, which is what I'd guessed, though how it had all come about I didn't know. You'd have thought they'd have told me that, but they never did. Instead they just sort of threw out hints, and the way they made out they knew everything that had happened just about had me thinking they must have had somebody there watching.

There's no question about what happened, one of them kept on saying, and they kept on at me until I said, all right, I'll tell you my story. Which is what I did, though I didn't say anything about Bert beating her up afterwards.

So then they sort of went over it all again.

You admit you put your hand on her, the one who did nearly all the talking said.

Yes, I said, but she didn't object.

She objected all right, he said.

Well, I said, maybe she did, but afterwards she didn't.

No ? he said. Then why did her husband come in and find her fighting to save herself ? And that was a new one on me, because they certainly hadn't told me that part of Maggie's story.

That's just baloney, I said.

Well, he said, she can show the bruises.

So then I said how Bert had beaten her up. But they said I'd only just made that up; if I hadn't, why hadn't I told **them** before? And they said it would make things a lot worse for me if I told lies.

Well, I tried to explain, but it did no good; they just went on saying I'd admitted I put my hand on her and she'd objected. And I got that fed up of arguing I felt that way I didn't care much if they believed me or not, though I sort of woke up when they said they were sorry, but they'd have to bring a case against me.

And it was certainly a knock because up till then I'd never realised I was properly i the cart; I certainly had no idea it was going to end up in a court case. And it naturally made me begin to worry about Terry. I didn't know what to say, and they said I was lucky it wasn't a more serious charge, and seeing I'd admitted what I'd done and hadn't told any serious lies I'd probably get probation.

I still sort of had too much stuffing knocked out of me to say anything, but probation didn't sound so bad, and maybe I wouldn't have minded so much if I hadn't been thinking of Terry. All the same, I didn't see how they could prove anything against me, but when I told them they said there wasn't any question about it because of what I'd admitted. And finally they said it would be best for me if they put it all in writing. And after we'd argued a bit more I got that fed up I thought writing it down wouldn't make any difference, so I went over it all again while one of them did the writing. And I admitted I put my hand on her, and I admitted she objected, and I admitted I let her go when I heard Bert coming, but I never admitted anything more, and besides other things I wanted them to put in about Bert beating her up, but they said it had nothing to do with it, and I couldn't say I'd actually seen him do it, anyhow. Then when it was all finished they got me to sign, and I could sort of tell they were thinking they'd done quite a good stroke of work. But I was so fed up I was past caring about anything much.

They wouldn't let me go away then, no, they said they'd try to have the case brought up in the police court that afternoon, but it mightn't be until the next morning. So I asked them if I could send a message to my cobber. I wanted him to come and see me, I said, and they said that would be O.K., they'd see Terry got the message. Then I asked them what the time was, and I'd no idea it had all taken hours and hours. The twelve o'clock whistles must have blown and I'd never even heard them.

I'll admit another thing, I said; I'm feeling empty.

We'll soon fix you up, one of them said, and they took me downstairs and turned me over to a John who wrote my name down in a book and told me to hand in all my money, but there was nothing doing, because I didn't have any. Then when he'd taken my belt off me (it was so as I couldn't hang myself, I suppose), he took me along a passage and locked me up. I sat down to save myself from holding my pants up, and I was sitting there thinking how it was the first time I'd ever been in one of those places, when the John came back with a tray that was loaded up with a big dinner. It was a real good dinner, too, two courses and plenty to eat, and I could have eaten the lot and more, but I thought gee, so far as tucker goes I'm better off than poor old Terry is. I might be, anyhow, I thought, because I remembered I didn't know whether he'd got any money out of Reg. All the same, I didn't like to think of Terry going hungry, so I tore some pages out of a Western that was in the cell and wrapped up half of both courses and put the parcel in my pocket. All in together, it certainly looked an awful mess, but I thought Terry wouldn't mind if he was feeling empty.

Then when I'd got outside the tucker I felt a lot better. I stretched myself out on a sort of long seat that was the only bit of furniture in the cell, and I thought if only a man never had any cobbers or anything, getting picked up by the police would take away some of your worries, anyhow.

I must have gone to sleep, because it seemed no time before the john was unlocking the door and telling me to come along.

And along at the end of the passage Terry was waiting for me. And if I wasn't pleased to see his wrinkled old Aussie's face! I certainly was. He grinned back at me, too, and the John let us sit together on a seat there, and I asked him how he was feeling now. And he said he was feeling good.

You don't look any too good, I said, but he said not to worry about him.

I'm in a jam, I said, and I gave him the works, and, Christ, if he didn't begin to laugh when I told him how I'd nearly had Maggie on.

How far did you get ? he asked me.

This far, I said, and I showed him. But I never even felt anything, I said.

I bet you didn't, he said. But go ahead, he said, and I told him the rest, and when I'd finished he said some pretty rude things about Maggie.

But don't you worry, he said, because there won't be any case.

They going to bring one, I said.

Don't you worry, he said.

I'll need to get a lawyer, I said.

You won't need any lawyer, he said. Listen, boy, he said, you don't need to worry, because I'm promising you there won't be any case.

All right, Terry, I said, but are you sure ?

Shake, he said.

All right, I said. And I certainly felt bucked, though I had no idea what he was going to do, yet I felt dead sure I could depend on him all the same, which was a peculiar feeling to have after the way I'd been feeling only the day before.

When does the case come on ? Terry asked me. And he said there was just one thing. I've got to get hold of Maggie, he said, and he told me if he couldn't get hold of her by next morning the case might go as far as the Supreme Court, which meant they'd keep me in clink until the sittings came on unless somebody would go bail.

Do you know anyone ? I said, and he said yes, may be he might be able to fix things.

All right, I said, I'm leaving it to you. But, Terry, I said, how are you off for sugar ?

I'll be O.K., he said.

Have you got any ? I said.

I've got a few bob, he said.

What about Reg ? I said, and I couldn't help asking him but I bet I went red in the face.

I won't be seeing Reg, he said. He sounded a bit annoyed, and I didn't know whether I felt glad or sorry, because Reg might have been good for a loan.

I'll be worried about you, Terry, I said.

You got no need to worry, he said, and I knew I'd better lay off, because I was getting him narked.

So I said O.K. and I told him not to move, and it was easy to put the parcel in his pocket without the John seeing. Then I couldn't think of anything more to say, so we just sat there, and I wouldn't have minded, if it had lasted like that for hours. But the john said if we'd finished talking I'd better come along, so we shook again and Terry said he'd tell Mrs. Clegg some yarn if she asked. Then we said cheers and I went along and was locked up, thinking everything was going to be O.K.

Nothing happened that afternoon. I had a lie down on the seat again, and I must have gone to sleep, because I don't remember anything until the john brought me another feed. And it was just as good as the one before, and I thought it was no wonder there were such a lot of cases when they stood you good tucker inside.

Then when the john came for the tray he brought me the blankets to sleep in, so after I'd had a read of the *Western* I decided to turn in, and I'd have had quite a good night if I hadn't been waked up by somebody who started kicking up a row somewhere along the passage. And by the sound of the voice I thought it must be some old girl who'd been picked

up for being tight. It kept me awake **for** hours, anyhow, but when I woke up at daylight everything was quiet.

And I woke up still feeling that everything was going to be O.K., so I was sort of impatient for them to take me into court and get it over. I had bacon and eggs for breakfast, then the doors all along the passage were unlocked and we all came out and they collected us along at the end where Terry and me had done our talking. There was a fair collection, too, I'd had no idea, though only one woman, and if she was the one who'd kicked up the row you could hardly believe it, because she looked quite all right. I thought she might have been any man's own mother, but of course it's a fact that nobody's the same person once they've sobered up.

We all had to stand there with a crowd of jacks in plain clothes standing round, and one in uniform called out our names and said what we'd been picked up for. And I didn't know what it was all about, but I suppose it was so as they could get us taped and pick out anybody they had anything else on. It made me go red, though, when I heard what it was I was charged with. It didn't sound too nice, I can tell you, and I thought damn it all, why give it that sort of name ? Anyhow, I thought, I bet all those jacks have done plenty they wouldn't like anybody to know about, particularly when you can give it such a rotten name.

Still, there was nothing I could do about it; I just stood there with the rest, and when it was all over they put us back in our cells again. Then when I was beginning to get the dingbats through being there so long on my own I was taken out by the two demons who'd picked me up. It was time to go over to the court, they said, and they asked me if I'd got a lawyer.

No, I said, I don't want any lawyer.

All right, one of them said, but don't say we didn't ask you.

Then they told me to come along, and it wasn't far to the police court, but I wished it could have been further. Because it was a fine summer's day (though no different to what it had

been for weeks), and we cut across an open place where there were flowers and trees. The grass was all dried up by the sun, yet it looked nice and cool there, just seeing a hose going made you feel cool. And it was nice to see some kids that were cutting across on their way to school, but I thought if a pair of dees hadn't been taking me to court I might never have noticed these things.

But, as I say, the walk was over too soon, and when we got inside the court we had to wait quite a time before my case came on. First there were traffic cases, then after a few drunks had been hauled up an old man that nobody could have much liked the look of was told off by his nibs for trying to do himself in. The bandage round his neck didn't improve his looks either; he looked sick, I can tell you, and you'd have thought no man would have treated him as rough as the magistrate did. But I bet he thought he was treating him good by letting him off.

Then after the old man it was my turn, and I'd been sitting down with one of the dees while I kept my eyes open for Terry. And there wasn't much of a crowd that'd come to watch, so it was easy to tell he hadn't turned up. I had to stand there while they told the magistrate the case, and then Maggie was brought in to say her piece. And she only took one look at me and never looked my way again. And you'd hardly believe anyone could tell a story that was all baloney as well as she did, and it certainly knocked me plenty. She was all flossied up, and to begin with, you sort of felt she was enjoying herself properly. But when she'd got nearly to the end something went wrong, because instead of answering a question she suddenly went white and hung on to the rail in front of her. And his nibs said to let her take her time, and he looked at me as if he thought I needed to be watched or I'd be trying to swing another one across her. But it never worried me much because it was just then I spotted Terry. He was standing in front of the crowd with a grin a mile wide, and when he saw me looking at him he winked and jerked his head over towards Maggie. And it certainly gave me a nice

feeling to know he was there, but things were sort of going round in my head so much I couldn't even wink back.

Maggie got going again and I fixed my attention on her, and when she'd finished one of the dees went into the box and read out what they'd written down. Then there was some talk about Bert, his ship was away, they said, but the magistrate said it didn't matter about Bert because of what I'd admitted in my statement. And then he went on and said a whole rigmarole about what he was going to do, and what would happen if I said I was guilty or not guilty. But I never had much idea of what he was saying, because I was suddenly a wake-up to what I'd let myself in for when I signed that statement. I understood things then, I can tell you, and it made me feel hopping mad. Instead of listening to his nibs, I just couldn't take my eyes off the two demons. And, Christ, I thought. And I couldn't think of anything except Christ!

But I knew it was no good letting my feelings get the better of me. So I told myself to hang on. I said not guilty all right, and when he asked me something about bail, I said I didn't want any bail, because I'd looked at Terry and he'd shaken his head. I remembered how he'd said the case might go as far as the Supreme Court, anyhow, and way at the back of my mind I was still feeling dead sure of Terry even if things had got in a worse tangle than I'd expected.

All the same, it was a hard job trying to stop my feelings from getting the better of me when I was walking back to the police station with the two dees. Because I thought they'd played me a rotten trick. But I didn't say anything except ask them what happened next.

You wait, one of them said, we'll look after you.

Yes, I said, I'm reckoning on that.

But I needn't have tried to be sarcastic, because a man needs a lot sharper tongue than I've got to get under any dee's skin.

It was all right being back, though, because of the tucker. I asked the John who fetched the tray what happened next,

and being quite a decent bloke as I'd thought he was right from the beginning, he stayed and talked and told me a lot.

They'll take you out there, he said, and he said it might be in a taxi or it might be in the Black Maria. And when I asked him what it was like out there he said he didn't know much about it, but he reckoned they'd treat me all right until I got convicted.

I'm not getting convicted, I said, but he only said, good luck, boy, and shook hands.

Well, it wasn't until late in the afternoon that the Black Marie came for me. It had blokes on it dressed more like soldiers than cops, and another joker was taken out and put inside as well as me, and there wasn't much room inside because it was chock full of stuff they were taking out to the gaol, and I had to sit right up behind the driver's seat, where I could look out a little window and see what streets we were going through. And instead of going straight out to the gaol we went down the main street and pulled up outside a butcher's shop while they put some boxes of meat on board, and it looked more like dogs' meat to me. But while we were waiting I looked out the window, and so help me if Maggie didn't go past. She stopped to cross the road, too, and watching out for the traffic it seemed as if she looked right at the window. I don't suppose she did really, and it was only for a second, but it made me feel very funny inside.

There were no more stops, though. After that we kept right on to the gaol, which was a long way out of town, and soon as we were out there we had to help unload the stuff. Then they took us inside and put our names down, and after they'd put black stuff on our fingers and got our fingerprints, they took us into a big sort of hall with iron doors along both sides, and locked the pair of us up on our own.

So there I was. And I'd only had time to look out through the bars and see there was nothing to see except a concrete wall and some sky above, when they brought me a hunk of bread and a pannikin of tea, which was certainly not so good after that I'd been getting. Then after a bit the light went

on, and to stop myself from doing any thinking I had a read of a detective mag that was lying there. But the yarns were all about crooks, and I reckoned they were a lot of baloney, nothing like the real thing at all. So I chucked the mag away and walked round a bit, and I may as well tell you that when you're in clink there's always a spy-hole in your door. You can't see out, but if you keep your eyes skinned you can always tell when anybody has come along for an eyeful. And that first night I just happened to be watching when somebody came along and moved the slide, so I asked could I have a dab of vaseline to put on my piles. And mister peeping Tom said he'd have to see about that.

Of course, it was mainly a gag just to have somebody to speak to, though as a matter of fact my piles were hurting pretty bad. And while I was waiting I thought I'd have a read of what was left of a Bible, and I'm blowed if I didn't strike the yarn about Joseph and his coat of all colours. It was a real good yarn, too; I liked reading it a hell of a lot, but before I'd got through the light went out, and there I was in the dark, and it didn't look as if the vaseline was going to turn up. So I thought I'd better turn in, and it sounded as if the jokers locked up alongside were doing the same thing because I could hear their beds creaking.

And maybe it was because of the way those beds creaked that I couldn't get to sleep. They didn't stop creaking, and I thought maybe they were jokers like me who'd been locked up for the first time. It made me start thinking about what makes a man get tough and land himself in clink. Because all those jokers must have been the same as I was once, too, just kids. And I started to remember the times when I'd get a kick on the behind for pinching out of the bin where they threw the rotten fruit along at the auction mart in the town where I lived. And the times when the old man would come home tight, and us kids go out in the morning and find him lying in the onion bed without hardly a stitch on. And I remembered other times, too, and I never thought about Terry or Maggie much. I just couldn't take my mind off

the jokers that were locked up alongside me, because their beds never left off creaking all night.

I was glad when it was morning, because, as I say, it doesn't matter what sort of a night you have, things are always different in the morning. When I heard a noise of doors being unlocked I got up and put my pants on, and when the doors were all unlocked you had to stand outside while a sort of procession came round. First you had to empty your jerry into a can, then you got your tins of porridge and stew off a tray, ami last you got your pannikin full of tea out of another can. Then you had to be locked in again while you ate your breakfast. But that first morning I couldn't eat much of it, because they might have called it porridge, but you couldn't tell by the taste. You could hardly tell the tea by the taste either, but I'm not going to tell all about what it's like in clink. Most things you soon get used to; if you don't eat you feel empty, so it's best to eat and after a while you never leave any. And maybe the main reason why I couldn't eat my breakfast the first morning was because I was wondering whether they'd leave me locked up on my pat all day. Also I was beginning to worry about Terry again. I wondered how the hell he'd get on for chips, and I was hoping to God they'd give me his letter if he wrote one, though it turned out I needn't have worried about that.

It wasn't long before the doors were unlocked again and they took us out in a yard with concrete walls all-round, and I thought it was all right because of the company, though a screw shouted out we were not to tell each other "about our cases. Everybody had plenty to talk about without talking about their cases, anyhow, and when it got too] hot in the sun we all went under a little roofed-in part, and with everybody squatting down and taking it easy while they talked the usual sort of talk, it might have been any crowd of jokers that were cutting scrub or working on the roads on relief. Because they all had ordinary clothes on, and up till then I hadn't found out they were all jokers that were

waiting to come up in court, though a few were dinkum lags who were all togged up to go into town in the van because they needed to go into hospital.

But, as I say, I'm not going to tell all about what it's like inside just because I was in for a few weeks. There'd be too much to tell, anyhow.

I never got any letter from Terry the first day or the day after, and I felt if one didn't come soon I'd have the dingbats worse than I'd ever had them before: What with hardly getting any sleep and listening to the beds creaking all night, I thought I'd go silly, and then maybe they'd have to take me away to the rat-house. But a letter came all right. And was it a relief! Terry said chin up and cheers and I needn't worry because he'd fixed things, though he couldn't get anybody to go bail, he said, but he was still trying and maybe he'd have some luck. And he wound up that I was not to worry if he didn't write again, because things were fixed for sure (with a line under the word sure), and I needn't be worrying about him either because he'd be O.K.

So while I was feeling the relief I wrote back saying what a great cobber he was, and how he certainly had my thanks. And I put a letter inside for Fanny. I told her I'd gone away for a few weeks, so I was leaving her to look after Terry. Get your mother to give him something to eat sometimes, Fanny, I said. And I put in a bit about the money tree, and how I knew for certain it liked little girls that were kind to people. I didn't think it would do much good, but maybe it was worth trying. And I asked her in a P.S. if she'd taught the budgie to do any new tricks.

And it wasn't until several days after I'd written the letters that I began to get the jitters again. Because Terry didn't write any more, and even though he'd told me he mightn't I couldn't make it out. And lying in bed at night when I couldn't sleep I'd start thinking he might only have pretended to help me, while all the time he hadn't done anything at all. I hadn't said anything about my case to anybody inside, but quite a number had told me about theirs, and they all said

you were a goner once you'd signed a statement admitting anything you'd done. There was no way of getting out of it then, they said, and they'd be that certain they knew the whole works I'd get the wind up considerably. So lying awake at night I'd start thinking rotten things about Terry. He wants me put away, I'd tell myself. Yes, I'd think, that's what he wants, because I'm the only bloke that knows he was with Reg after he collected the hundred quid. And once I'd got as far as thinking that way I'd sort of let myself go, and work out all the different ways he might have used to get the money out of Reg. And I'd tell myself I could bet he'd left Mrs. Clegg's and I'd never see him again. Because say they put me away for five years? I'd think. And I couldn't help it, I'd break out in a sweat.

But of course it was mainly during the night-time that I'd be thinking these things. When it was daylight I'd sort of feel maybe I'd gone off to sleep without knowing, and only dreamed all I'd been thinking. I'd go out into the yard thinking everything was going to be O.K. and I'd be all right unless any joker said something that was liable to start me worrying again. Some days they'd talk about their lawyers, and they'd all reckon they'd got good ones. If they didn't get off, they reckoned, they'd get only a light stretch. And I hadn't got a lawyer. I had the law dead against me, and instead of trying to do anything about it I was just relying on Terry. And I'd ask mysef what could Terry *do* against the law all on his own any more than I could? But then I'd think if I tried to do anything I might only spoil what it was that Terry had said he'd fixed. So there I was, sort of feeling I was liable to be caught which ever way I went, and some days I'd feel if things didn't stop going round in my head I'd end up in the rat-house for sure.

I've never known time drag like it did during those weeks. Some days were that long I thought they'd never finish, and the nights were worse. Yet it seemed no time when they started taking away a few jokers each morning to have their cases tried. And when I sort of woke up I found I'd got easy

about things. I felt I didn't care what happened. When they asked me didn't I want a lawyer to defend me, because the country would pay if I couldn't, I still said I didn't want any lawyer. Because I'd worked myself into a state. Things couldn't be any worse than they .were, I thought, and if Terry was going to let me down it was just too bad. Yet even though I'd got to the stage of thinking I didn't care what happened to me, I'd be liable to break out in a sweat at the thought of what might be happening to Terry. He might be no good, I thought, but he was sick, anyhow; I'd like having him for a cobber and we'd had some good times together. And the thought of him having nothing to eat was the one thing I could never make myself feel easy about.

You could feel the difference in the place once the van started going in each day with a few jokers to be tried. All the rest were wondering which day it was going to be their turn, and that's the sort of thing that would give any man the jitters. We'd always been keen to find out how things had gone, yet we never got much chance. Because several got off and never came back, and those who'd got convicted would be wondering how long a stretch they'd get, and that's the sort of time when you don't feel like asking a man too many questions. Or if their cases hadn't finished they'd be in just as rotten a state, so it wasn't easy to find out anything much.

Then the morning came when it was my turn, and I was told to get myself shaved and make myself look respectable. And I was just a bundle of nerves waiting to be taken out of the yard, but once we were in the bus, three of us, each with our pannikin and a hunk of bread to eat at midday, I didn't feel so bad. I was lucky enough to be sitting up by the window again, and it was good to look out and see the places we went past.

We didn't see much of the outside world, though, because the bus backed right in at a door, and we were taken out and locked in a cell right away, all of us in together. And

it was easy to tell the court-room was somewhere upstairs because of the sound of feet moving. My two mates were going up for sentence and it wasn't long before they were taken out. I was left there on my pat, so just to calm myself down I walked about the cell, and it was a terribly dirty place, nothing like what I'd been used to. All over the walls there were drawings that must have been done by jokers who'd had to wait there, and they were nearly all drawings of jokers being hanged or lying on their backs with knives stuck through them. And underneath it would say: NEVER MAKE A STATEMENT TO A DEE. Or: THIS IS A BLOODY DEE AND THIS IS WHAT HE'S GOING TO GET. And calling the dees for all the names you can think of.

But it wasn't long before one of my mates was put back in again, and I didn't know what he'd got, but he took it pretty hard. He just sat there with his head in his hands and didn't say anything, and I would have liked him to talk because it was hard to bear the sight of him sitting there. I'd been told he had a missis and several kids, too. But I didn't have to put up with it for long, because my other mate came back, and then it was my turn. I said O.K., but before I got out the door the first joker jumped up and gave me his fist to shake. Good luck, boy, he said, and I thought it mighty nice of him. It made me feel as if I was nearly going to cry.

Well, the screw took me along a passage to the bottom of a little stairway, and I had to sit there and wait, and another joker was waiting there as well, and when he looked at me so help me if it wasn't Ted, the bloke who'd pinched my money that day on the beach.

Well, I'm blowed, I said, and just for a second I thought he was going to pretend he didn't know me.

No talking about your cases, the screw said.

O.K., brother, I said, and I asked Ted how things were, though it was a stupid question to ask.

Not so good, he said.

I'm telling you in your own interests, the screw said.

That's O.K., brother, I said, and I told Ted I was pleased

to see him, anyhow. Though that was a stupid thing to say, too, because before I could say any more another screw came down the stairway to fetch Ted, and I thought he might be going up thinking I was trying to rub it in over pinching my money. Which I hadn't intended to do at all; no, it was just that seeing somebody I knew I was only trying to be friendly.

And waiting there on my own I began wondering what had happened to his girl Mavis, but it seemed hardly more than just a few minutes before he came down again, and this time I didn't say anything because he looked well shaken up. He certainly looked white. The screw took him straight off down the passage, and he said something as he passed me, but he seemed to be only talking to himself. And I was wondering why I'd never struck him out there; he'd been out on bail, I supposed, when it was my turn to go up the stairway.

And it was a surprise to find I'd come out right inside the dock where I had to stand while my case was on. It wasn't so good standing up there with the court full of people that had come to watch, all sorts, besides men for the jury and all the officials and lawyers. But after a time I had a look round to see if Terry was there, though I soon turned round again, because there were too many that were looking me straight in the face and taking me in as if they'd never seen anyone like me before.

There was nobody on the jury I could have said I'd ever seen before, and I had to wait a fair time while it was being called. I thought things would never get started, but they did at last when the charge was read out and I was asked if I pleaded guilty or not guilty. Then a lawyer got up and said what my case was about, and after the judge had said something, sort of saying it so nobody could get the guts of it at all, Maggie's name was called out and she came in looking all flossied up. She had to swear on the Bible and the lawyer asked her her name and other things about how we'd been living at Mrs. Clegg's. Then he asked her to tell about the night of such and such a day, and he gave the date, and how anybody had remembered I don't know, because I

hadn't. And Maggie said how I'd come into the quick-lunch place and started talking to her, and afterwards we'd gone up to her room.

Did you invite him to go with you to your room ? the lawyer said, and Maggie said she didn't remember.

I didn't mind him coming, she said, and the lawyer said oh. Then he blew his nose and looked at his papers before he said anything more.

Well, he said, what happened ?

There wasn't anything happened, Maggie said.

You must tell the court what he did to you, he said.

He never did anything, Maggie said, and the lawyer said oh again.

Come along now, he said, we can all understand your feelings, and he sort of looked round at everybody. But you must tell the court, he said.

And Maggie began to go red, but she still said I never did anything. And you could tell it was a surprise to everybody. They stayed that quiet listening you couldn't hear any sound except the sound of breathing, and when the lawyer blew his nose it sounded that loud everybody jumped, and after that it wasn't quiet any more. You could hear people talking, and they had to be told to pipe down.

Maggie didn't go any redder than the lawyer did, anyhow; he started to get in a temper! I can tell you, but the judge chipped in and started to talk to Maggie, but she went on saying no and no. Then the judge said something to the lawyer, and he went on asking Maggie questions. Hadn't I done this to her? he said, and hadn't I done that? And Maggie got a bit rattled, but she still went on saying no.

So in the end the judge chipped in again, and I couldn't hear all he was saying, nobody could, but he said something about wasting time, and when the lawyer said something about what I'd admitted in my statement he said he wasn't going to let the case go to the jury just on that. And he went on and said a lot more that I couldn't get the guts of at all, but in the end he did say I'd have to be discharged.

And he hardly got finished before the screw that had been sitting on the stairs, where he was just out of sight of everybody, told me to come down, and while I was going down he grabbed me by the hand and said I was the luckiest bloke he'd ever known in his experience.

You mind your step in future, my boy, he said, and going along the passage I was in a sort of daze. All the screws came round to shake my by the hand, and I had to sit down because my legs felt as if they wouldn't hold me up.

When I was outside I was still shaking, but I felt a lot better after I'd taken a few big lungfuls of air. And I reckon that's what anybody would feel the need of if they'd just walked out of court without getting a stretch.

But of course I was thinking of Terry, so I didn't waste any time getting round to the front of the court. There were people standing about talking and a few recognised me, and I noticed that now I wasn't standing in the dock they looked at me in quite a different way, but I couldn't be bothered because I had Terry on my mind. I looked inside, but there was no sign of him, the place was empty, so just as fast as I could travel I made tracks for Mrs. Clegg's place.

III

THE budgie was out on the front of the house, but inside it was all quiet down below. I went up the stairs a good many at a time and Terry's and my room was empty, the bed was made up, but the stretcher was gone and there was no sign of anybody's things, and I couldn't help noticing a smell of disinfectant. So, without hardly knowing what I was doing, I went over and opened Maggie's door, and there was an old man lying on the bed with only his shirt on.

Sorry, I said, and I said, Where's Terry? But instead of saying anything he just heaved a half-eaten apple at me. So I slammed the door and called out Sorry again; then when I looked out the window of the other room I saw Mrs. Clegg along at the end of the clothes-line, and I didn't waste any time in getting down to her.

Hello, I said, and straight off I said, where's Terry ?

But she bent down and put a clothes-peg in her mouth, and I had to wait until she'd pegged it on the line before she answered.

He's in hospital, she said.

Where've you been? she said, and I looked her straight in the eye, even if I did pick on the glass one.

I've just been away, I said.

Look at that, she said, that's where he coughed up his blood, and she pointed to a sheet on the line.

How long ago ? I said, and she said two days, and I turned round to go without saying anything more. But Mrs. Clegg called out:

There's rent owing, mister, she said.

O.K., I said. I'll come back.

And making fresh tracks for the hospital I felt in as bad a daze as I'd felt in only a short time before.

Up at the hospital they wanted to make a fuss about me seeing Terry.

Are you a relative ? they said.

No, I said, just a cobber.

And the bloke on the other side of the counter looked at me as if he was down on anybody that was just a cobber.

Well, he said, don't you come here again out of visiting hours. And he told me the number of the ward and said to ask for the sister.

The sister wasn't a bad sort, she gave me a smile and took me out on the veranda, and there was old Aussie-face sitting up and leaning on a heap of pillows. He grinned when he saw me too, but, Christ, if he didn't look crook.

Hello, Terry, I said, and he said hello, boy, and for a while we didn't seem to have anything else to say. I just sat there holding on to his hand, and after giving us a few looks the jokers in the other beds looked away, and I thought it was mighty nice of them.

You're not feeling too good, I said, but just as usual Terry said there was nothing wrong with him.

I want to be out of here, he said.

You'd better stay if you're crook, I said.

I'm not crook, he said. Listen, boy, he said, to-morrow they're going to put me down in a shelter, and he sat up further to look over the veranda rail, and I could see the little shanties he was talking about. It'll be easy to walk out from there, he said.

But can you walk, Terry? I said.

I can walk, he said. You come up to-morrow afternoon. They can't keep me, he said.

All right, Terry, I said; but I knew I'd have to think it over.

You fix things, he said.

I'll have a try, I said. But have you got any chips ?

No, he said.

Never mind, I said, I'll fix things.

So you got off all right, he said.

How did you work it, Terry ? I said.

I worked it, he said, and he wouldn't say anything more.

Forget it, he said.

Then the sister came back and said my time was up. So I said so long to Terry, and caught up to the sister and asked her a few questions. Terry was pretty bad, she said.

How bad ? I said, but she said I'd better ask the doctor if I could find him.

And my luck was in, because going down the stairs I stopped a young joker in ajwhite coat, and he just happened to be Terry's doctor.

That man's in a bad way, he said.

That's no good, I said. But will he get better ?

No hope, he said.

Well, I said, how long will he last?

Too hard to say, he said. It's just like that, he said, and he ran on up the stairs.

And it's too hard to say just how I was feeling when I

came out of the hospital. I got the feeling again that my legs wouldn't hold me up, so I went and sat on a seat in a bus-stop shelter shed, and I remember I 'was in such a daze I didn't seem to be thinking of anything at all, hot even Terry. Nor noticing anything, either. Because people would go past, or they'd come in and sit on the seat and talk, but I never moved or took the slightest bit of notice.

I sort of began to take notice when a dog came up and started sniffing me. Hello, dog, I said, and he stood there in front of me with his tail going. And after a bit his mouth started dribbling. You're thinking of tucker, are you? I said, and I remembered the piece of bread I had in my pocket, and when I took it out the dog's tail wagged faster. I didn't know the time, it must have been well on in the afternoon, but I hadn't felt hungry. The bread tasted good, though, and I broke off small pieces and gave them to the dog, and when I had no more to give him he went down on his belly with paws stretched out in front, and his tail swept a clean place on the floor of the shed.

But when I'd eaten I decided I'd have to do something, so after I'd kidded to the dog a bit, I went down town and waited until I got the chance to use the phone in a pub. Then I looked in the book and rang up a parson that came visiting once while I was out there. I got him all right, and he said he remembered me, and after he'd talked a lot of palaver, I said I'd got no money and was in need of a job.

Well, he said, I know a gentleman who helps young fellows in your position. He's a very fine gentleman, indeed, he said and he told me the name and I waited while he looked up the phone number.

You ring that number, he said. And remember, he said, anyone of us may stumble if we depend on our own strength alone.

That's right, I said.

Good-bye, he said. May you receive grace and strength, he said.

Yes, good-oh, I said, and thanks very much.

Then I rang the other number, but a girl said the joker wasn't there. She told me to ring his house number, which I did, and got on to his missis. And she said he wasn't home, but he would be in that evening, and instead of ringing again I'd better call and see him.

So I promised I would, and then I went into the bar, but the counter-lunch hadn't come out. I went outside and waited and then I went back and picked on a pretty classy joker that was there on his own. I just went straight up to him and asked him if he'd stand me a half-handle.

Sure, he said. Have a large one, he said, and he called the barman and got the drink.

Things a bit tough ? he said.

I'll say, I said, and he talked about the depression and I make the drink last until the tucker arrived. Then we both went over and I put away quite a lot in quite a short time, and when the joker saw the way I was eating, he sort of turned the plates round so as the biggest pieces were next to me.

Eat up, he said.

But next minute some of his cobbers came in. They were all classy jokers, too, and the first one didn't take much notice of me because he was too busy talking. I stood there finishing the drink, and so help me if I didn't hear them start talking about the Court cases. And by the way they talked I thought they must be lawyers. It made me feel a bit nervous, because I thought they might say something about my case, so when they had more drinks all round, and my joker turned and asked if I'd have another, I said No, thanks, and shoved off.

I thought I'd need somewhere to sleep that night, though I wouldn't have minded flopping in the park, with the weather so good, but, of course, there was Terry to consider, so I thought it wouldn't do any good to put off trying to fix things with Mrs. Clegg.

But soon as I got up there I ran right into Fanny, and it was a hard job getting her to put off paying a visit to the money tree.

You promised, Bill, she said.

Yes, I know, I said. But did you look after Terry?

Yes, she said, because he was sick.

You're a good girl, Fanny, I said. And seeing I was feeling glad that Terry had been looked after, I said that later on I might buy her another budgie, though, I told myself, I oughtn't to be making any rash promises.

Then I went in and Mrs. Clegg and her old man had finished dinner and were having a cup of tea. So I sat down and had a cup and we had quite a long talk, though Mr. Clegg was all the time going on about politics and rocking it into the government. Off and on he was reading the paper, too, and I had the jitters wondering if he might come across my name.

If things don't improve, there's going to be hell to pay, he said.

You may be right, I said.

Yes, he said, when the winter comes there'll be trouble. And it was a fair dinkum prophecy, though I had no idea at the time.

But later on when he went off down the street, I had Mrs. Clegg on her own, and it was a hard job putting it up to her.

I have to think of the money, she said.

I know, I said. But, listen, I said, you've g6t two rooms empty now, because when people can live in washhouses and sheds for a few bob, they won't rent rooms. So why not take Terry and me?

You mightn't pay, she said.

I'll pay, I said. Look, I said, I've got hands, I can work. If I don't pay to-day, I'll pay to-morrow.

And in the end I got her to say yes when I promised I'd let her have ten bob just to show her, first thing in the morning.

Well, that was something off my mind, and when I looked at the clock I thought it was about time to go and see the joker the parson had put me on to.

I had to walk a long way to get there, and it was a posh house, one standing in a big garden. But I thought, Well

he can't eat me, and I rang the front door bell. It was his missis that opened the door though, and she took me inside into a big room that was fitted up like a sort of gymnasium. Over in the corner there were parallel bars and all that sort of gear, and a heap of things like soccer balls, crash helmets, and golf sticks. And all round the walls were pictures out of the Bible with texts underneath.

She made me sit down, and then she said she was sorry but her husband had gone out.

He's so busy, she said, and she asked me if I'd ever been there before.

No, I said.

Well, she said, my husband is such a busy man. I'm sure you wouldn't want to come and take up any more of his time, she said.

So I asked her how did she mean ?

My husband is so good to all his boys, she said, but if he doesn't give it all up, I think he'il have a breakdown. I do really, she said.

I said I was sorry to hear that, but I was only being polite because it was her I felt a bit sorry for. She looked pretty sick on it. I've never seen anyone look as black round the eyes, and, besides everything else, she looked a bit batty because her hair was all over the place.

I only wanted to know if he could get me a job, I said, and I told her how the parson had put me on to him.

Yes, I know, she said, he sends so many, but she smiled and said of course it wasn't my fault.

Couldn't you go away and do farm work ? she said.

Yes, I said, I'd like to, but just now I haven't got a penny to my name.

Then if I give you a pound, she said, will you promise you won't waste it or spend in on drink ?

Yes, I said, I'll promise that.

And you'll try very hard to find a place on a farm ? she said.

Yes, I said, I'll do that.

Very well, she said, here's more than a pound, and she got up and took thirty bob off the mantelpiece. Though She held on to it until we were out on the veranda, and before she handed it over she said there was just one more thing.

I want you to promise you won't ring my husband up any more, she said.

All right, I said, I'll promise that.

The poor man, she said, he's just wearing himself out.

You want to get him to take a holiday, I said.

She said it was nice of me to say that, and I went down the path thinking she must be a bit crazy. But I had the thirty bob in my hand.

Well, it was late by the time I got to bed, and when I woke up in the morning I felt done. Another day, I thought, and I sort of didn't want to face it, so I kept my eyes shut and turned over and tried to go off to sleep again. It wasn't any good, though, I was only kidding myself, and I knew I'd better get moving. I hopped out of bed, and while I was stretching I looked out the window at Mrs. Clegg's washing, which was hanging on the line just like it was on the first morning I stayed there. The weather didn't look any different, either, it was just as hot, and I wasn't sure, but I thought I could get the whiff from the heap of sawdust in the butcher's back yard; and just for a second it all gave me a sort of peculiar feeling, because it seemed to be that first morning all over again, and as though I'd gone back and started again, and nothing had happened in between.

If only it hadn't all happened, I thought; but then I thought if one thing doesn't happen another one does, so what's the difference? But I couldn't help feeling there's always a difference, all the same.

I went downstairs and collected my things and Terry's from Mrs. Clegg and borrowed the teapot again, and she lent me a few teaspoonfuls of tea. And she looked bucked when I gave her half a quid. I fixed up with her about the stretcher, and told her I'd be bringing my mate home later on.

Though I didn't say anything about how I was going to manage about his tucker if he had to stay in bed. I thought it best to leave that over in the meantime.

Then, when I'd had my tea and was out in the streets, I felt life wasn't so bad, though I had a longing to go up and see Terry right away. But I'd looked in the phone book and found out the visiting hours, so I was putting it off until the afternoon.

I went and looked at the paper in the library, but there didn't seem to be anything doing, so instead of trying the registry offices I decided I'd go and have a shot at getting on relief. And after a long wait in a queue down at the place I got to a window, and the joker there said right away that as a single man they wouldn't consider me unless I'd go to a camp in the country.

Yes, I said, but I've got a sick cobber.

That's nothing to do with us, he said.

No, I said, but I've been sick myself.

What's wrong with you ? he said.

And I didn't know what to say, so I said I'd strained my heart.

Who's your doctor ? he said.

Well, I said, I haven't been to one here, and I told him I'd had a job in the country, which I'd had to give up because of my heart.

All right, he said, we'll see if you're fit. And after he'd written on a form, he gave me a slip of paper and told me where to go.

If you go now, he said, he might put you through this morning.

So what was I to do ? I'd told the yarn about my heart, but I didn't think there was anything wrong with me. Yet I thought I might as well go and give it a pop, so I went round to the place, and it was a broken-down building in a back street, and when I looked inside there was a big dark room with rows of jokers sitting on wooden seats. They didn't look any too cheerful either, no, most of them were

old jokers, and they all looked as if they were properly up against it.

And while I was standing there a door opened up the far end, and an old joker came out buttoning up his pants. Then a young fellow came out and called a number, and another one of the crowd got up and went in, after which I was called up and had my slip changed for a piece of cardboard with my number.

Sit down and wait your turn, he said.

So I went back and sat with the last row of jokers, and the one next me started talking.

Wait your turn's right, he said. That's what I've been doing all my life.

It's no good, I said.

Yes, wait, he said. You can wait here or you can go home and wait, it don't make no difference. It might as well be your funeral you're waiting for, he said.

It's certainly no good, I said.

Wait, he said; yes, wait till the guns go off. You wait, boy, he said; you'll find out you were born just at the right time.

But, knocking around, I'd heard all that sort of talk, so I asked him how long you had to wait.

It depends, he said, you never can tell. We might have to come back to-morrow if the quack's not through by the time he feels like having a bite. I bet he has a good bite, too, he said.

I bet he does, I said. Anyhow, I said, I'm going out for a breath of air, and he said I'd better be careful if I didn't want to miss. You never can tell, he said.

I went outside, anyhow, and just across the road there was a parking place for cars, and up against the wall of a building I noticed a lot of bikes were parked. And so help me if I didn't get one of my notions.

I picked on one of the bikes and rode off, and not far along there was a street that cut right up through the park. And I pedalled up that hill just as fast as I could make the bike go.

When I got to the top I was done, and I turned round and let her run down again. I parked the bike outside the place and looked inside, but there was still nearly the same number of jokers, not counting a few more that had turned up. So I came out and repeated what I'd done, and kept on several times over. Then I reckoned I'd have time for just one more and when I got back I was that done I could hardly stagger over and put the bike back where I'd got it from.

Well, I timed it pretty nicely. I just had time to cool off and get my breath under control when it was my turn and once inside the room the quack asked me straight off what my trouble was.

I've got a bad heart, I said. And without saying anything he put the things in his ears and had a listen. He listened for quite a time, too, then he stood back and looked at me.

Who's your family doctor ? he said.

You are, I said.

You look all right, he said.

I don't feel too good, I said.

So then he had another listen.

Breathe naturally, he said.

I'm trying to, I said.

And after a bit he sat down and wrote, and before he'd finished writing he told me to go back to the office next morning.

Next, he said, and the young fellow shoved me out, and I came away without having any idea how things had gone.

It was over, anyway, and next minute the whistles blew and I decided I'd go a bob dinner. It seemed a mean thing to do, considering the hole Terry and me might be going to be in, but I thought it might be as well if I kept my strength up. I risked going to the Daily's, and as usual at that time he was standing behind the peter, and he seemed as if he was quite pleased to see me.

Is your mother better ? he said.

And I had to think, because I'd forgotten that yarn.

She's fine, I said.

Good, he said. That is good for you. And it is good for me now you are back to eat here.

Yes, I said. And I sort of realised for the first time he must talk about it being good for somebody to just about all his customers. And I thought that, seeing he hadn't said anything, it was no good asking him about a job just then.

After I'd eaten, I just slowly worked my way over to the hospital. Visiting time hadn't started when I got there, but I risked going round the building, and I found Terry all right after I'd looked in a good few shelters. He had one all to himself, though there was another bed, and he said he'd have a mate by to-morrow. But he started on right away about how he wasn't going to be there to-morrow.

There's nothing wrong with me, he said.

Did you walk down here ? I said.

I can walk, he said.

Have you tried ? 1 said.

Listen, boy, he said, there's nothing wrong with me except I feel a bit done-in.

O.K., I said, because it wouldn't have done any good telling him he looked awful, and I knew if I kept on I'd only get him narked.

I never could stand being kept in at school when I was a kid, he said.

No, I said, no more could I.

How did Mrs. Clegg take it ? he said.

She took it good, I said. She's a real nice woman, I said.

She's all right, Terry said.

Listen, I said, I've got enough chips for a taxi, so why not come now ?

No, he said, because I don't want any fuss. And you hang on to your chips, he said.

So I said O.K., again, and he started talking horses, and all the time I was hearing about which ones would be certain to win the autumn meetings, I was wishing he'd give me the works about Maggie instead, because I still couldn't get that business out of my mind. But Terry was still talking about

the horses when a bell rang and a nurse came past and said visiting time was over. And Terry told me to come up again after nine o'clock, when lights were out.

Nobody will see you if you come up from the bottom of the hill, he said.

And I thought that was a good idea, so I said so long and went straight over the grass and down the hill from where I was, just so as I'd have an idea of the way in the dark. And I knew it would be easy, because I could turn round and wave to Terry almost until I was down on the road.

It was lucky I went that way, too, because some relief jokers that were working on the road had just finished up for the day. They were locking their shovels in a box and putting their barrows all together, and as I went past I couldn't help thinking that one of those barrows might come in handy.

Well, I kicked about the streets until it was time to pick up the usual bit of counter-lunch, then I went up to Mrs. Clegg's and got her to lend me a piece of dripping, which I thought I might need just in case the barrow wheel started squeaking. And I took the blanket off my stretcher and carried it folded up over my arm, though I thought Terry wouldn't need it on such a warm night.

Then time began to drag pretty badly while I was waiting to bring off the stunt, but I went and had a cup of coffee in a coffee and sandwich place, and a hard-case old sheila in sand-shoes came and sat next to me. She was the sort you see going into pubs carrying shopping bags with good wide mouths. She kept putting her hand on my arm, so I bought her a cup of coffee, and she said wouldn't it be nice to go for a run in a taxi.

Sorry, I said, nothing doing. But with things as they were, I thought, maybe, I wouldn't have minded if I could have got her to pay *me.*

By nine o'clock, though, I was up on the road below the hospital, where it was pretty quiet at that time of night. I tried the barrows until I got the one that ran easiest, and after I'd greased her up and left her by the fence, I climbed over,

and Terry saw me coming up thejiill and struck a match so as I wouldn't mistake his shelter.

And everything went O.K., though all the time we were a bit windy in case some joker in one of the other shelters might ring the bell and give the show away. Terry had managed to hang on to his clothes and they were folded in his locker. He could hardly stand, but I got him dressed, and before we shoved off he left a note he had written all ready. Then I got him on my back, and it was easy taking him downhill, because he didn't seem to be any weight at all.

We've got our taxi waiting, I said, and he said, Oh, yeah! but he thought it was a great stunt when he saw the barrow.

He didn't need the blanket, but he sat on it folded up, and to begin with it was easy because it was still downhill. But then there was a long hill to go up, and I had to keep stopping for rests, and Terry joked about how I needed more benzine, and said, Horsey, keep your tail up. And a few people passed us, though no cops, and if we saw them coming I'd have a rest, and Terry'd get out and sit on the edge of the barrow, just so as not to attract too much attention.

We had to get across the main street, though, and that was worrying me considerably. But we took the barrow down pretty close and parked it on the edge of the footpath, then Terry got out, and with me hanging on to him he could walk, though only slowly, but I got him across, and propped him up against a railing, where he could sort of half sit down while I went back for the barrow. And wheeling the empty barrow across didn't attract much attention, and we were lucky, because there weren't any cops.

And we got up to Mrs. Clegg's all right, and I got Terry on my back again and carried him up the stairs, though when I'd put him on his bed I just had to flop myself, because I was nearly busted.

Maybe it was the joke of my weak heart that helped me to get my strength back, and I certainly needed it because Terry was lying there helpless just like I'd dumped him. And I thought I could bet he looked a long sight worse than I did,

even though I'd been doing all the work. So I doubled his pillow up and used my own as well, then I got him undressed, and I'd never noticed it before, but there was a string round his neck with a medal thing at the end of the loop. I had a look and it said: I AM A CATHOLIC. IN CASE OF ACCIDENT, SEND FOR A PRIEST.

It was a new one on me, but I asked him if he wanted me to.

If you like, he said, and he closed his eyes again and I had to pull him about until I finished off trying to get him comfy.

Are you all right ? I said.

I'm O.K., boy, he said, and I turned off the light and left him, because I knew I'd better go and put the barrow back, even though I was feeling more like leaving it until the morning.

Gee! but I was tired the next morning. My head felt as if it was stuck to the bed, and my eyes felt as if they'd had some glue used on them as well. But there was Terry with his wide open. And that was always one thing about him, no matter how crook he was, his eyes always looked bright and lively as a bird's.

I just lay there trying to get over the tired feeling, and after a bit I started joking with Terry about how we only needed to ring a bell and we'd get our breakfast brought in; and in the end I hopped up feeling quite lively.

You won't be getting up to-day, I said.

Not to-day, to-morrow, he said.

So I mucked about and got two cups of tea, and then Terry said how about the paper? I went out and got him one and bought a loaf of bread and a quarter of a pound of butter as well, and he said he didn't want any breakfast, but he ate some. And while he was eating I got him to look at the jobs, but he said there didn't seem to be any going.

Then, when I'd got myself looking tidy, I told him I was going out but I'd be back to see him at midday, and I gave

him the tobacco I had left, and he was sitting up reading the paper and looking as if he never had a worry in the world when I went out. Except that he looked so crook.

I went straight down to the unemployment office and waited in the queue, and when I got to the window the joker looked up my papers, and then I had to go round to a counter and wait to see another joker. And he said they wouldn't send me to camp, instead they'd give me about a day-and-a-half's relief work a week, and I'd draw fourteen shillings. I thought that would be all right because it would pay the rent with quite a few bob over, but when I'd filled in the papers he said I'd have to wait a fortnight before I began. And I tried to argue it out with him, but it did no good; he said I could take it or leave it. So there wasn't anything I could do, but I came away feeling sore over having to wait a fortnight.

Except for a ten-bob note and some chicken feed, I had hardly anything left in my pocket, so I went down on the waterfront for a sit-down while I tried to decide what I'd do next. Though what with the ships and the wharves, there was so much going on down there, my mind would sort of shy away from trying to decide anything for me. And I was just beginning to think I'd better get off up the street again when a young joker came and sat next to me. We got talking, and he said he was out of a job, but he'd soon be going back on a farm again. He'd been working there before, he said, and the farmer bloke had sent him a letter to say he could come back if he liked to break in twenty-five acres of rough land, and take it over on easy payments. He told me all about it, and if there wasn't any catch it sounded as if there might be something in it. So I told him the jobs I'd had on farms.

Well, he said, how about being mates and going together 7

And I liked the look of him, so I said O.K., right off, and the thought of being back working on the land again made me feel suddenly all worked up. But next minute I remembered, so I said wait on a bit, because I'd need longer time to decide.

Where can I see you to-night ? I said.

Well, he said, it will have to be early, and he said how he was sleeping in a railway carriage, but you needed to be early if you wanted to get a decent possie. So we fixed a date for the afternoon.

Where do you eat ? I asked, and he said he went on the ships; there were some of them that stood you quite a good feed, he said.

I'm going on now, he said, so you come along.

Sure, I said, and we'd got a fair way along the wharf before I remembered again. I stopped, and said I'd changed my mind, and I suppose he thought I was batty, because he went on without stopping. And I suppose he knew I'd never turn up at the place where we'd fixed the date.

But I put it all out of my mind, and went up the street and spent my chicken feed on a couple of pies, and got the girl to put on tomato sauce just to give them a taste. Then, coming out I ran right into Maggie, and she went red, but she stopped and said she'd been wanting to see me.

How are you, anyway ? I said.

I'm feeling good, she said.

You didn't look ,as if you were feeling any too good in that witness box, I said.

And she looked away and said wasn't it a pity, and she'd been wanting to apologize.

He beat me up that bad, she said.

He certainly did, I said.

He was a brute, she said. I ran away right into a cop, and he stopped me, and I said a man had tried to put one across me.

Too bad, I said.

I didn't know what I was saying, Bill, she said. He wouldn't let me go, he made me go to the police station so he could give me to those awful men.

The two demons, I said.

Yes, she said. They kept on that long I had to say it was you.

You didn't have to, Maggie, I said.

Yes, I did, she said, and she went red again. I didn't want to get Bert into trouble. Bert's all right, she said. I like Bert, he's been good to me.

So I said I suppose that was why he beat her up ?

I can't help liking him, Bill, she said.

All right, Maggie, I said, let's forget it. You put things right again, anyhow.

But I had to, she said. Terry said he'd put me away if I didn't. I'd forgot about Terry, she said.

I don't get you, Maggie, I said.

Yes, you do, she said. You can't tell me you don't know.

Skip it, Maggie, I said.

Of course you know, she said.

Cut it out, Maggie, I said, and I was feeling pretty annoyed.

All right, she said, but you can't kid me.

Well, I didn't know what she was driving at, and I thought the pies would be getting cold. I said I'd have to go, and Maggie asked me how Terry was keeping, and I told her the way things were.

Poor old Terry, she said. I might come up and see him sometime. I might bring Bert and some beer, she said.

Beer mightn't be good for him, Maggie, I said.

Aw, heck, Bill, she said. Beer's always good for everybody.

All right, Maggie, I said. I might be seeing you.

I said so long, and I hurried up to Mrs. Clegg's and found Terry half asleep, though he was lying on the top of the bed. It was too hot under the blanket, he said. He certainly looked hot, and I was worried, because I didn't think eating a pie would do him any good. But he didn't complain, and he ate bread and butter as well, and drank two cups of tea afterwards.

I was worried about leaving him again, and he didn't want me to go, either. He got me to get a pack of cards out of his suit-case and I played him whisky poker for matches, but after a few games he said he felt like having another sleep, so he settled down and I got him to let me put his over coat on top of him, just in case he caught cold.

I didn't stay long down tow, anyhow, because kicking

round the streets I couldn't think of a single thing to do. And in the end I began to feel reckless and decided to blow in nearly the whole of my last ten bob. I went to cheap places in back streets and bought mutton flap and things from the grocer's, besides a few nice things for Terry. And when I got up to Mrs. Clegg's with an armful she hummed and hahed, but I said everything was for her as well as Terry and me, and in the end she said she didn't mind putting on a bit extra, though she said she hoped Terry wasn't going to be in bed for long.

I thought I'd done a great stroke. I did the vegetables, then I went upstairs to lie on my stretcher and yarn to Terry. And while we were waiting for Mrs. Clegg to call out we joked about how it was just as good as staying in a flash hotel.

But later on we'd hardly finished eating when there was a noise on the stairs, and a second later it sounded as if some body had fallen down. I went out, and it was Bert and Maggie, and Bert had slipped on the stairs and was trying to get up, while at the same time he was hanging on to an armful of riggers. I went down and took the beer off him, and with Maggie shoving behind we got him to the top. Then he was O.K.; he had a good few in certainly, and so had Maggie, but they weren't all that tight. They'd brought a lot of riggers and I was worried, because I thought beer wouldn't do Terry any good; but I couldn't do anything, because he looked that bucked when he saw the pair of them. And he said straight off he was feeling dry.

It gave me a rotten feeling watching Terry put away the first few drinks, but once I had a few in myself, I felt different. Way at the back of my mind I was remembering what the young hospital quack had said. And I asked myself who was I to be interfering with anyone's pleasure in a world like this ? Though it wasn't too nice remembering what the quack had said, and I told myself the sooner I got lit up the better for my own peace of mind. And it wasn't long before I was telling myself it was nice to see a bit of colour in Terry's cheeks, anyhow.

It turned out quite an evening, though the pair of them stayed on far too long for my liking. Among four of us the

beer didn't last any too long, and when there wasn't any more Bert turned sort of sour, and the way he started picking on Maggie reminded me of Ted and Mavis, though with them it had been the other way about. Maggie was silly, the way she took it, too; she tried to throw everything back, and that only made Bert worse.

I'll make a proper job of you if I start this time, he said.

You'd better not start, Maggie said, and Bert said wouldn't he start?

You do, said Maggie. I'll put you away.

And maybe Bert would have started on her right then if Terry hadn't managed to grab hold of his two arms.

No rough house, he said.

No, I said, because we don't want any more cot cases.

But Maggie was too far gone to hold her tongue.

Anyhow, she said, I'm sick of wearing these glad rags round my legs.

You shut up, Maggie, Terry said, and he spoke mighty sharp.

I won't shut up, she said. What do I care ? she said. I'll put the both of us away.

And Bert tried to go for her then, but with Terry and me holding on, Maggie got quite a good start down the stairs before he could tear himself away.

Terry and me just lay back on our beds, and it was mighty nice to lie there listening to the quiet after all the row. And I didn't feel like saying anything, because all of a sudden I was a wake-up as far as Maggie was concerned. I lay there thinking back and trying to put two and two together. And I dozed off to sleep thinking unless you do it on paper, it's not always so easy to make two and two add up right.

I could go on and tell a lot more, but I don't see the use. Terry never picked up after the night of the party; no, he just sort of went steadily downhill. And there was hardly a thing I could say or do, though he never went short of tucker if he felt like eating.

I'd look at him lying there.

Terry, I'd say.

What is it, boy? he'd say.

Nothing, I'd say.

And then I'd say, Terry.

And instead of answering he'd just have a sort of faint grin on his face.

Terry, I'd say.

But I never could get any further than just saying Terry.

I wanted to say something, but I didn't know what it was, and I couldn't say it.

Terry, I'd say.

And he'd sort of grin. And sometimes I'd take his hand and hold it tight, and he'd let it stay in my hand, and there'd be the faint grin on his face.

Terry, I'd say.

I'm all right, boy, he'd say.

And sometimes I couldn't stand it, I'd have to just rush off and leave him there.

And one night when I came back again I looked at him and knew it was the finish.

Terry, I said, and he didn't answer.

Terry, I said, and I said I was going to get the priest.

Cheers, boy, is what I think he said, and I rushed off without even saying good-bye.

I found the place, and the priest said he'd come. So I waited and took him along and showed him Mrs. Clegg's, and told him where to find the room upstairs. Then I went along the street and the taxi-driver I'd won the double with was on the stand.

Do you want to take one ? he said.

No, I said, and I'd only got a few bob, but I asked him if he knew of any decent sheilas.

He grinned and put away the paper he was reading and told me to hop in.

You surprise me, he said.

And it was a fine night for a drive. Maybe if only it had rained, I remember I thought.

BOY

FOR my twelfth birthday my father promised me a box of paints.

If he behaves himself, my mother said.

I didn't say anything. Instead I did one of my famous big sniff-in sniffs. It was a case of urgent necessity.

Wipe your nose, my mother said.

I began counting the days to my birthday, and at the rate they went I didn't see how I'd reach my birthday this side of being an old man.

With a week to go I reckoned it was time to remind my father about the paints just in case he'd forgotten. But it turned out I didn't remind him because that afternoon after school I broke the window of the shed in our backyard. It wasn't the first time either, though always an accident of course.

But the last time was almost too long ago to remember. That's how it seemed to me anyhow, though I did sort of somehow remember clearly enough that I'd been promised a thrashing the next time it happened. So I got quite a surprise when all my father did was to promise me a thrashing if it happened again.

It had me properly worried. Things being what they were I didn't feel like reminding my father about the box of paints, but I thought if he could forget one promise he could just as easily forget another.

Anyhow years and years went by and one morning I woke up and found I was twelve years old. It was all too marvellous for words. At breakfast mother gave me six new handkerchiefs and said that no decent twelve year old boy ever went anywhere without a clean handkerchief in his pocket. And father told me that he'd bring the box of paints when he came home from work that evening.

Well, that afternoon after school I was out in the back yard with my shanghai, and when I took a shot at a thrush

that came and sat on our gooseberry bush you can guess what happened. My hand slipped of course.

Mother heard the noise and came to the kitchen door.

You know what your father said, she said, and went inside again.

When my father came home I was in my room lying on my bed. I heard him put his bike away in the shed and then I could hear him and mother talking in the kitchen. And then mother called out for me to come to my dinner.

I went, and my father was sitting in his place taking a look at the paper before he carved the meat. I sat down and we had dinner and I never said a word and father and mother never talked much either. And I could see the box of paints wrapped in brown paper lying on the top of the sewing machine.

When he'd finished his dinner my father took out his pipe and pointed.

Your paints are over there, he said.

First you can help me with the dishes, my mother said.

But I dropped the tea-towel when I saw my father light a candle and go out to put another piece of glass in the window.

I'll hold the candle father, I said. And here's the putty-knife father, I said.

I helped him a lot I can tell you. I helped him until he growled at me for helping him and told me to go and help my mother instead.

Later on that evening I painted a thrush in mid-air with a most painful look on its face and half its feathers flying. I told my father and mother it was because I'd landed it with my shanghai.

Neither of them seemed to think much of my painting.

It's half an hour past your bedtime, my mother said.

I felt like telling her it was only twenty-five minutes, but I somehow thought with my father there I'd better not.

But it was only the next day that my father heard me answering my mother back, and oh gee if he didn't lay it on.

OLD MAN'S STORY

HE was sitting there on the waterfront, and off and on I watched him while he read the newspaper. He looked a frail old man, I don't mean feeble, just frail. Delicate. You see such old men about and you wonder how it is they've lived so long, how it is that some sickness hasn't carried them off long ago. You think perhaps life has always been easy for them, you look at their hands and feel sure about it. Though hands will sometimes deceive you just as much as faces.

It was good to be sitting there on the waterfront. Besides the old man there were ships alongside the wharves to look at, and the sea, and seagulls. The seagulls were making their horrid squabbling noises. It was because of a slice of buttered bread lying close to our seat, the butter gone soft and yellow in the sun. The seagulls wanted it, but didn't dare to come so close to us, and I watched them, wanting to see if they'd have the courage. Then the old man frightened the birds away by saying the word, Terrible! I looked at him and his cheeks had turned red, and *I* understood it was because of something he'd read in the newspaper.

Have you seen this ? he said, and I leaned over to see the column he was pointing to.

Yes, I said. It was about a man, an adult man and a young girl. A Court case.

Terrible! the old man said.

Yes? I said. Maybe you're right. Anyhow, I said, five years in gaol is terrible.

Yes, the old man said, five years in gaol. Terrible !

Oh, I said, I get you. I don't go much on putting people away, I said.

No, the old man said, it's terrible.

But people say, I said, what can you do?

I don't know, the old man said. But I knew of a case once. It didn't get into the newspapers.

Well, the old man told me, and it was quite a story. It had all happened when he was a boy, fourteen years old perhaps, or thereabouts. He'd just finished school and for a time he went and worked on his uncle's farm. It was a nice place, he said, an old place in a part of the country that had been settled very early. The farms round about were all old places, most of them were run by the families that had been the first to settle there. There were old orchards everywhere, and plenty of trees, English trees that had been planted right at the beginning. Some people went in for crops and some ran cows, but besides they'd have poultry and bees, and everybody had an orchard. Life was pretty quiet there, the old man said, there wasn't any hurry and bustle, it was just real old-fashioned country life. Now and then there'd be a picnic in the school grounds, where the trees were very thick and shady, or perhaps they'd hold a dance in the school itself, but that was about all. You couldn't have found a nicer place, the old man said. His uncle's house was an old place just about buried in a tangle of honey-suckle and rambler roses, not the sort of farmhouse it's so easy to find nowadays. The railway ran alongside but it was a branch line, there weren't'many trains and they'd run at any old times. Why, the old man said, he could remember one time when the driver stopped the train to get off and buy a watermelon from his uncle. But nobody worried, because people took life differently in those days.

As a boy the old man used to spend his school holidays there, and he'd enjoy himself no end, so when he finished school his people sent him to help his uncle. They thought perhaps he might turn out a farmer. Anyhow it suited him fine. There were just his uncle and his aunt (they'd never had any children), both easy-going, good-natured sorts, and a man they'd had working on the place for years. This man was a little wiry fellow with a mop of curly hair that he never brushed, and a wrinkled face that was always grinning

at you. It was a wicked grin, the old man said, one eye'd close up a lot more than the other. Anyhow he was quite a character. He'd turned up one day with a swag on his back, been given a job, and never moved on for years. He was no chicken, in his fifties perhaps; and they used to call him Bandy; though one leg was a lot bandier than the other. He'd had that one broken more times than he could remember was the yarn he told. When he was a boy he'd gone to sea, he said, and several times he'd fallen from aloft. But he told so many yarns about his life in different parts of the world it was hard to say whether they were all true. He was Irish, the old man said, and had the real Irishman's way of telling you far-fetched yarns. Anyhow he milked the cows and was generally useful about the place. He taught the boy to milk and the two of them were in each other's company the most part of each day. Once you got to know him, the old man said, he was a regular hard case to talk to, his aunt would have had a blue-fit if she'd found out. But of course it was only natural for a boy that age to listen to Bandy and never let on. He was curious about life, he had to find things out sooner or later, and thinking it over later on he reckoned he'd learned more from Bandy than he ever had out of his Sunday school books. It was pretty strong stuff, granted, it had a real tang to it, but it was honest stuff all the same. Nor did it ever get him excited so far as he could remember, not in a physical way anyhow. When Bandy'd tell him he'd been with white black brown and yellow and was still clean, he never had any other feeling except a sort of hero-worship for him. It was the same as if Bandy had said he'd had fights with all colours and had always knocked the other fellow out without ever getting a scratch himself. People forget when they grow up, the old man said. Maybe they've learned to play safe by shying away from the strong stuff, but they forget it would never have appealed to them as children in anything like the same way. Children live in a different world, the old man said.

Anyhow, that was the position when the old man was a

boy of **about** fourteen working on his uncle's farm. He was enjoying the life in that old-fashioned neighbourhood, and he was great cobbers with this Bandy, this hard old case; and besides teaching him to milk cows Bandy was every day tell ing him what was what. Neither his uncle nor his aunt had any idea, he said, they never seemed to worry about his always being with Bandy, and he never told them a thing.

But it turned out things didn't stay like that for very long. One day the boy's aunt went up to town for a holiday, and when she came back she brought home a girl with her. She was quite a young thing, thirteen or fourteen years old per haps, and small for her age. It seemed she was an orphan and someone had persuaded the old man's aunt to be a good soul and give her a home, to try out anyhow. Well, her name was Myrtle and she was nothing much to look at. She wore glasses and had curls that hung over her fore-head. They made her look a bit silly, the old man said, you felt you'd like to get the scissors and clip them off. She'd annoy you too by always asking, Why ? She didn't seem to know much about anything, and you could hardly do a thing without her asking, Why? Still, she seemed to be quite harmless, she helped with the housework and did everything she was told without making any fuss about it. Nobody took much notice of her but she didn't seem to mind.

Later on, though, the boy noticed that a change had come over Bandy. To begin with he'd been like every one else and hardly taken any notice of Myrtle. Then the boy noticed he'd become interested. Up in the cowshed he'd ask, How's Myrtle this morning? or picking fruit in the orchard he'd say, We'll keep that one for Myrtle. And the curious thing was, the old man said, Myrtle showed signs of being interested the same way. If Bandy was working in the garden anywhere near the house Myrtle would be sure to start banging about on the verandah with a broom. Bandy'd grin at her (that wicked grin, the old man said), and they wouldn't say much, but you could tell there was a sort of situation between them. One day when Myrtle was out on

the verandah Bandy suddenly left off digging and picked a bunch of roses (which he wasn't supposed to do) and gave them to the girl. And instead of saying anything she just dropped the broom and ran inside, and Bandy was sort of overcome as well and went away down the garden leaving the boy to dig on his own. It was the kind of thing a boy notices, the old man said, even though he mightn't be able to make head nor tail of it. Another thing was that Bandy wasn't the company he'd been before. He'd be a bit short with the boy for no reason at all, nor would he talk in the old way. If the boy tried to get him to talk on the old subject he wouldn't bite, or else he'd tell him he'd better behave himself or he'd grow up with a dirty mind. He couldn't make it out, the old man said. The idea he'd got of Bandy right from the beginning made it just impossible for him to make it out. And you only had to look at him and look at Myrtle. So far as they were concerned, one and one didn't make two at all.

Then it happened his uncle began to get an idea of the way the wind was blowing. Perhaps he'd been told about the bunch of roses, the boy didn't know. Bandy began to spend his spare time making a garden seat (one of those rustic contraptions, the old man said). It was on the edge of the orchard, but right up against a hedge where you couldn't see it from the house. And one day when it was about finished the boy tried it out by taking a seat. Well, Bandy told him off properly. He hadn't made it for him to sit on, he said. No, he'd made it for Myrtle. But the boy's uncle just happened to be coming up on the other side of the hedge at the time, and he came round and Bandy got told off properly. The boy only heard half of it because his uncle sent him away, but after that nobody could help seeing the difference in Bandy. He went about looking black, the old man said, he'd be always muttering to himself and he'd make a mess of his work, spilling buckets of milk, putting the cows in the wrong, paddock and that sort of thing. And by the way Myrtle looked she must have got a talking to as well. She looked scared, the old man said, and

often enough, she'd look as if she'd been crying. Nor were the pair of them the only ones you could see the difference In. Everybody in the house was affected. The boy couldn't deep at night for thinking it all over, and he'd hear his uncle and aunt talking in bed in the next room. And he was pretty certain he knew what they were talking about. Why Myrtle wasn't packed off back where she'd come from he couldn't make out, but that didn't happen and for some weeks things just drifted along as they were. He felt very unhappy, the old man said, he was ail the time thinking of writing his people to say he was sick of farming and wanted to come back home.

All the same things couldn't last as they were. Myrtle wouldn't cat her meals and Bandy did his work worse and worse. You felt something was going to happen, the old man said, things were absolutely ripe so to speak.

Then one evening the boy saw something. It was one evening when he'd been across to a neighbouring farm for a game of draughts. His aunt didn't like him being out at night on his own, but he'd begged to go, he wanted to get away from what was going on in the house. He couldn't stand it, the old man said. Every night Myrtle'd be sent off to bed immediately she'd done the dishes, and you'd hear Bandy muttering to himself in his room which was a lean-to up against the kitchen wall. Anyhow, coming home this night the boy took a short cut through the orchard, and looking along a row of trees he saw that somebody was sit ting on the seat Bandy had made. There was a bit of a moon and he could see something white. He thought of Bandy and Myrtle, of course, and for a time he waited, not knowing whether it would be safe to go closer or not. He thought his heart was beating loud enough to give the show away on its own, and in the dark he felt his cheeks begin to burn. He was thinking of what he might see. But he couldn't help himself, the old man said, he had to go closer. And Bandy and Myrtle were sitting on the seat. Bandy was in his working clothes but Myrtle seemed to be in her night gown, at anyrate the boy could tell she had bare feet And

they were sitting there without saying a word, the old man said, sitting a little apart but holding each other's hands. Every now and then the girl would turn her face to Bandy and he'd lean over to kiss her; or Bandy would turn his face and she'd lean over to kiss him. That was all there was to see, the old man said. Nothing more than that. It amounted to this, that bad old Bandy had got the girl, this young Myrtle, with her silly curls, out on the seat with him, and there was nothing doing except those kisses. And the whole time the boy stood there watching he never heard them say a thing.

It was a tremendous experience for a boy, the old man said, too big for him to be at all clear about until later on in life. All he understood at the time was that he had some how managed to get life all wrong. Like all boys he thought he'd got to know what was what, but as he stood there in the dark and watched Bandy and Myrtle he understood that he had a lot to learn. He'd been taken in, he thought. It wasn't a pleasant thought, the old man said.

Well, the old man told me the story sitting there on the waterfront. It had all happened a long time ago, and he didn't tell it exactly as I've written it down, but I felt there was something in the story that he wanted to make me see. And I felt it was mainly connected with the part about Bandy and Myrtle sitting on the garden seat, because when he'd told me that part the old man seemed to think his story was finished. He stopped talking and began to fold up his newspaper. But I couldn't leave it at that.

What happened ? I said.

Oh, the old man said, my uncle caught the pair of them in Bandy's room one night, and the girl got packed off back where she'd come from.

I see, I said, and the old man got up to go.

And what about Bandy ? I said, and I got up to kick the piece of buttered bread over to the seagulls.

Oh, the old man said, one morning when he was supposed to be milking the cows Bandy hanged himself in the cowshed.

THREE MEN

LISTEN Marge—don't you think a lot of boys are peculiar these days ? They treat you just as if you was a lump of dirt, and what I say is if a girl had any common she'd never even speak to the nasty creatures.

There was Hilda and me the day we went to the races—we didn't buy a race card because Hilda said if you didn't have a card you could always ask some boy to let you have a look at his, and if you knew how to do your stuff you never could tell but what it mightn't end up in a date.

Well, Hilda certainly knows her onions because that's just how it turned out. Only there were two boys instead of one which made it a whole lot better, specially as Hilda went nuts on the little fat one that I wouldn't have had on as a gift. But the other one was a proper he-man and a real gentleman too you could see, and it made my heart go pit a-pat just standing there talking to him, and he could have asked me to leave home just as soon as he liked and he wouldn't have needed to ask me twice.

Anyhow that afternoon went just like magic, you'd never believe it. I could hardly be bothered to look at the races and I don't believe Hilda could be either, and I didn't care if our horses won or not. They didn't win anyhow. The boys had come in a car and between the races they'd take us over to where it was parked and we'd all have a few spots. Though of course I didn't have too many because I'm not a girl like that. But Hilda can never stop herself from having a fling, so one or two times I had to tell her not to forget she was a lady.

It was a great afternoon believe me, but when it came to the last race I got a kind of sad feeling inside me because the boys hadn't said anything about making a date. All the same they said they'd take us back to town in the car and so

they did. And I got a thrill out of sitting in the back seat with the one who was a proper he-man, and he put his arm along the seat behind me and I'm telling you this without a word of a lie—I could have sat back and he'd as good as had his arm round me. But I'd never do a thing like that with out I got the proper encouragement, because a girl like me shouldn't ought to ever forget that she's a lady. Anyhow I didn't sort of feel safe enough to sit bapk because the way Hilda's boy was driving after having all those spots was giving me the jitters. And seeing the way Hilda was behaving sitting next to him in the front seat I thought I'd better sit up and set an example or anyone that saw us go past might think it was a real rough party.

Well, the car stopped to let us out at the bottom of Queen street, and you know I could have just sat there and died the way that sad feeling had got me. I've never felt the strength go out of me like that before. But Hilda was just carrying on laughing and giggling with her cheeks all red and I never thought she'd say it, but when she slammed the door shut she said, Don't ask me to go out with you to-night boys because I'd have to break a date. And the boys said, Too bad. And I never know how I did it but I said, Yes boys it's her grandfather's funeral she's got to go to' and she's taking me along to play gooseberry.

So then the boys said could they ring us up on the phone ? And that was O.K. because we've got the phone on at our boardinghouse, so Hilda wrote the number down on the cover of the fat one's cheque book and they said, Be good girls, and we'll ring you about half-past seven—gee, Marge, think of him having a cheque book.

Well you know we flew home just like magic and when we got in Mrs. Potter was cooking some apple fritters and they tasted real lovely, only Hilda bolted hers too quick and they gave her the stomachache. And we kept on talking like mad in front of Mrs. Potter which we don't generally do because even if she is a bit deaf she hears a lot more than you'd think. Though neither of us cared because we knew she

wouldn't mind leaving the key out on **the** nail, and I told **myself to remember** and give her a kiss before I went out **and tell** Hilda **to** too, because you can't help feeling sorry **for the** poor old thing what with her being deaf and having that husband who was always going on the booze until he ran away and left her to shift for herself. There's not many girls who'd consider other people's feelings like that, but it's **a** crying shame because if we can't be kind to each other what I say is we all ought to be dead. And even if Mrs. Potter is old like that now I suppose she must have been a young girl once even if it was a long time ago. And I suppose Hilda and me (and you too Marge) will be old like that some day ourselves, though I can hardly believe it myself and anyhow thank God it won't be for years and years and years.

Anyhow Mrs. Potter said she didn't mind leaving the key out on the nail and Hilda said she was going to have a bath and I told her she'd better step on it, so we went upstairs and while Hilda was having a bath I put on my new organdie cut on the bias. And then just because I had nothing better to do I read a book that Hilda said was hot, but every time you came to a hot place you had to read a row of dots, and anyhow I had to leave off to go and give Hilda a peppermint for her stomachache.

Well do you know Hilda was drying herself when the phone rang so I had to go and answer, and Hilda opened the bathroom door and stood there in the draught without a stitch on, and my heart was going pit-a-pat so as I could hardly speak. And I said Hello, nice and ladylike-like. Hahlu, that's what I said. And for crying out loud if it wasn't **a** lady who'd got the wrong number!

Do you know right from that very instant I just had an idea that something was going to go wrong, but I never said **a** word to Hilda and she never said a word to me, so of course we never said a word to each other. And I just went 6n reading that **book** but there were so many dots **I** turned **over a good** few pages each time, and oh, **I** forgot to tell **you**

I had to read standing up because I didn't want to sit down wearing my new organdie. And Hilda took a good while making herself looking pretty like she always does, and then do you know the most awful thing happened—I broke out all over with sweat. Really I did, though it's perspiration I *should* say. It just dripped off me like water and I was so hot I had to fan myself with a hanky, and Hilda saw me and said I must be getting breezy. And I tried to tell her how I'd got a line on those boys just as if by magic and they were all kidsteaks. I did honest. And the words just stuck in my throat. So I said, What if the boys wanted us to go joy-riding for miles and miles and miles? And Hilda told me not to be a prude or I'd never get anything except a boy like the answer to the Maiden's Prayer. So I never said another word, and I thought, All right, you just wait.

Well do you know Marge, wait was right because we waited until nine o'clock and the phone never rang once. And Hilda looked awful because she had a lie-down on her bed and you'd nearly have thought she had passed out. It fair give me the jitters because I got sick of standing up and reading all the dots in that book, and when I looked at Hilda I couldn't help thinking of her in a coffin and flowers and a hearse and things like that. So I said, How about going down town and having a milkshake ? And she said all right we'd go. And when we were outside in the street Hilda said she wouldn't mind betting they were a couple of pansies anyhow. But I said she could speak for the little fat one if she liked, and if she asked me she had just about all her taste in her mouth.

Well Marge, now I've told you—oh and Marge I nearly forgot, I told Hilda to wait because I'd forgot about giving Mrs. Potter a kiss, and do you know you mightn't believe it and she tried to make out she wasn't, but when I went in where she was sitting down there doing her knitting she was *crying !*

THEY GAVE HER A RISE

WHEN the explosion happened I couldn't go and see where it was. I'd been working on the wharves, and a case had dropped on my foot. It put me on crutches for a fortnight.

I was boarding with Mrs. Bowman down by the water front at the time. She was quite a good sort though a bit keen on the main chance. But I didn't blame her because her husband had cleared out, and to make ends meet she took on cleaning jobs several days a week.

Explosions are like fires, you can't tell how far off they are. But it was some explosion. Mrs. Bowman and I were in the kitchen and the crockery rattled, and the dust came down off the light shade. Sally Bowman was working out at the ammunition factory, and Mrs. Bowman never said anything but you could see she thought that's where it might have happened. Of course people were talking out in the street and the news came pretty quick.

It was out at the ammunition factory. And they said some of the hands had been blown to smithereens.

Mrs. Bowman broke down.

She's dead, she said, I know she's dead.

Well, we couldn't do anything. I went over next door on my crutches and asked the people if they'd find out about Sally and whistle me. Then I'd break the news to Mrs. Bowman.

I went back and Mrs. Bowman was worse than ever. She'd been getting dinner at the time and she sat there with her head down on the table among the potato peelings. Her hair'd come all unput too, and she looked awful. But she wasn't crying, and you sort of wished she had've been.

She's dead, she said, I know she's dead.

She's not dead, I said.

I know she's dead.

Bull's wool, I said, she's not dead.

Oh God, she said, why did I make her go and work in that factory?

I'll guarantee she's been lucky.

She's all I've got. And now she's dead.

If you don't look out you'll start believing it, I said.

It was no good. She went on a treat. I asked her if she'd like me to get one of the neighbours in but she said no.

I don't want to see nobody no more, she said. Sally's all I was living for, and now she's dead. She was a good girl, she said, she was good to her mother.

Sure, I said. Of course she was good to her mother. So she always will be.

She won't. She's dead.

I couldn't do anything. The worst of it was I had a sort of sick feeling that Sally had been blown up. She was only seventeen and a nice kid too. And Mrs. Bowman was as good as a widow. It was tough all right.

Then Mrs. Bowman started to pray.

Lord God Jesus, she said, give me back my baby. You know she's all I've got. Do please Jesus Christ Almighty give me back my baby. Please Jesus just this once. Darling Jesus I know I done wrong. I shouldn't ought to have made my Sally go and work in that factory. It was because of the money. I had to make her go, you know I did. But oh sweet Jesus if you'll only give me back my baby just this once I won't never do another wrong thing in my life. Without a word of lie I won't, so help me God.

She went on like that. It sounded pretty awful to me, that sort of praying. Because I'm a Doolan myself, and Mrs. Bowman was always down on the churches. You wouldn't have thought she had a spark of religion in her at all. Still, it was tough. And I felt like nothing on earth.

The next thing was Sally was brought home in a car, one of those big limousines too. The joker driving had been going home from golf and he'd volunteered. He had to help Sally out of the car and up the steps because she was just

a jelly. Her hat was on crooked and she couldn't stop crying. Of course the neighbours all came round but I told them to shove off and come back later on.

Well, Mrs. Bowman had kidded herself into believing that Sally had been blown to smithereens. So when Sally walked in she went properly dippy and carried on about her having come back from the dead. So I slung off at her a bit for being dippy and banged about cheerful-like getting them a cup of tea. Sally wasn't hurt at all, but some of the girls had been killed so naturally she was upset. Anyhow I slapped her on the back just to show her mother it wasn't a ghost that had walked in, then Mrs. Bowman began crying and you could see she felt better. So both of them sat there and cried until the tea was ready.

I can't believe my eyes, Mrs. Bowman said, I thought you was dead.

Well, I'm not dead, Sally said.

I thought you was.

I thought I was too. There's Peg Watson, she's dead.

What a shame, Mrs. Bowman said.

And Marge Andrews, she's dead too.

Poor Mrs. Andrews.

Mum it was awful. It was just like the noise of something being torn. Something big. A wind sort of tore at you too. And then there was a funny smell.

Anyhow you're not dead. You've been spared.

That wind knocked me over. I thought I was dead then.

You've been spared.

Yes I know. But what about Peg Watson and Marge Andrews?

Poor Mrs. Andrews, Mrs. Bowman said.

Then Mrs. Bowman roused on to me for putting too much sugar in her tea.

I thought I'd never taste tea again, Sally said, not when I was knocked over I didn't.

Have another cup ! I said.

Mr. Doran, Mrs. Bowman said, how ever much tea did you put in the teapot?

I made it strong, I said. I thought you'd like it strong.

Anyone would think we was millionaires, Mrs. Bowman said.

Sally said she wasn't ever going back to work in the ammunition factory again.

Why not? Mrs. Bowman asked. You could see she was feeling a lot better and she spoke quite sharp.

Well I'm not. You never got knocked over by that wind.

I've had things to put up with in my life. Yes I have.

I know you have, mum. But you never got knocked over by a wind like that.

You can't avoid accidents.

I know you can't. But what about Peg and Marge?

Isn't it a shame? Poor Mrs. Andrews. Marge was getting more money than you, wasn't she?

Anyhow I'm not going back. So there.

Oh, indeed young lady, Mrs. Bowman said. So that's the way you're going to talk. Not going back! Will you tell me where our money's coming from if you're not? Huh! You'd sooner see your mother scrubbing floors, wouldn't you?

Listen mum, Sally said. Listen. . . .

Well, I left them to it. I went over next door to talk to the people, and you could hear Sally and her mother squabbling from there.

Of course Sally wasn't off for long. And they gave **her** a rise.

A MAN AND HIS WIFE

IT was during the slump, when times were bad. Bad times are different from good times, people's habits aren't quite the same. When the slump was on you didn't have to worry about certain things. The way you were dressed, for instance. Along the street you'd meet too many who were as hard put to it as you were yourself. That's one thing the slump did, it put a certain sort of comradeship into life that you don't find now.

During the slump people had to live where they could, and a lot of them lived in sheds and wash-houses in other people's backyards. I lived in an old shed that had once been a stable, and it was all right except for the rats. It was out towards the edge of the town, and there were two of us living there, and my cobber was on relief work like myself. There'd been some trouble between him and his wife, so when he had to get out he came and lived with me. It cut the rent in half, and there was room enough. And Ted was quite a good hand at rigging up a table and such like out of any odds and ends he could pick up. He got quite a lot of pickings from a rubbish tip that was handy, and with me giving him a hand we made a fireplace and got the place pretty snug, which it needed to be for the winter. It wasn't a bad sort of life. We never went short of tucker, though a few times we had to raid a Chinaman's garden after we'd spent all our money in the pubs. As a single man, I'd only get about a day and a-half 's relief work a week, and drew fourteen shillings. Ted got more but of course there was his wife, and he had to part up.

I knew Ted only casually until I struck him on relief. He hadn't long been in the town. He'd had a good job in a pub, but he went on the booze once too often. To start with he wasn't so hot with a shovel, and the gang used to

pull his leg, but he was a good-tempered bloke, and as I say there grew up that comradeship when the slump was on. It was pretty hard for him when his wife got her separation, because it was all in the paper, and everybody starting making jokes. When she got in Court his wife certainly got going about the sort of husband he was. Besides always getting drunk, she said, he kept a dog, and he'd talk to the dog when he'd never talk to her. He was always taking the dog for walks too, and once when she tried to go along as well he locked her in the wash-house and never let her out until he came home. Well, our gang certainly thought up plenty of jokes about that dog.

When he came to my place, Ted brought the dog. It was nothing special, just a dog, but Ted was certainly fond of it. He had it sleeping at the foot of his bed, and I only put up with it because it was good for the rats. But later on it got under a bus along the road and that was the finish. Ted took it pretty hard, but he wasn't the sort that ever says much. He never told me anything about the trouble he'd had with his wife. There are men who'll talk to you about such things, but it's more often you find women that way. And Ted's wife was the sort. She'd call sometimes to collect her money, though if Ted saw her coming up the road he'd hook off if he could before she got near. And if he couldn't I'd hook off while they had their barney. But usually Ted would have a fair idea when she was coming and wouldn't be around, and then Mrs. Watts would talk to me. She was quite all right, quite a nice woman, though always a bit on edge so to speak. She'd say quite a lot. Ted spent too much money on drink, she said, but it was the dog that was the trouble. A man ought to put his wife first, she said. She wouldn't have minded so much if it had been another woman. She couldn't understand it, she said. Well, maybe I couldn't either, so I felt sorry for Mrs. Watts. But I felt sorry for Ted too, so I never told her when the dog was done in. I thought maybe things would come right if they were just left alone.

It didn't work out though, because one day Ted came home with a canary, and he certainly began to think the world of that canary. It just about made me think that he might be a bit unnatural, though I didn't think he was, because one night when some of the gang were round and we were all a bit stonkered, Ted told about how his missis once ran a fish shop and had a girl serving behind the counter for a pound a week. And it was only a shame she was worth the money, Ted said. His wife used to complain that the pound made too big a hole in the profits, but as for him he reckoned the girl was well worth the money. But of course we all chipped in to say he was a dirty old man, and it was no wonder his missis had kicked him out.

But about the canary. Ted loved that bird. He worshipped it. And anyway, it certainly could sing. Ted'd make himself late for work in the morning talking to it and seeing it was all O.K., and he paid a neighbour's little girl sixpence a week to always run over and put the cage inside the window if it came on to rain. And when we got home it was no good expecting him to lend a hand because he'd just want to sit down and kid to the bird. I'd tell him he was a goat, but it did no good. Even when the dinner was cooked it was no good telling him to come and eat, he'd sooner sit just there and kid to the bird.

There was another thing too. Ted'd get all hot and bothered if anybody began to take too much of an interest in his bird. He didn't mind me so much, though I sort of felt I had to keep off the grass. It was when there was a crowd round that he'd get properly hot and bothered. We'd have some rare old times some evenings when there was a crowd round, usually some of the boys in the gang. We'd fill up the baby. We had a big demijohn that we used to call the baby, and we'd all put in and then toss to see who'd go and get her filled up. And an old suitcase that Ted'd got from the rubbish tip came in handy for the purpose. Well, evenings when we'd had the baby filled would get Ted all hot and bothered. Because once they were a bit stonkered the boys would want

to have a bo-peep at the bird while he was asleep. If you were careful you could look under the cloth Ted put over the cage at night and see him standing on one leg with his head tucked in, and his feathers all fluffed up. And it was certainly great to see him sleeping there, specially considering the noise and the smoke. He'd always be a bit unsteady on his one leg and the boys'd argue about that, some saying it was because of his heart beating, and others that he was only balancing. But of course Ted'd be all on edge trying to keep everybody away, and he'd go crook if somebody moved the cloth too much and woke the poor little blighter up, which was usually what happened.

Well, for months on end Ted just about lived for that canary. Then later on he decided it didn't get enough exercise inside the cage, so he tried a stunt. We'd shut the door and the window and Ted'd let the bird out of the cage, and it certainly seemed to enjoy the outing. And Ted thought he was a clever bloke when he'd taught it to sit on his shoulder, though when he put seed in his hair to get it to go up on top it wasn't a success, because the bird got its feet tangled, and I had to cut off some hair to get it away, which reminded me how once on a sheep farm I found a little skeleton tangled in the wool on a sheep's back. In the end though, Ted did a stupid thing, he left the window open while the bird was having its outing. I said wasn't he taking a risk, but he said no, the bird loved him too much ever to fly away. And certainly for a time it just did its usual stuff, sitting on Ted's shoulder and hopping about on the table. Though when it decided to go it didn't waste any time. It up and nipped out that window just as fast as if it was a sparrow that had blown in by mistake. For a time it hung about in a tree while Ted walked round and round underneath with the cage in his hand. And watching the pair of them I thought the bird was rubbing it in, because up in the tree it sounded to me as if it was singing better than ever it did before.

The next morning Ted was gone before I was awake. The cage was gone too, and Ted never turned up at work

and lost a day's pay. It was no good though, he never found the bird. Later on we talked it over and I said he'd better try another dog, but he said no. I've still got the wife, he said. Yes, I said. The wife never let me down, he said. No, I said. It was all I could think of to say. He put his things together and went right away, and it wasn't long before I was going round regularly twice a week for a game of cards with the pair of them. But right until the finish of the slump I was living on my own, and occasionally I'd sort of wish that Ted hadn't been so careless with his canary.

TWO WORLDS

MY granpa Munro was a Belfast man. He was also a Loyal Orangeman, and I think I first became aware of these fecta when I asked why granpa was dressed in a fancy apron in a photograph that hung on the wall. Granma explained to me, but I was too young to have much idea what it all meant,,

Then one time during school holidays, when my brother and I were staying with granma and granpa Munro, we found a string of beads in the street. I say we, but my brother said he saw it first. I said I did.

Neither of us had ever before seen such a string of beads.. Instead of their being all of an even size, or else threaded so that they began small and grew large and then got smalt again, this string was made of a number of small beads that were interrupted at regular intervals by a big one. We counteck the number of big beads and the number of small ones in between, and the number altogether, and this kept us busy for quite a time. Then we squabbled over who was to be the owner, but my brother was the older, he had the advantage of me, and the findings disappeared into his pocket.

I got my own back by saying they weren't worth anything anyhow. And as soon as we were home I said that we'd found something, and told my brother to show granma. He gave me a look that told me plainly what he thought of me but he brought the beads out, and granma hardly had them in her hand when she gave a sort of groan and dropped them on the table. She spread out her arms to keep us from going near, and granpa got up from his chair and looked at the beads over the top of his glasses. Granma said that we were not to touch and she took the tongs and would have put the beads in the fire if granpa hadn't stopped her.

Granma went on getting the tea, we asked her what the beads were and she said they were a Catholic thing. I don't

think that meant a great deal to us. We knew what Catholic churches looked like from the outside, and that was about all. Though at school we'd learned to say a rhyme:

Catholic dogs don't like frogs,
And won't eat meat on Friday.

Meantime granpa was walking up and down, stopping now and then to look at the beads. I suppose there must have been quite a tug of war going on between the man who was a loyal Orangeman, and the man who didn't want to do anything dishonest. Finally he pushed the beads on to a piece of paper with one finger and put them on the mantel piece.

I don't think we thought about the beads for very long that evening. My main feeling about them was quite a satis factory one. My brother had prevented me from being able to say they were mine, now he couldn't say they were his either. I felt that we were quits.

When we came home from going to the butcher's for granma the next morning we found that granpa had the horse harnessed in the buggy, and was waiting to take us for a drive. We ran and put our boots and stockings on, which was the rule whenever we went out driving, then we climbed up and sat beside granpa. He touched Beauty with the whip, and driving out the gate we waved to granma who was standing at the door to watch us go.

Granpa turned in the direction of the main street, and at the corner a man was lighting his pipe in the middle of the road.

By your leave ! granpa shouted out, and he made the man jump. But my brother and I turned round and saw him laughing, and we knew it was mainly because of the straw hat, with holes for his ears to stick through, that Beauty wore. On hot days granpa always put it on, and it was supposed to keep him from getting sunstroke.

All the way along the main street graapa shouted out, By your leave ! to people that were crossing the street, even though it didn't look as if any of them were going to be run over. And my brother and I saw so many people laughing that we felt a little shy and uncomfortable until we were through to the other end of the town.

It was a part of the town we didn't know very well, the houses were smaller and closer together than in the part we knew, though granpa pulled outside a big house with a lawn and trees in front. He gave us the paper that he had wrapped the beads in, and told us we were to go and knock at the front door and ask for Mr. Doyle. When Mr. Doyle came to the door we were to say we'd found some beads, give him the parcel, and come straight back again.

We went up a path that wound through the trees and took us out of sight of the street, we knocked at the door and it was opened by a fat lady with a red face.

Please is Mr. Doyle in? my brother said.

Mister Doyle ? the fat lady said, and we were frightened by the way she looked down at us.

Do you mean the Very Reveren8 Dean Doyle? she said, and what she said made us more frightened. I looked at my brother, my brother looked at me. Neither of us had a voice any more.

Then a voice from behind the fat lady said, Well boys?

The fat lady stepped back and in her place was a white-haired old man wearing a parson's collar.

My brother held out the parcel, and I was quite surprised to hear myself speak.

We found them, I said.

Did you now? the old man said, and he looked at me as he unwrapped the paper.

I found them, my brother said, and the old man looked at him.

We both found them, I said.

Well indeed now, did you both find them ? the old man said, and he laughed as he put the beads in his pocket.

Would you boys like some lemonade ? he said, and he told the fat lady to bring some, and then he leaned against the doorpost and asked us what our names were. He certainly had a way with him and he soon had us talking.

My brother said he might be getting a bicycle for his birthday, and I said he'd promised to let me ride it. This wasn't quite true, but I was hoping it might have some effect on my brother.

Then the fat lady brought the lemonade, with a straw in each glass, and when I'd finished I asked if I could keep the straw. My brother, who'd given his glass back, said I wasn't to, but the old man gave him his straw. Then he said, Goodbye boys, and remembering granpa we both began to run down the path.

But round the first bend we came to a standstill. Granpa was coming up the path. There was a look on his face we'd never seen before, and he had the buggy whip in his hand.

A MAN OF GOOD WILL

WHEN I was a boy at school our family lived some way along the road from a tomato-grower who was supposed to be eccentric. Among other things it was said that he didn't eat meat, neither had he ever been known to smoke or drink. Neither, as I found out for myself later on, did he use certain words or tell the usual sort of stories. But a lack of the more obvious vices will make people talk just as readily as the reverse, so I suppose it was only natural for some such word as eccentric to be passed round the neighbourhood.

He was a single man, this David Williams, and well on in years. He was so dark in colouring that people said he had a touch of the tar-brush, but if his name was anything to go by he probably got his dark skin from Welsh blood. He was a sketch of a man to look at, he walked pigeon-toed, and he was so thin his clothes seemed to hang on a frame work of sticks. When you talked to him he laughed a lot, pushing his face in yours, and catching hold of your arm. Over one of his eyes he had a drooping eyelid, and it didn't fit in too well with the rest of him because it rather suggested wickedness. He had his sister living with him, attending to the house and helping with the outside work, and to look at she was very much the same kind as her brother. Though,, if anything, there was even less of her.

On their place there was a tremendous lot to do. They had a big glass-house for winter growing, and as soon as the warmer weather came there'd be the outdoor work as well One winter I earned a few shillings by helping a milkman during my school holidays, and driving along the road in the small hours of a frosty morning we would see a light moving inside the glass-house. Some mornings there would be two lights, and that meant Miss Williams was working with her brother. But no matter how early they started you'd

see them working until well on into the evening, when they must have been too tired to do another stroke.

The Williams were grafters, everybody agreed about that. They never seemed to have any time for recreation, unless that was the name you could give to the time they put in on their flower-beds and keeping the place tidy. They never -went to socials or dances, they never even went to church, so nobody got to know them at all well. But they had people's respect for being such hard workers. Occasionally it would be said they were a pair of money-grubbers, living only to Take in the cash, but I think that would usually be said by somebody who wouldn't have minded being able to do the same thing. That is, if they were doing it. Nobody knew for certain.

Then, after they had been on the place for a number of years, Miss Williams became ill. She was taken to hospital and died after a few days. The funeral was a private one and her brother had her cremated, and a story got about that he afterwards took the ashes and threw them into the air to be scattered by the wind. I heard people talking about this and some said it was a horrible thing to do. They said it didn't show much respect for the dead. I remember my mother said that the thought of it was enough to give her the creeps.

Miss Williams's illness had happened round about Christmas-time, when the outdoor tomatoes would soon be coming into bearing. Her brother was away for about a week after the funeral, the house was locked up and everything was neglected. Then it was noticed he was back again and he seemed to be just the same as ever, but he had about double the work to do. It was too much for him and one evening he came along the road to see my father. He wanted to know if I would like a job, and I think my father was a bit doubtful. He wasn't the sort of man to approve of queer fish, but I'd just left school and hadn't found anything to do, so finally it was all fixed up. I went over the next morning and began toy following my boss about, watching until I got the hang of things, and after a week or so I began to develop into

quite a capable lad. I couldn't keep up with the speed my boss worked at, but we got on all right together, and besides teaching me the work he told me all his theories. He was against the use of quick manures, he said, it means that tomatoes grown that way didn't feed you properly, though what was a commercial grower to do? If he didn't do as the next man did he'd go broke. And he was against all the expensive and complicated business of spraying. He said it wouldn't be necessary if you had healthy plants that weren't forced. He didn't even approve of the poisonous spray for caterpillars, and as we worked along the rows he taught me to watch out for the moths' eggs, which you found underneath the leaves and on the flowers. It was quite a good method perhaps, but it took up a lot of time.

To begin with I'd go along the road home to my lunch at midday. But later on I'd stay and eat with my boss; he seemed to like my company and he got a butcher to call sometimes and leave a piece of sausage, though he never ate any himself. And it was mainly during our times of eating together that he began to tell me about how he had come to be a tomato-grower. Probably he said much that I was too young to understand, but it was all so different from what I was used to hearing in my own home, that I could always listen without feeling impatient. Also it fascinated me to watch him. He'd walk pigeon-toed across the kitchen to fill the teapot, or he'd bend his head back to look out at me from under his drooping eyelid.

He'd begun life in a draper's shop, he said, and for a number of years he'd liked the work quite well. He had the knack of arranging things so he was put on to dressing the window, and he did so well it wasn't long before he was able to get a job in a big store. He stayed there for years, finding the work quite to his liking, and getting more and more money, but at the same time he wasn't happy and he wasn't satisfied. Deep down he wasn't, he said. He'd begin to feel it was wrong of people to shut themselves away from the sun and fresh air by working in such places; except that you went

home at night it was just as though you'd been put in gaol. As for people who worked inside cages behind the counters of banks, or sat all day going up and down in lifts—well, you might just as well live in a cage out at the zoo. And such ideas had kept coming into his head, until he decided he'd cut out all his pleasures and save hard so that he could set himself up in a new way of living. Why, he said, it had even meant he'd had to change his mind about getting married. Then later on when he'd got started he found out the life meant much harder work than he'd ever imagined. Yet he'd liked it all right, he said. He'd feel prouder over the sight of a good bunch of tomatoes, with the top ones just beginning to colour, than he'd ever felt over any window he'd dressed. And another thing, it was an education, because it had taught him things he never knew before.

If you grew something for sale, he found out, particularly if it was something that wouldn't keep, you mainly had to take just what people would pay for it, even though you might get a lot less than would pay for the work and expense it had cost you. And that was a different thing from what happened in the big store he had worked in, where you usually managed to buy at one price and sell at another that would always keep you on the right side. You didn't wait until you were offered a price, no, you mainly got the price you asked Tor. Well, the world was a funny place, he said; you'd strike people who'd grumble over the price of tomatoes when it hardly paid you for the work of picking them, yet if you asked these people to work for such little return they'd have properly hit the roof. And most of them you couldn't blame, because they could never have afforded to buy at a fair price. Well, well, he said, the world was all wrong, men couldn't be brothers to each other when they spent so much time worrying over the prices they were going to pay or get. It made you feel unhappy, but when you'd puzzled your brains you asked yourself what could you do ? You could count yourself one of the lucky ones if you got plenty to eat and a good share of sunshine and fresh air, and didn't have

to dress up to go to work. The only thing that worried him, he said, was that he hardly ever had enough spare time to read a book. And the joke of it was he'd thought when he started out he was going to have plenty.

All this and a lot more I mainly listened to during the half-hours when we knocked off for lunch. A few things would sink in, and from time to time I'd be liable to fetch them up at home. Mr. Williams says, I would begin, and sometimes I'd annoy my father by contradicting him with something my boss had said. I'm afraid my father was the sort of man who gets upset if people say things that aren't like what the newspapers say. One evening I heard him talking to my mother, telling her that I was under a bad influence, and that I'd better look round for another job. That was all I heard, but I knew my mother would be on my side. She was easy-going, and I knew she liked me to come home and tell her what I'd had for lunch, and what the inside of Mr. Williams's house was like. It made her feel important to be able to tell people about how he did all his own cooking, washed and mended his clothes. and managed to keep every thing tidy even to polishing the floors. What an eccentric man ! Though I remember she hadn't got the word quite right and said acentric.

So in the meantime my father didn't interfere with my job, and it was lucky for my boss because the season was turning out a good one. Every day was a real scorcher. I lived with the strong tomato-smell always in my nose, and the hot smell of the earth that we were forever sprinkling with manure and drenching with water until it was soaked right through. I'd start early, stay late, and get paid extra, but we never seemed to be able to catch up with what had to be done. On top of the other work was the marketing, and tomatoes that were still warm from the sun, hours after they'd been picked, seemed always to be layers deep on the floor of the packing-shed. Like all good seasons it had benefited everybody's crops alike. If was one right out of the box, and my boss told me he'd never known so many tomatoes about at so

cheap a price. Sauce factories that had contracted for whole crops had landed themselves in the cart, he said; deliveries were more than they knew what to do with, and they were buying dearer than they could have bought on the market. So the growers who had contracts were all right, but as for the rest of them, well, my boss reckoned a bad season of blight couldn't have been worse blow than such plenty was.

Then one morning I turned up to work and got a surprise to find my boss hadn't even finished his breakfast. And instead of telling me what to get busy on he asked me inside. Have you had a good tuck-in, he said, and I said I'd had plenty. Go on, he said, I know what boys' appetites are like, and he made me sit down to a poached egg on toast. He sat there with his arms folded, and I'd never seen him taking it so easy. It's a silly game, this working so hard, he said; look what it did to my poor sister. With my mouth full I mumbled something, and he began to tell me about a growers' meeting that had been held the night before. He'd been along, he said, and they had a scheme for each man to dig a pit and throw away half his crop. But I'll guarantee they won't be able to trust each other enough to make that idea work. Besides, it would be a wicked shame. I got up to speak, he said, and the words wouldn't come. I just stood there like a fool with my mouth open, and the chairman told me to sit down. He told me this several times over, and he laughed as though it were a great joke.

When I'd finished eating he still didn't seem to be in any hurry. Instead of leaving the dishes until lunch-time he started on them right away, throwing me a tea-towel. Or don't you like women's work, my boy? he said, and laughed. Then he got me to wait while he swept the floor, and when we were finally out in the garden he just walked about, saying that no man could help being happy in a garden on a day of such weather. A man in the garden, a woman in the house, and a child in the cradle, he said, that's what God put us on the earth to make come true. And then, just as if he hadn't said anything at all out of the ordinary, he told me what

he wanted me to do. But don't work too hard, he said, and laughed. And if it had been anyone else but him I'd have thought he was slinging off.

He left me to go ahead and never came near me all morning,, and I had no idea what he was doing. He should have been nailing up cases in the packing-shed but I didn't hear him,, though when he called me to lunch I noticed as I went past that .the tomatoes we'd picked the afternoon before had all disappeared. He was drying his hands out on the verandah, and straight-off he said, Come and tell me if I've made a good job. So we went down the length of the glass-house to the front of the section, and there, just inside the gate, he'd put all the tomatoes in a heap. Not just an ordinary heap though, he'd built them up into a sort of pyramid, the way you see them in a shop window, only this one was a monster. He asked me if they looked nice, and I thought they certainly did. And it wasn't just because they made a pretty picture, each one a perfect specimen that showed a wonderful red polish in the sun. It was something more than that. I'd helped him do the work, and just to stand and look at the result gave me a wonderful feeling of being satisfied. Perhaps I'd never before understood what deep feelings you could have over things you'd made happen under your own hands. Perhaps I understood even more than that. I may have understood that the feeling had nothing to do with the money you could sell such things for. I'm not quite sure, but I know I had the feeling, and I know my boss had it too, and that it was tremendously deep in him. And I think he knew about me as well, because instead of saying anything much he put his arm round my shoulders, and I wasn't at all keen about him doing this but I let him leave it there.

Once we were back up at the house he talked and acted just the same as usual, yet it turned out that day was the first of some very queer days for me. My boss would leave me to work on my own, while he spent most of his time sitting down at the gate in an old easy-chair he took off the verandah. And besides leaving the heap of tomatoes there, he was all

the time making it bigger with every fresh lot that we picked. One morning I turned up to work and struck him having an argument with our carrier. It was our main market day, and the carrier had made his call to pick up the cases we'd normally have been sending into town. My boss was saying he wasn't sending anything in, and the carrier was pointing to the heap and asking what the big idea was. I stood listening, and my boss just laughed and said, No, my friend, until the carrier got annoyed, and drove off after shaking my boss's hand from his arm, and telling him he was clean off his rocker.

Then stories about what was happening began to get around. Probably the carrier talked, but it wouldn't have made any difference if he hadn't, because anybody could look over the gate and see the heap, and my boss sitting in the old chair. More and more people began to stop and stare, and later on there'd sometimes be quite a crowd. I noticed people began to look at me in the street, and although I hadn't said a word at home, my father wanted to know what Mr. Williams thought he was up to. I didn't know what to say so I didn't say anything, but I must have gone red because my mother suddenly changed the subject. Though when she got me on my own she asked me what Mr. Williams was doing with that heap of tomatoes. I said I didn't know, and it wasn't exactly the truth, but I could never have explained, even if I'd wanted to try.

Then f®r a couple of days everybody had something else to talk about. The weather broke. All of a sudden there came a terrific gale that blew one way one day, the other the next, and in between there was a downpour that measured several inches in just a few hours. The wind lifted the roof off a house in our road, so it was no wonder my boss's tomatoes were all flattened out. The tea-tree sticks were dry and brittle from so much sun and the wobbling weight of the great t©p bunches was too much for them, they snapped off and the flax ties that held only meant a worse tangle. If it hadn't been for the rain the damage wouldn't have been so serious, but the sun came out hot again, and that sea of

green tangle, lying thick on the wet ground, meant we had to go for our lives if we wanted to stop the blight from setting in. My boss never had time to sit in his chair for days. We'd both of us begin at daylight and work ourselves to a standstill, and after about a week it was certainly wonderful the way we managed to get things pretty straight again. Though of course a lot of damage had been done. All over the country it was the same and I read about it in the newspaper. Tomatoes were specially mentioned, and it was said that prices would go up.

Yet once things had been got straight my boss left me to work on my own again, while he went back to his chair, taking time off only to put more and more on the heap. Though by this time it had gone properly rotten inside, and was getting smaller if anything. Also it was smelling bad and bringing the flies around, and the sanitary inspector came and said it would have to be shifted into a hole and buried. And he didn't like it when my boss laughed and said it was a good smell; it meant that the earth was getting her own back again.

Nor was he our only visitor. They started driving up in their cars every day, looking as smart as if they'd just stepped out of bandboxes, and my boss would look a cut talking to them in his denims and sandshoes, and his shirt full of holes that he'd left off mending. There was a man from my boss's bank came, and a man from the markets, and a police man along with one of our local doctors. But I never heard what they talked about, and I never said a thing to anybody, not even the Sunday morning when my mother came in from next door, and said they were taking Mr. Williams to the hospital in an ambulance. They'd found him lying just inside the gate, she said, and he'd had a stroke.

I ran along the road and I was just in time to see my boss lying all tucked up on the stretcher. He couldn't move and he couldn't speak, and he didn't seem to be able to hear. The drooping lid was right down over that eye, but the other one was wide open. I got right in front of it, but he didn't seem as if he could see me.

A HEN AND SOME EGGS

I THINK that one time when my mother set a hen on some eggs was about the most anxious time I've ever experienced in my life.

The hen was a big black Orpington, and mother set her inside a coop in the warmest corner of our yard. My brother and I went out one night and held a candle, and mother put the hen in the coop and gave her thirteen eggs to hatch out. And the next morning we ran out and looked inside the coop, and it was wonderful to see the hen looking bigger than ever as she sat on the thirteen eggs.

But besides being wonderful to see the hen sitting on the eggs it was a worry to see that she had one egg showing. And it was the same way each time we looked. It wouldn't have been so bad if we could have been sure that it was the same egg each time, because mother had put the thirteenth egg in just to see if thirteen was an unlucky number, and if it hadn't hatched out it wouldn't have mattered much. But we couldn't be sure, and we'd go to school thinking that if our hen was silly enough to let each one of the thirteen eggs get cold in turn, then we wouldn't have any of the eggs hatch out at all.

Then an even worse worry was trying to get the hen to eat. We'd put her food just by the hole in the coop but she'd take no notice. And after we'd got tired of waiting to see her come out and eat and had gone away and left her, sometimes the food would disappear, but as often as not it wouldn't. And when it did disappear we could never be sure that it wasn't the sparrows that had taken *it* So each time we looked inside the coop we thought our hen was getting thinner and thinner, and if there happened to be two eggs showing instead of one we were sure it was so, and we said that after all our trouble there probably wouldn't be one egg

that'd hatch out after all. And we thought that our hen might even be silly enough to let herself starve to death.

Then one Saturday morning when it was nearly time for the eggs to hatch out something terrible happened. My brother and I were chopping kindling wood in the yard when suddenly my brother said, Look! And there was the hen walking up and down inside the wire-netting part of the coop, something which we had never seen her doing before.

We thought she must be hungry, so as fast as we could we took her some wheat. But the hen didn't seem to be hungry, and instead of eating the wheat she started cackling, and if we stayed near her she'd run up and down inside the wire-netting instead of just walking. Well, we went and told mother, and mother told us to leave the hen alone and she'd go back to the eggs. So we stood in the yard and watched, but the hen went on walking up and down so we went and told mother again. And mother looked at the clock and said, Give her five minutes from now and see what happens.

Well, the hen went on walking up and down, and we could hardly bear it. It was awful to think of the thirteen eggs getting colder and colder. Anyhow mother made us wait another five minutes, then she came out and we tried to shoo the hen back into the coop. But it was no good, the hen went on like a mad thing, and mother said we'd just have to leave her alone and trust to luck. We all went inside to look at the clock and we reckoned that the hen must have been off the nest for at least twenty minutes, and we said that the eggs couldn't help being stone cold by that time.

Then when we came outside again we saw the most astonishing thing happen. The hen suddenly left off cackling and walking up and down. She stood there without moving just as if she was trying to remember something, then she ran for the hole in the coop and disappeared inside.

Well, it was ourselves who went on like mad things then. But after a few minutes we started talking in whispers, and we chopped our kindling wood round the front of the house so as not to disturb the hen, and we'd keep coming back

into the yard to creep towards the coop and took in from a distance, and it was more wonderful than ever to see the hen sitting there even though there was one egg showing as usual.

And a few days later twelve of the eggs hatched out, but the thirteenth egg was no good. To this day I've wondered whether it was the same one that was always showing, and whether that was the one that was no good. My brother said the hen knew it was no good and didn't bother to keep it warm. He may have been right. Children are rather like hens. They know things that men and women don't know, but when they grow up they forget them.

GODS LIVE IN WOODS

AFTER they'd finished a late breakfast Henry put some more fire on and filled up the kettle. Then he brought out a big thermos and began to cut slices of bread. Rex still had plenty to say, but Henry interrupted him.

I'm going to bring some sheep down from the back, he said.

Good, Rex said, and he went on talking.

Rex was one of Henry's nephews and it was donkey's years since he'd been down to the farm, not since he'd been a boy. The previous evening he'd driven down for the Easter weekend. He'd arrived late, but full of talk, and they hadn't gone to bed until long after midnight. Anyhow it made a change for his uncle Henry, he was a bachelor, and except when he had somebody there help-r ing him on the farm, he lived on his own. It was years now since he'd finished breaking in his farm from heavy bush country.

Come on, Henry said, or it'll be lunchtime before we start.

He put what they were taking to eat in a tucker-bag, and they went outside. There had been rain in the night but now it was a fine hot day, one right out of the box. As much, of the sky as you could see between the sides of the valley was a wonderful blue. Henry let the dogs off the chain, and they bounded about until they were sure where the boss was going, then they went on ahead along the road that led up the pumice floor of the valley that was Henry's farm and it was only a few minutes up the road to the woolshed, its pens overshadowed by huge willows. Rex remembered the woolshed from the time he had been there as a boy, but the willows had only just been planted then.

By Jove, uncle Henry, he said, they make a man realize he's a lot older than he feels.

Not far beyond the woolshed the road ended. Here the valley began to close in and there were no pumice flats, the spurs being thicker and coming down right to the creek,.

And above the creek the track that began where the road left off was cut into the spurs. It was really what was left of a tramline that had been used for bringing out logs. Nor was the country so good up here, it was even steeper, and on the shady faces the fern had properly got away. And places where the grass still held were scarred by slips that showed up the clay and papa. One of these had come down from above the track, and piled up on it before going on down into the creek. A chain or so of fence had been in its way and it had gone too. You could see some posts and wire sticking out of the clay.

That one came down in the flood last winter, Henry said. A man is lucky to have any farm left. But what was it you were saying? he said.

And Rex went on to say what nonsense it was for Easter to come at the wrong time of the year. It's to do with re-birth, he said. Springtime. It's a pagan ceremony really.

Yes? Henry said.

And Rex said he didn't go to church any more, he'd joined the Rationalists instead.

His uncle listened while he went on to explain- himself, and by that time the valley had begun to widen out again. All the same it was the end of it, the side ridges joined up in a tremendous circle, and the basin that they made was broken up by spurs coming down off the skyline. And filling a long wide gully between two of them was the only piece of bush that was left on the farm. Everywhere else you saw only the grass, sheep and cattle dotted about, fern and manuka getting away, the fire-blackened skeletons of trees still standing, and the great bare faces with the clay and papa showing. It was as though everything there was to see was there to be seen. But looking up towards the bush wasn't at all the same, you couldn't help but feel that it was quite different.

It's an easier climb up this way, Henry said.

He turned off towards the bush, and they crossed over the creek just above where another one came down from the bush and joined in. And you couldn't help noticing that the water was cloudy in one and clear in the other. At that

moment Rex was saying that religion didn't have any meaning any more, but his uncle interrupted him. He was standing on top of the bank where he could watch the two streams mix.

A man can stand here and see his farm going down to the sea, he said. But carry on with what you were saying, he said, and going up to the bush Rex went on to say how science had got the wood on religion properly. Yet believe it or not, uncle Henry, I know a crazy sort of guy who reckons things'll crash and then there'll be a return to the old pagan religions. But can you see people going back to believing in gods and dragons ? Well, I'm blowed if I can.

But for some time the dogs had been out of sight some where ahead, all of a sudden some sheep moved, and by the time Henry had got the dogs to come behind they were on the edge of the bush. And for a while inside the going was tough. There was the sloping ground for one thing, but it was mainly because, years ago, the biggest trees had been taken out. The stumps still had the sloven sticking up, though it was covered over with moss now. And there was the litter of the tops, and the logs that hadn't been worth while, all overgrown now, rotting, and hung with moss.

Rex didn't talk any more. He followed along behind his uncle and the dogs came after, panting, flattening themselves on their bellies to squeeze under the biggest logs, jumping onto the smaller and then down. Henry knew his way though, the tough part didn't last long and then it was a fairly easy grade up what seemed to be the back of a side spur. It was more open bush too, nothing had been taken out, and every here and there they'd come on great barrels that were springing up, up, until they passed out of sight above the lighter stuff. Henry said that climbing the hills made him feel a lot older than looking at the willows did, and he'd keep on stopping for a breather, and they'd stand there without even Rex talking. After the sun it was all very cool and dim, with a smell of damp and rot, and still, except for the birds, and the sound of the creek somewhere down below. The dogs stopped too, and panted with their tongues hanging out. Nor did they wander, they were

content to follow along close behind, as if they too had the feeling that this wasn't at all like being in the open country.

Then Henry said, Do you remember the time you thought you were lost ?

I had the wind up that time, Rex said. But dash it all uncle Henry, remember I was only a kid then.

And it started him off talking again. He said he'd often thought about how frightened he'd been that time, when really there'd been nothing to be frightened of.

Well, Henry said, it isn't too nice getting caught in the bush overnight.

Still, Rex said, you know there's nothing that can hurt you. I wouldn't mind spending a night in the bush. Not now, he said.

No ? Henry said. But the wetas come out at night. And he laughed. The Maoris call them taipos.

But Rex said that was just a piece of superstition, and he was going to explain about that when his uncle said, Listen !

Quite close to them something was moving, then there was the stillness again. The dogs peered. They pricked their ears, left off panting to sniff, and you could see the hair bristling on their backs. Then Henry took Rex's arm and pointed. See, he said. For a moment Rex couldn't see, then he did.

Good God! he said.

From only a few yards away the face of a bullock with big curving horns was staring at them. And from what you could see of the rest of it, it was a wonderful dark-red beast.

I need a fence down below, Henry said. The sheep don't come up through here but the cattle do. And I've got to have the cattle to help me keep the fern down.

He stooped to pick up something to throw but the beast suddenly turned round. There was a crash; a sway of small stuff, and it was gone.

Rex wanted to know, didn't he feel like cutting the bush out ?

No, Henry said, I've done enough of that.

Why ? Rex said. Wouldn't it pay ?

Oh yes, Henry said, there'd be money in it all right.

And they started climbing again, and it wasn't long before they came out of the bush without having gone through very much of it. They'd come out high up on one side, and stopping for another breather before going out of the shade Henry took a couple of apples out of his tucker-bag, and while they ate them he explained to Rex that this strip of country running round the back of the bush was the hardest place on the farm to muster. If the sheep ran down into the gully where the creek started on its run through the bush it was almost impossible to get them out.

But I'll show you, he said.

It was rough country, and they were quite a time working their way round behind the bush until they came to the edge of the gully Henry had told about. He stopped then and said they were lucky. There were no sheep down below, they were all feeding higher up, and it looked as if they'd probably run the right way.

But if you don't mind, he said, you go down to the bottom and try to stop anything that comes.

He waited until Rex had got to the right place, then he sent one of the dogs out. It had a long way to go and the sheep never saw it coming, and it didn't bark until just at the right moment. The sheep began to move, and a string of them crossed over the top of the gully just as Henry wanted them to. But the dog went back out of sight, you could hear it barking, then three more sheep showed up in a great hurry and Henry quickly called the dogs off. The sheep started to run across but halfway over they stopped. Henry and Rex began calling out, *Ho, ho, ho,* but the three sheep didn't move, and the dog was too sudden when Henry told him to fetch them on. In its fright the last sheep turned down towards Rex, and although he did his best it was no good, the sheep beat him. It was a big wether too, and it never stopped until it finished up right down in the hollow by the creek where it went into the bush. And down there it became even more upset at finding itself without any of its cobbers.

Never mind, Henry said.

But Rex was excited too. He ran down after the wether

and was lucky enough to grab hold of it first go. He sat over it, holding on tight, and as he tried to get the beast to move uphill his face looking up at his uncle showed how proud and excited he was feeling.

It's no good, Henry said, Let him go.

Rex said, say he took it down through the bush? It ought to be easy along the creek, he said.

And Henry laughed.

There's bluffs forty feet high, he said.

Well, look here, uncle Henry, Rex said, d'you mind if I have a go ?

No, Henry said, it would be a proper mug's game.

But instead of saying anything to that Rex worked the sheep round until he had it facing downhill. All of a sudden it tried to make a break but he held on, riding it, then they were hidden by the first trees. The next moment Henry could hear them splashing in the creek.

That evening Henry had his dinner and cleared away afterwards before he showed any signs of doing something. And by that time it had been dark for several hours. First he took Rex's dinner off the rack and put it in the oven, then he made some fresh tea and filled the thermos. And after he'd found a torch that would work he went out and let the dogs off the chain. It turned out that he needn't have bothered though, because he hadn't got as far as the wool-shed when the dogs barked. He cooeyed, and Rex answered, and coming round a bend in the road Henry caught him in the light of the torch. He didn't keep it on him though, he quickly turned it away.

Are you all right ? he said.

Right as rain, Rex said.

But Henry had seen the wreck that he was, his face bleeding and his clothes filthy and torn.

He didn't say anything, and going down the road Rex said only one thing, You know uncle Henry, I'd certainly get rid of that blasted bit of bush if I were you.

Note—Taipo: colloquially interpreted by the European as devil.

THE HOLE THAT JACK DUG

JACK had got a pretty considerable hole dug in the backyard before I knew anything about it. I went round one scorching hot Saturday afternoon, and Jack was in the hole with nothing on except his boots and his little tight pair of shorts. Jack is a big specimen of a bloke, he's very powerfully developed, and seeing he's worked in the quarry for years in just that rigout, he's browned a darker colour than you'd ever believe possible on a white man. And that afternoon he was sweating so much he had a shine on as well.

Hullo, Jack, I said, doing a spot of work?

And Jack leaned on his shovel and grinned up at me. The trouble with Jack's grin is that it shows too many teeth. It's easy to pick they're not the real thing, and I've always thought they somehow don't fit in with the rest of him. Also, his eyes are sky-blue, and it almost scares you to see them staring out of all that sunburn. I don't say they don't fit in though. They always have a bit of a crazy look about them, and even though Jack is my closest cobber, I will say he'll do some crazy things.

Yes, Tom, he said, I'm doing a job.

But it's hot work, I said.

I've said it was scorching hot and it was. We'd been having a good summer, the first one after the war broke out. You'd hear folks say what lovely days we were having; and you'd be somehow always telling yourself you just couldn't believe there was any war on, when everything round about you looked so fine and dandy. But anyhow, I was just going to ask Jack if he wanted a hand, when his missus opened the back door and asked if I'd go in and have a cup of tea.

No thanks, Mrs. Parker, I said, I've only just had one.

She didn't ask Jack, but he said he could do with one, so we both went inside, and his missus had several of her friends

there. She always has stacks of friends, and most times you'll find them around. But I'm Jack's friend, about the only one he has that goes to the house. I first ran across Jack in camp during the last war, though I only got to be cobbers with him a fair while after, when we lived at the same boarding house and worked at the same job, shovelling cement. In those days he hadn't started to trot the sheila he eventually married, though later on when he did I heard all about it. It knocked Jack over properly. He was always telling me about how she was far too good for him, a girl with her brains and refinement. Before she came out from England she'd been a governess, and I remember how Jack said she'd read more than ten books by an author called Hugh Walpole. Anyhow, Jack was knocked over properly, and I reckon she must have been, too. Or why did she marry him? As for me, I reckon it was because she did have the brains to tell a real man when she saw one, and hook on to him when she got the chance. But all that must be well over twenty years ago now, and it's always a wonder to me the way Jack still thinks his missus is the greatest kid that ever was, even though she couldn't make it plainer than she does, without a word said, that she's changed her mind about him. Not that you can altogether blame her, of course. Just about any man, I should say, would find it awfully trying to be a woman married to Jack. But for a cobber you couldn't pick on a finer bloke.

One thing Mrs. Parker's always had against Jack is that he's stayed working in the quarry year after year, instead of trying to get himself a better job. Meaning by a better job one that brings in more pay, without it mattering if it's only senseless and stupid sort of work you have to do. Of course, Jack knows that to run the house, with the snooks growing up fast, his missus could have always done with considerably more money than he's able to let her have. He lets her have the lot anyway, he never would smoke or drink or put money on a horse. But he isn't the sort that's got much show of ever being in the big money, and any case it would need to be pretty big, because his missus is always coming to light

with some big ideas. Not to mention a car, one thing she's always on about is a refrigerator. It would save money in the long run is what she reckons, and maybe she's right, but it's always seemed too much of a hurdle to Jack.

Do you know, dear, I heard him say once, when I was a little boy, and my mother opened the safe, and there was a blowfly buzzing about, it sometimes wouldn't even bother to fly inside.

And Mrs. Parker said, What's a blowfly (or your mother for that matter) got to do with us having a refrigerator? And Jack went on grinning until she got cross and said, Well, why wouldn't it fly inside ?

Because, dear, Jack said, it knew it was no good flying inside.

And you could tell it annoyed his missus because she still couldn't work it out, but she wasn't going to let on by asking Jack to explain.

But I was telling about that Saturday afternoon when we went inside, and Jack had his cup of tea and I wouldn't have one.

Well, do sit down, Mrs. Parker said to me, but I stayed standing. It sounds dirty, I know, but I'd had years of experience behind me. I've only got a sort of polite interest in Jack's missus and those friends of hers. They're always talking about books and writers, but never any I know anything about. Henry Lawson now, that would be different. Though I've always remembered that name Hugh Walpole, and once I started one of his, I forget the name, but I never got past the first chapter. I only go there because I'm Jack's cobber, but Mrs. Parker is a mighty good-looking woman, so I suppose she's always naturally expected everybody of the male sex to be more interested in her than in her old man. Everybody is, anyhow, except me. But still she's never seemed satisfied. And with things that way I've usually always picked on fine week-ends to go round and see Jack, because then the pair of us can work in the garden, and I don't have to listen to his missus all the time nipping at him. And times

when it comes on wet I've usually shoved off, though sometimes we've gone and sat yarning on the camp stretcher in the little room off the back verandah where Jack sleeps. Jack mightn't have the brains that his missus has, but he isn't dumb, and I've always liked to hear him talk. He's such a good-natured cuss, always wanting everything in the garden to be lovely for everybody that walks the earth, and he'll spout little pieces of poetry to show what he means. Years before the war broke out I was listening to him talking about the way things were going with the world, and saying what he thought was going to happen. After all, the pair of us had been in the last war, and I agreed when Jack said he could see it all coming again. And he had more to worry about than I had, because his eldest one was a colt. (I say was, because later on it was rotten to get the news from Italy about him.)

Anyhow, one reason I stayed standing when Mrs. Parker asked me to sit down was because I thought I'd get Jack back into the garden sooner if I didn't sit down. And although he grinned round at the company, looking awfully hairy and sweaty though not too naked on account of his dark colour, and even spouted one of his pieces of poetry (which his missus several times tried to interrupt), he was all the time gulping several cups of tea down hot, and I reckoned he had that hole he was digging on his mind, which as it turned out he had.

That hole !

It was right up against the wash-house wall, and we went out and looked at it, and Jack said it would take a lot of work but never mind. He said he hadn't thought about me giving him a hand, but never mind that either. We could widen *it* another four feet so the pair of us could work there together. And he went and got the spade, and I began by taking the turf off the extra four feet, while Jack got down below again with the shovel.

Now I've known Jack a longer time than his missus has, so maybe that's the reason why I know it's never any good

pestering him with straightout questions, because if you do you only get an answer back like the one I'd heard his missus get over the refrigerator. Only seeing Jack knows me pretty thoroughly, he'll probably make it a lot more difficult to work out than that one was. So if he wanted to dig a hole that was all right with me, and I thought if I just kept my mouth shut I'd find out in plenty of good time what he **was** digging it for. To begin with though, I don't know that I thought about it much at all. It was Jack's concern, and he didn't have to tell me.

But I admit it wasn't long before I began wondering. **You** see, when we finished up that Saturday afternoon Jack said we'd done a good job of work, but how about if I came round and we carried on one night during the week? And that was all right, I said for one night I could cut out taking a few bob off the lads that were learning to play billiards along at the room, and I'd make it Wednesday. And Wednesday after work I had my wash but didn't change out of my working clothes, and after dinner I got on my bike and went round to Jack's place and found him har4 at it. Also, it was easy to tell this wasn't the only night he'd been working because already by now it was a whopping great hole he was working in. Anyhow, we had our usual yarn, then the pair of us got to work and kept on until it was too dark to see any more. And just about then Jack's missus came round the corner of the wash-house.

Whatever are you two boys doing? she wanted to know.

We've been working, Mrs. Parker, I said.

Yes, she said, but what are you digging that hole for?

You see, dear, Jack said, some people say they don't like work, but what would we ever have if we didn't work? And now the war's on we've all got to do our share. Think of the soldier-boys. Fighting's hard work, and Tom **and** me want to do our bit as well.

But before he'd finished Mrs. Parker had gone inside again. I was putting my bicycle clips on my trousers, but Jack was still down the hole, and he asked if I'd mind handing him

down a box with a candle and matches that I'd see in the wash-house. I watched while he lit up and fixed the box so the light shone where he wanted to work. And for a few minutes I stayed watching, the shovel going in deep each time under his weight, the candle-light showing up the hollows and curves made by his big muscles, and the sweat making him look as if he was all covered with oil. I left him to it, but said I'd be round again Saturday afternoon, and going home I thought perhaps it was a septic tank he was putting in. Or was it an asparagus bed? Or was he going to set a grape vine? It was evidently going to be a proper job anyway, whatever it was.

Well, the job went on for weeks, As far as I could make out Jack must have come home and worked at it every night until late. He didn't like taking time off to shift away the spoil from the edge, so that was the job I took on, and I must have shifted tons of the stuff down to the bottom of the garden in the wheelbarrow. Nor would Jack let me go down the hole any more. He said it was too dangerous, and it certainly looked like it. Because once he'd got down deep he started to under-cut in all directions, particularly on the wash-house side, which seemed pretty crazy to me. Once he struck rock, so brought some gelly home from the quarry and plugged a bit in and set it off, and it brought a lot of earth down on the wash-house side. Then he had to get to work and spend a lot of time rigging up props in case the blocks that were holding the wash-house up came through. I was hanged if I could get a line on what it was all about, and it was beginning to get me worried. His missus didn't ask any more questions, not while I was there anyway, but I noticed she was getting round with a worried look, and I'd never felt that way before, but I did feel a bit sorry for her then. About the only ones that got a kick out of the business were Jack's youngest snooks. The gelly he set off had been a real bit of fun for them, and they and their cobbers were always hanging around in the hope of another explosion. One that would finish off the wash-house, no doubt. Another thing

was that for several weeks Jack hadn't done a tap of work in tie garden, and one afternoon when Mrs. Parker came out with cups of tea for us, she said he must be losing his eyesight if he couldn't see there was plenty just crying out to be done.

Yes, dear, Jack said in that good-natured sort of loving tone he always uses to her. Things being what they are between them, I can understand how it must make her want to knock him over the head. Yes, dear, he said, but just now there are other things for Tom and me to do.

He was sitting on the edge of the hole, and after the strain of a long bout of shovelling his chest was going like a big pair of bellows worked by machinery. The day was another scorcher, but blowy as well, and the dust had stuck to him, and run and caked, and stuck again, until about all you could see that was actually him was those eyes of his. And the bloodshot white and bright blue staring out of all that was something you almost couldn't bear to look at.

Yes, dear, he repeated, we have other things to do.

And it was just then that half a dozen planes flying down quite low happened to suddenly come over. And of course we all of us stared up at them.

You see, dear, Jack went on saying, though you could hardly hear him for the noise of the planes. You see dear, he said, we have more important things to do than those boys flying up there. Or, at any rate, he went on, just as important.

But since we were watching the planes we didn't pay much attention to him. And it wasn't until they were nearly out of sight that I realized he'd disappeared down the hole again. You could tell he was down there all right. The shovelfuls of spoil were coming flying up over the edge at a tremendous rate. And it was only afterwards, thinking it over, that I remembered what he'd been saying.

Well. This is the end of my yarn about Jack and the hole he dug. Next time I went round he was filling it in again, and he'd already got a fair bit done. All he said was that if he didn't go ahead and get his winter garden in he'd be having

the family short of vegetables. And his missus had told Mm he'd got to do something about the hole because it was dangerous when there were kids about. So I took over wheeling the stuff up from the bottom of the garden, and Jack rammed it back in so tight that by the time he was up to ground level again there was only a little bit left over.

I must end up with a joke, though. It was only a few summers later we had the Jap scare, and Jack earned a considerable amount of money digging shelters for people who were wanting them put in in a hurry, and weren'r so particular how much they paid to get the work done. His missus appreciated the extra one for the family. All her friends agreed it was scandalous, the callous way he didn't seem to care if his own wife and children were all blown to bits !

As for me, I'm ready to stick up for Jack any time. Though I don't say his missus is making a mistake when she says that some day he'll end up in the lunatic asylum.

LAST ADVENTURE

THE one and only time when I visited a certain seaside place in the far north of New Zealand was when I'd just left school. My mother had had an illness all through the spring, and towards Christmas the doctor ordered her away to the sea side. And as I was finishing with school that summer my father said I might as well have a decent holiday before I started on a job in his office early in the New Year.

In those days it was a quiet place up in the north there, a very old settled place with a row of Norfolk pines planted along the beach, and after living all my life in a country town I thought nothing could have been finer. Although to begin with my mother was rather difficult. She was far from being really well again, and she expected me to stay with her nearly all day while she sat in a deck chair in the shade of the pines. But later on we .got to know some of the people in the settlement (they were nearly all retired lawyers and colonels, and people of that type), so most days I could get mother settled in her deck chair among the ladies along at the croquet lawn. They'd promise to keep an eye on her, and then I was free to go off and explore the coast. And it was on one of these occasions that I met the old man my story is about.

You had to walk a fair way along the coast before you came to where he lived. He'd built himself a shack among the sandhills, and he'd mainly used old pieces of corrugated iron. It was a hot sort of place to live in in summer, but then in summer he was hardly ever inside, and wintertime, he said, he could always keep a fire going with the driftwood that he picked up along the beach.

The first time I came on him he was in having a swim and he seemed to be enjoying himself. He was well sunburnt, and he had such an extraordinary growth of shaggy

hair on his chest that when he stood up chest-high in the water, it floated on the surface like seaweed. He looked very old to me. He had on only a small pair of trunks and he was sunburnt all over, and I thought that at one time he must have been a lot heftier than he was then, as in places his skin hung in folds and reminded me of a rhinoceros that I'd seen in a zoo. Anyhow we said good-day to each other and he came out of the water and took me up to his shack and gave me a drink of his homebrew. It was the first time in my life I'd tasted any sort of brew, and I must say I found the taste to my liking.

But that first day he didn't open out much, although he told me that his name was Fred Holmes, and he seemed to like having me there to talk to, so it wasn't long before I got into the habit of always heading in his direction whenever I could leave my mother. He owned an old dinghy and he'd take me out fishing with him, although most of my time I'd have to spend in baling to keep us from sinking. And it was while we were fishing, or while we were lying in the sand after having a swim, that he told me about his life.

He'd been born in a Devonshire market town, and his father had been a solicitor (my own father was a public accountant, I told him), but when he was fifteen he'd cleared out and gone to sea in a windjammer. The trip had been across to New York and he'd got left there. It was over a girl. Her father kept a saloon on the waterfront, and on the night the ship was sailing he thought he'd like to say good bye to her just once more, even though he'd already said good-bye a good many times over. So he climbed up on some big pipes that were stacked endways underneath her window. But up on top he'd slipped down inside one of the pipes, and that had put the lid on things properly. The girl's father hadn't taken to him too kindly and he didn't feel like making a row, but there was no way of getting out So he'd missed his ship, and for a time he'd had a tougl spin living from hand to mouth on odd jobs he picked u on the waterfront. But later on he'd got another ship and

finished up with her in Fremantle. This time he deserted on purpose. He thought he'd try his luck on the goldfields..

Well, he told me endless tales of his adventures and I suppose they were commonplace enough. I'd read any number of stories of such adventures and had many a wild longing to experience them myself, but they seemed so far removed from the everyday life of a small country town that I suppose I'd never have the courage to make the break.. But it was somewhat different hearing them firsthand from Fred Holmes. He had a narrative gift that thrilled me as scarcely any book had ever done, and when I'd go back to the croquet lawn to help mother back to our boarding-house, and be offered a cup of tea when only an hour or SQ before I'd been drinking the old man's homebrew, I'd feel quite sick at the thought of how tame most people's lives were. Never in my life had I met anyone like Fred Holmes. But I was young, of course, and didn't know much.

The days passed and I could think of nothing but Fred Holmes and his adventures. And each fresh episode that he told me stirred me up more than the one before. His tales were of pearling and wild life in Broome, of life in the mounted police and on the goldfields. Later on he'd come further east and worked on boats running about the islands, for a time he'd run a banana farm in Queensland, and he'd first come to New Zealand in the hope of making a fortune out of picking up ambergris. He hadn't made a fortune, he said, but he'd done fairly well.

I remember particularly one bit he told me about gold prospecting. He told me about the way old-timers would cut a big potato in half and hollow out the centres, then they'd put their mixture of gold and quicksilver in the hollows, bind the pieces together with wire and put the potato in a heap of cinders. The heat would drive off the quick-silver and they'd open the potato and there'd be a Jump of gold inside. It was wasteful of course, as you lost the quicksilver, but it was a way. And after a story like that I'd go hack to the croquet lawn dream ing of enormous potatoes with enormous tumps of gold inside,

Other times he would tell me grim stories, and I could see that he had a great liking for telling them. There was one about when he was a constable in Boulder City and was sent out with a horse and cart to bring a corpse into town. He picked up the corpse and put it in the back of the cart, and after, stopping at every hotel on the way he got back late at night. But when he looked in the cart the corpse wasn't there. So to save himself from getting into trouble he drove back over his route, but without finding the corpse anywhere. Then when he arrived back in the morning the corpse was found in the lock-up. It had fallen out of the cart outside the last hotel he had stopped at. Another constable had found it there, and thinking he was dealing with a drunken man had dragged him along to the lock-up.

But I'm afraid that such stories did not impress me very much. My life up till then hadn't brought me into contact with any corpses, and the sort of adventures that attracted me had no connection with them. And no matter how long I listened to the old man his grim stories would always seem much less real to me than his romantic ones. I much preferred to hear about potatoes with lumps of gold inside.

I had, in fact, almost made up my mind that I'd follow the old man's example and live a life of adventure. He told me that young people hadn't the spirit of adventure in them any longer, and it was a pity that in a new country like New Zealand it had died out so soon. He was quite proud of his life, particularly of the fact that he had been born in a hum drum market town in Devon, and into a very staid and re spectable family, yet had struck out for himself and refused to live the tame easy life that he could have lived.

Nevertheless I had my doubts. I asked him whether he didn't wish that now he was old he could live in comfort, and that he'd saved some of his money instead of always spending it on drinking and having a riotous time generally. But he said he had no regrets, and that if you had that attitude to money you'd never get the best out of life. When his time came he would die a free man just the same as he

had always lived. Nor had he any intention of ending his days in his shack, he said. He'd been thinking of moving on for some while past, and there'd be lots of exciting times for him yet. It was just that in the meantime he was content to spend his time fishing and swimming and lying in the sun. And on such an occasion he'd always slap himself on the chest and declare that he was still as sound as ever he was. And 'certainly he seemed to be in the best of health, although there was one time when we were in swimming and after we'd raced over fifty yards or so he stood up rather pale and shaky. I said something about it, but he declared that it was only my imagination. Even so I noticed that he lay down, and was very quiet for a fair while after.

Then it happened that Christmas week began, and a few visitors turned up in the settlement, as well as some of the sons and daughters of mother's croquet-playing friends. So besides croquet there was tennis, and cricket on the beach, and mother insisted that instead of going off so much on my own I should make myself sociable by joining in. And as she was still far from well, and liable to be easily upset I had to fall in with her wishes as much as possible. Several days went by and I didn't get a chance to go along and see old Fred Holmes. But I was thinking of him all the time, and one day when a crowd of us took a launch trip round the Bay I got so sick of listening to back-chat that hardly went beyond tennis and dancing and cricket that I made up my mind. I decided that I would be like the old man and live a life of adventure. I didn't know how or when I would start on it, but sooner or later, start on it I would. And perhaps I was helped to make my decision by the launch's calling in at a place where overseas boats could come in to load timber. There was a big boat in loading at the time, and as we went past I watched the men working aboard. It made my heart beat. Lots of them, I thought, could tell of adventures as exciting as any of Fred Holmes's. And some of them looked very little older than I was. They might be cabin boys or apprentices, I didn't know what, but if they could get away on such boats

so could I. And I imagined myself persuading Fred to let me have his dinghy so that some night I could pull out, climb aboard some such boat, and stow away. Perhaps I could persuade him to come too and it would be all right, I thought, to have him with me.

Anyhow, it must have been nearly a week before I got an opportunity to spend a day with my friend, and it was early one fine morning when I set out, wearing my bathing suit, and carrying only a towel and a parcel of lunch. But just before I was clear of the settlement I had to pass the little building that was known as the police station, although there was never any constable to be seen, and whatever duties were necessary were done by the local storekeeper. Outside was the storekeeper's old Ford truck, and as I passed the man himself came out of the building and asked me if I'd lend him a hand. I went inside and there was a coffin wrapped round with mourning crepe, and you could see it was just a long box made out of rough boards. Well, the storekeeper got me to help him to carry out the coffin and put it on the truck, and I felt rather uncomfortable having to do such a thing dressed only in my bathing suit.

The old bloke's not so heavy as I thought he'd be, the storekeeper said, and as he lit his pipe before driving off I said I supposed it was somebody local.

Yes, he said, the old bloke who was living just up the coast. Fred Holmes.

I was too upset to say anything. I just stood there and watched the storekeeper crank up and drive away, and there were so many ruts in the road I wouldn't have been surprised to see the coffin bounce off the back of the truck.

And thinking the matter over all these years, I've never yet been able to decide why that sight of a coffin bouncing about on the back of an old Ford truck should have had such a profound effect on me. After all, an expensive funeral wouldn't have made things any better. I suppose it was just the shock of waking up to the fact that no matter what sort of life you have, there's always the catch at the end of it.