

TALES

OF THE

DANDENONGS

(Second Series)



By JAMES HUME-COOK

TALES

OF THE

DANDENONGS

(Second Series)



By JAMES HUME-COOK

p60254.

20

J. H. Moor

With all good wishes

J. Anne & Co

FOREWORD

The following Tales—like the first series, issued in December, 1935—have their settings in the Dandenong Hills. The reasons, as set forth in the first story—“Nellie Moir”—may be here re-stated:—

“There is always something doing in the Hills. Amid the Hills the human heart beats stronger and the mind is more alert. Though they seem to brood, to doze, they are none the less awake to all that matters. From every peak and shoulder there is to be seen another view, and, to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, there is much more to be noted than can be imagined. Their variety is measureless. Within their depths and on their heights it is the unexpected that always happens. Surprise lurks everywhere, and there is no manner of man who cannot be taken unawares.”

No copies of this booklet will be offered for sale, the whole edition having been reserved for distribution amongst friends.

If any reader cares to express an opinion, it would be esteemed a favour to receive a letter saying which Tale was liked the better.

JAMES HUME-COOK.

Brighton, Melbourne,
Australia.

December, 1938.

THE CHARACTERS IN THESE STORIES
ARE FICTITIOUS.

Tales of the Dandenongs

“SIMPLE SIMON.”

“**S**O! Mither Detective there’s the case! And if ye’ll go out to Jimmy Cowan’s place ye’ll see a pair of Mary McArdle’s shoes, and if I’m not mistaken—”

But the story had better begin at a point from whence the narrative may proceed in orderly fashion to its natural conclusion. In this case, perhaps, the most appropriate thing to do is to first introduce the speaker of the opening words, for he is the central character, and plays a prominent part in the events that are about to be recorded.

Simon Slowe was what is known as “a character!” There are several types to which this expressive phrase can be applied, but in his case—owing to his attributes and peculiarities—it was a particularly apt appellation. Because of them he would have been noticeable anywhere, but in the limited community of Gembrook he stood out in contrast with the rest. In short, he was an oddity; but with such an amount of what is called “commonsense” that, despite his mannerisms and eccentricities, he was the first to be consulted in a difficulty.

In person, Simon Slowe was fairly tall and slightly round-shouldered. His face was weather-beaten and wrinkled, and might have been considered ugly but for the shrewd intelligence that gleamed in his kindly eyes. A quaint and whimsical method of expression added a touch of humour to his searching glance, and there was the suggestion of a faint and far-off brogue in the tones of his voice.

From whence he had come originally no one knew for certain. There were those who asserted that the North of Ireland had been his birth-place. They based their belief on the fact that he was wont to say “ye” for “you,” and pronounced the word “many” as if it were spelt “man-ny.” To all enquiries as to what country he came from he in-

variably replied: "From God's own Country"; and left it at that. Nor did anyone dare to question him further, for there was a note of finality in his tone that never failed to silence the enquirer.

As to his means, also, there was considerable speculation. The general assumption was that he must either be a pensioner or have some secret source of income which not even the most knowing amongst them could discover. They scorned the idea that he could maintain himself by the sale of the few curiosities he garnered from the bush and the creeks. And, as enquirers never gained the knowledge they sought, the riddle of his sustenance added to the mystery that wrapped him round. On his side—although inordinately curious—he was not given to asking personal questions. Yet—as Mrs. Scott remarked to Mrs. McArdle: "He seems to know everything about everybody, and he never forgets a thing you tell him."

At this stage it is appropriate to mention that Simon Slowe was extraordinarily observant. Nothing escaped his notice, from the direction being taken by the wind-driven clouds above to the least movement of bird or beast amid the bush below. Strange conformations and singular markings he was able to see—and perhaps slightly emphasise—in all manner of things. In his house were sticks and stones and roots; feathers and eggs and bark—besides other bush curios—every item of which had some distinctive feature.

Held by him in a certain way a water-worn pebble from the creek would disclose a fairy face of delicate beauty. A wood-knot he had placed upon a little stand looked like a crouching gnome. With the stem of his pipe—as he moved it from point to point over the surface of a speckled egg—he would trace a miniature representation of the Southern Cross. Amongst other treasures—and one with which he could not be induced to part—was a collection of twenty-six roots, of varying shapes, that he called: "The Trees' Alphabet." When showing these to child visitors he used to solemnly observe that "the trees, ye see, have learned their A, B, C, and ye's had better be careful what ye say in the bush!"

In some respects Simon Slowe belied his name. He could, on occasion, be as quick as most—and as sure. What he knew, he knew! Any statement he made was never known to be successfully disputed. He admitted having had

“some schooling as a child;” but his accuracy was not due to any special educational training. Most of his knowledge was self-acquired, and not the result of teaching or verbally imparted instruction. The books he read and re-read were few in number, and, as a consequence, no one could be more certain of their contents. It was said that he was so conversant with certain chapters of the Bible that he could quote them flawlessly, and in the whole of that great Book he was very well versed.

In this respect his almost uncanny knowledge was sharply illustrated on one well remembered occasion. Peter Smith, the butcher, was telling of how he had been shown over Parliament House, Melbourne, and of what he had seen there. Amongst other listeners, Simon Slowe was not the least attentive. Yet all were deeply interested, for none of them had ever seen anything more than the outside of Victoria’s Legislative Buildings; and they were unusually silent as Peter described the Queen’s Hall; the Chambers in which the Members sat; the Library; and other features that had caught his notice.

Enjoying the marked appreciation with which his narrative was being received, Peter came to an enthusiastic conclusion by saying:

“And in the Front Hall, in a great circle round the Royal Coat of Arms worked in colored tiles on the floor, is a verse from the Bible!”

“De ye remember the verse?” enquired Simon.

“Oh! Yes! I think I do! One of our party walked around the circle and read it aloud! What it says is: “In the multitude of Counsellors there is wisdom!”

“Then let me tell ye its not correct!” retorted Simon in his soft voice. “I know nothing about the Coat of Arms worked in colored tiles, but I can tell ye that King Solomon was too wise a man to say any such thing. What he said was: ‘Where no Counsel is the people fail; but in the multitude of Counsellors there is safety.’” And those of ye who care to look at your Bibles—” (and he gave them chapter and verse—Proverbs XI., 14)—“can see for yourselves that the word is ‘safety’ and not ‘wisdom’.” He added in his whimsical way: “Wisdom is individual. Mankind, in the mass, is very unwise. Parliament represents the mass. It may do things that are safe; but whoever heard of it doing anything that was wise!”

Which last remark would seem to indicate that Simon really was an Irishman, and "agin the Government!"

As to his nickname "Simple" Simon, a word or two may be added. Strange as it may seem, it was out of his absolute accuracy that Simon Slowe came to be dubbed "Simple" Simon. Yet, so it was, for in deprecation of any praise bestowed upon him, he invariably remarked:

"'Tis simple! 'Tis very simple! Observe and note! Knowledge mostly comes from what ye see and hear. If ye see rightly, of if ye hear rightly, ye cannot make a misstatement, if ye tell the truth! 'Tis them that don't really see or hear the thing aright that leads others astray. They only think they saw the things they talk about. Man-ny a good man's lost his liberty because somebody didn't see what he thought he saw. 'Tis just seeing and hearing, that's all!"

And, in himself, so perfectly trained were these two senses that he could—without looking, and without mistake—name the bird that flew over his head or the animal that moved in the scrub!

:: :: ::

But Simon Slowe was not unobservant of other things. To the confusion of the thief—and the wonder of others—it was his faculty of accurate observation that enabled him to name the person who had robbed the till at Mrs. Scott's little store.

Simon arrived just after that trusting soul had discovered her loss. She was greatly distressed thereat, and, amid sobs and tears, told him her story. She had gone out to feed the fowls, knowing that, as usual, she would be called by Tim the milk-boy, who, at half past seven every morning, sold her—his only cash customer—a day's supply of milk. He had come in due course—filled her jug—given her the expected call—and then waited for her to come and pay him in the accustomed way. To her dismay—when she opened the till it was quite empty!

For a moment she thought that perhaps Tim was playing a trick on her, and she had jokingly accused him of hiding her money. But he most solemnly assured her that he hadn't got it, and she could search him if she liked! Thinking then that he might be teasing her, she actually

did step round the counter with the intention of going through his pockets, but, as he immediately came forward opening his jacket for the examination, she felt that he had told her the truth, and that somebody else must have slipped in unawares and got away with the cash before he entered the store.

When Simon Slowe could calm Mrs. Scott a little, he asked how much money there had been in the drawer and how it was made up. She knew exactly. There were two one pound notes, three half sovereigns, sixteen shillings in silver and fourteen pence in copper. In reply to a further question she said: "Yes! I am quite certain of the several amounts. You see, my takings are so small that, after each sale, I just add the new sums on, and so I always know how much I have in hand!"

"Ah!" said Simon, "that settles it!" Tim has your money, although he says he hasn't, and if ye'll come with me I'll get it back for ye!"

Only too eager to recover her cash, the shop was closed and they set off at once. As every detail of Tim's round was known to them, they simply made for the place where they expected to see him; and they were not disappointed. Simon straight away demanded the return of Mrs. Scott's money; but Tim stoutly denied that he had it, and, as before, offered himself to be searched.

At this—not unexpected—offer, Simon looked steadily into the boy's eyes, but, as the youngster did not flinch beneath his gaze, he shook his head and said:

"So! I'll not search ye, for I wouldn't find it! But come back to the house ye have just left and we'll see what Mrs. Johnson can do!"

Tim went willingly; depositing his milk-can at the back door before stepping into the kitchen with the others. Mrs. Johnson looked surprised at their entry, but, in his quiet way, Simon said:

"We have just some inside to make a little investigation; and we want your help. Have ye got such a thing as a clean wash basin?"

Mrs. Johnson replied that she had, and, at Simon's request, it was brought from the bed-room and placed upon the kitchen table. He then asked:

“Are ye fairly strong, Mrs. Johnson?”

She nodded a “Yes.”

“Well! Will you please lift in the milk-can that Tim left outside, and pour the milk into the wash basin!”

At these words Tim made a spring for the door, but Simon, anticipating the move, swiftly gripped him by the arm and held him fast. Then, without appearing to take any notice of the youth’s efforts to free himself, he continued:

“Pour very carefully, Mrs. Johnson, for I don’t want ye to tip into the basin the parcel of money that’s at the bottom of the can!”

Later on, when pressed to say how he knew the cash was in the can, Simon made something like his usual reply:

“’Twas very simple! ’Twas only a matter of seeing aright. When I went into Mrs. Scott’s store to buy some tobacco I saw several spots of milk about. They were not drips but splashes. I was sure of that because drips—though they might drop on the floor—couldn’t fall upon the upright face of the counter! Such carelessness was not like Tim, for, often as I have seen him measuring out the milk, I have never seen him splash any of it about. So, when Mrs. Scott told me her till had been rifled, I immediately suspected Tim; but when she added that he had offered to let her search him I was certain that he was the thief—and what he had done with the money.

“What he did—as ye now know—was to take it out of the drawer, wrap the silver and copper into the notes and then roll the lot into a piece of paper and drop the parcel into the milk-can. Unfortunately for him—in his hurry—it was the weight of the parcel, and the sudden way he let it fall into the can, that made the milk splash the counter and spot the floor. As ye see, ’twas all very simple to make out, for Tim wrote his name ye might say, in the milk marks he left on the front of the counter.”

:: :: ::

The exposure of Tim’s trick, and the recovery of Mrs. Scott’s stolen money had been the means of establishing Simon Slowe’s reputation. From that time forth he was consulted on all manner of matters where observation and

reason were required to solve local riddles. He it was who gave the right direction for the finding of Danny Kelly's calf; and he it was who named the canine culprit that was eating the eggs laid by Mrs. McArdle's hens.

It was therefore only natural—when the great event occurred—and the detectives were trying to unravel the mystery of how Peter Smith, the butcher, met his death—that Simon Slowe should be repeatedly asked to express an opinion. But Simon kept his own counsel and refused to be drawn.

Early on a Saturday afternoon, in May, Peter went with his sister to Melbourne. Peter was a bachelor and Lily kept house for him. Once in a while, however, she would leave him to fend for himself from one afternoon to the next, the while she went to have what she termed "a little break in the city." On this occasion he accompanied her, it being his intention to spend an hour or more at the football match between Carlton and Collingwood. He returned about half past eight o'clock the same evening, and, as those who saw him were able to state—"a good deal the worse for liquor."

Amongst others who had seen him thus was "handy" Jimmy Cowans. Jimmy was one of those oddities who are to be found in out-of-the-way corners of the world. They constitute a class by themselves, and their ways of getting a living are as varied as their peculiarities. Cowans was of the inoffensive type; shy, silent and reserved. He was not exactly a "half-wit," although he was not "all there." It was only in some respects that he was a little short of normal. In others he was sharp, intelligent and reliable. For instance, he was particularly clever in the use of tools—of which he had a number—and in the mending of boots or broken things he was regarded as a wonder. He lived, with his mother, in a little cottage not far from Peter Smith's shop, behind which, at the top of a gentle rise, stood the Smith's house.

How it came to pass that Jimmy saw Peter was easily explained. Peter had given him a little job to do. One of his large knives had wooden sides to its handle, and one of these sides had split in two and fallen away from the rivets. It was Jimmy's task to fit on a new piece of wood. The repaired handle was to be ready on the Saturday, and, though drunk, Peter remembered the promise and so called for the

knife on his way home. It was ready, and Peter had taken it away in his hand, unwrapped.

As will be disclosed, these matters were to play a prominent part in the final stages of the police enquiry. The knife—stained with blood—was found upon a small table in Peter's room, where Peter himself—with his throat cut—lay dead on his bed. So was he discovered by his sister Lily on her return from Melbourne on the Sunday afternoon.

At first, suicide was suspected—then murder. But as nothing in the house had been disturbed, and nothing stolen, opinion was sharply divided. If Peter had taken his own life it was impossible to believe that, after using the knife for that purpose, he had calmly laid it on the nearby table. Moreover, the point was toward the bed, which suggested that he must have used his left hand: a ridiculous assumption seeing that he was a right handed man. On the other hand, if murder had been committed, the fact that his watch and chain—and his sovereign case with three sovereigns in it—as well as the money in his pockets were all untouched, was proof that robbery was not the motive.

Was there a motive? If so, what was it? Enquiries by the detective in charge of the case elicited the fact that Peter had greatly desired to take Mary McArdle to wife. But Mary would have none of him, prosperous as he was, and, in some respects, a desirable man for a husband. Her aversion angered him, and on several occasions Mrs. McArdle had found Mary in tears over his behaviour. The old lady naturally sided with her daughter, and it was recorded that, three or four times at least, she had been heard to say that what Peter wanted "was a good hiding!" It was also alleged that she had more than once said: "One of these days I'll give him a smack on the head that'll knock sense into it!" Some such remarks she admitted having made the night before his death.

This led to the very serious questioning of Mrs. McArdle and her daughter Mary; but nothing came of it. They were able to prove beyond all question that, on the Saturday night, two of their next door neighbors had joined them in a game of cards, and that the visitors had not departed until after ten o'clock. The friends said that it was eleven when they went to bed. Still unsatisfied, the detective called again the following day and asked for a

pair of Mary's shoes. An hour later she was arrested, taken to Melbourne, and charged with the murder of Peter Smith.

:: :: ::

The news spread with the rapidity of fire. Within a few minutes—or so it seemed—almost everybody in Gembrook was standing outside Peter Smith's closed shop, talking about Mary's arrest. Of course, no one would have it that she had killed Peter; but the fact that a Melbourne detective thought her guilty shook the faith in each of them to its foundations. In a stunned sort of way they sought—by speech—to seek enlightenment and relief, one from another. But, as nothing anyone said threw the least ray of light upon the situation, they helplessly dispersed: puzzled and afraid for Mary's life.

As soon as Simon Slowe heard the news he came into action. But there was nothing slow or stunned about the way in which he set to work. On the contrary, his moves were swift and decisive. Although he hated the city, and had not paid it a visit for years, to Melbourne he went; having just time to catch a round-trip motor car on its way back. Arrived there, without any delay he called upon the Chief Commissioner of Police—and, before that officer could say a word, burst into vehement speech.

“I want to see that daft detective ye have in charge of the Gembrook murder case. Man-ny a good man's lost his liberty because somebody didn't see what he thought he saw! And now ye be like to lose a good girl her life because ye can't see past a pair of shoes. Shame on ye! And shame on the man that's to blame. Bring him to me and I'll tell him of something he ought to have seen for himself. Get him at once!”

A few minutes later, when Detective George Brown appeared, Simon was still more or less excited. With scarcely an acknowledgment of Brown's greeting, he broke into the queerest mixture of questions and statements.

“So ye found the print of Mary's shoes in the soft earth did ye?”

“And ye's thought that that settled the matter I suppose?”

“Did you not take notice that all the foot-prints were coming away from the house and none were going to it? No! Of course ye 'didn't! But I'll defy ye to find the front of Mary's shoes facing any other way than towards the road! Did ye think, maybe, that she was carried up to the house, and then walked away from it? And would ye be after believing that Mary was twice taken that way up the path—seeing that there are two sets of footprints to be seen by them that looks at the marks aright?

“And did ye also notice that one set o' the heel marks was deeper than the other? No! Ye didn't, ye bat-eyed blunderer!—No! I'll not excuse ye! Wait till I finish.—And because ye 'didn't notice the difference ye'll be swearing a good girl's life away! Oh! 'Tis murder it is!

“And will ye be past admitting that ye didn't see the marks of a dog's feet for about half the distance up to the house?—Don't interrupt me!—Tell-tale marks. Story telling marks if ye were not too cross-eyed to read them! Oh! 'Tis an innocent ye'll be after hanging in your bob-eyed blindness!

“No! No! Listen to me, Mither Detective Brown, and I'll tell ye what ye could have found out for yourself, but what I would not tell ye except to save a life that is better than the one that must now be lost.”

And what follows—reduced to narrative form—summarises and sets out the facts and circumstances which Simon laid before the detective.

:: :: ::

When Lily Smith found her brother dead she rushed into the street screaming the news. Although Simon may not have been the first to hear her, he was the first to go with her to the house and see the state of affairs for himself. After a close examination of all there was to observe, he advised that the place be locked up and nobody admitted until the police arrived; and that a telephone message be sent to the Melbourne police at once. These things were done.

Outside the bedroom Simon also made a very careful examination of anything and everything that seemed to have a bearing on the mystery. In particular, he paid special

attention to the path leading from the house to the street. Bending near to the earth, he closely scrutinised every foot of the way; occasionally nodding his head as if to confirm his thoughts.

Later, as the result of his observations and reasoning, he came to certain definite conclusions. The theory of suicide he rejected. The state of the bed-room; the burnt-out candle; the absence of any signs of struggle—and the position of the knife all pointed to the belief that Peter Smith had been murdered in his sleep.

But who had committed the murder, and why? The answers to those questions were, as Simon put it, "printed on the path." But he read them one way and the detective another way. On behalf of the detective, it has to be said, however, that Simon's larger local knowledge gave him some advantage. He knew, for instance, that about seven o'clock on the evening of the tragedy, there had been a light fall of rain; lasting for about a quarter of an hour. This shower had been sufficient to soften the earth a little. As a result, the imprints of a dog's forepaws were plainly discernible. The marks extended from the street almost half way to Smith's house; but, quite singularly, the imprints of the animal's hind feet were scarcely visible. The reason for the uneven marking Simon ultimately explained. He was also able to state that—from his knowledge of the dogs of the district—the marks were undoubtedly made by Jimmy Cowans' terrier!

On the left-hand side of the path going towards the house, immediately in front of the dog's feet marks, were the imprints of a pair of shoes. Other markings, made by the same shoes, were also to be seen on the righthand side of the path; but no dog's feet marks. Both sets of shoe imprints faced towards the road. Superficially, it looked as if the wearer had twice walked from the house to the entrance gate. That was extremely strange because there was not the slightest trace of any walking to the house. Stranger still, as Simon realised, the imprints had unquestionably been made by Mary McArdle's shoes!

It was at this stage that Simon Slowe put on his "considering cap." As the outcome of his thinking he made some guarded and cautious enquiries. These he followed up with another and closer examination of the path to Smith's

house. He was then certain of his ground, and, in telling his deductions to the detective he said:

“Ye see, the shoe marks on the left side were not nearly in as straight a line as those on the right, and the heels were pressed more deeply into the ground. There was also the heavier imprints of the forepaws of the dog. These things led me to think that the wearer of the shoes had walked backwards, and that, for a time, a dog was following up; barking. The barking was due to the dog thinking that his master was playing a game by walking as he did. As they got nearer the house it was realised that the noise made by the dog might waken Peter Smith, who was believed to be asleep. So, to get rid of the animal a kick was aimed at him—(the deeper imprint of the left heel at the place where the paw marks stop showed that to be the case)—and he was ordered home. The reason for walking backwards was to have a clear view of the road in order to be sure that no one noticed who was making for Smith’s dwelling. Had anyone appeared, whatever purpose was in mind would at once have been abandoned.

“The next point, as ye can see,” said Simon Slowe, “was to discover who did the murder. From the first I knew it wasn’t Mary McArdle. It was some one a little bit heavier. Then who could have obtained possession of her shoes, and who had small enough feet to wear them? That was not difficult to determine after I found out that Mary had left a pair with Jimmy Cowans to mend. And suspicion grew into a certainty when I saw that the impressions left on the soft earth were made either by new or newly-mended shoes.

“So! Mистер Detective, there’s the case! And if ye’ll go to Jimmy Cowans’ place, ye’ll see a pair of Mary McArdle’s mended shoes; and, if I’m not mistaken, ye’ll find the dirt of the walking still on them. Furthermore, if ye’ll get him to put them on—and then ask him quietly—he’ll probably tell ye why he did so before, and how he came to be murdering Peter Smith.”

Simon Slowe’s advice was taken, and when Jimmy Cowans told his story in the dock it was indeed a pitiable one. As pieced together from the disjointed way in which the facts were elicited, the pith of it may be reduced to the following brief statement:

He loved Mary McArdle. In his child-like infatuation he resented Smith's attempts to win Mary for his wife; and he hated him for the distress he sometimes caused her by his offensive language and behaviour. He wanted to help Mary, but had not been able to think how or in what way he could stop Smith from pestering her with his attentions. For a long time he kept the matter to himself. At last he became so troubled that he spoke to his mother, hoping that she might do something, or tell him what to do. All that his mother had said was:

"If I were in Mary McArdle's shoes I would know what to do with Peter Smith!"

In some confused sort of way, Cowans had taken his mother's words to mean that if he got into Mary's shoes he would find out how to rid her of Smith's bullying—and he acted accordingly. It was the sight of the candle still burning—after Smith must have gone to bed—which made him think that Smith had fallen into a drunken sleep; and, although he had thought he might "bang Peter on the head with the candlestick," it was evident that he had no fixed plan of action in his mind. What he really felt was that—with Mary's shoes upon his feet—he would know what to do, and could safely have it out with the man he so intensely disliked. He knew that the butcher's sister was away from home and that he could never have such a chance again. He had not taken any weapon with him. The impulse to murder Peter Smith had come when he found him sound asleep—and the newly mended knife lying on the table. He had "only wanted to do Mary a good turn!"

From which it is clear that it was not intentional murder which actuated Jimmy Cowans's actions that fatal night. On the contrary, his sole purpose was to prevent the one he loved from being further distressed. The jury took the same view and returned a verdict of "murder whilst temporarily insane!"

Tales of the Dandenongs

"THE NURSE."

"HERE'S 'the Nurse,' Jack!"

"To hell with 'the Nurse!' I want no woman messing about me. Get me a Doctor!"

"But there's no Doctor available at present. We'll get one as soon as we can. The nearest is at Fern Tree Gully. Meantime you must have your wounds dressed and your eyes looked after!"

"Ah! My eyes! I can't see! What the blazes has gone wrong with them? I don't understand! I don't—
Oh! Alright! Let her see what she can do! But I've no faith in women! They're all the same! Either want to make love to you, or pass you by as if you didn't exist!"

:: :: ::

The foregoing colloquy took place between Jack Hewitt—a Council Foreman engaged upon the roads in the vicinity of Olinda—and two fellow employees who chanced to see the accident that had befallen him.

It was the duty of these men, amongst other things, to cut down and remove dead or dangerous trees. Hewitt was so expert at the work that he needed no assistance; and took pride in working alone. Yet, by one of those unaccountable freaks of Fate, the tree upon which he had been working creaked and fell before he could get clear—with the result that he was badly injured. His shirt was torn from his back, leaving it scored and bleeding. Luckily, neither of his arms was hurt; but his left leg was very seriously torn, and he had received such a smashing blow on the head that his eyesight was affected and he could not see.

After he had been struck down, the other two men raced to the fallen tree. They could not see Hewitt, but,

by his calls for assistance, they guessed he must be seriously injured. Within a couple of minutes they were on the scene and had pulled and cut away such portions of the tree as pinned him to the ground. Then, as gently as possible, they lifted and carried him to his own shack, a little off the roadside, further down the hill. There they laid him on his bed, and it was whilst they were stanching his wounds, and otherwise doing the best they could for him, that Hewitt had spoken so impatiently.

On the way to Hewitt's shack they had met the butcher's boy, driving around delivering orders. Seeing what had happened, he agreed without the slightest hesitation to go and look for "The Nurse." Fortunately, she was at home and agreed to go at once to Hewitt's shack. In point of fact the readiness of her response was characteristic of her usual promptitude, for, with everything ready: white overall, bag containing such first aid things as she might require—and bicycle in perfect order, she was never more than a minute or two behind the messenger.

:: :: ::

"The Nurse" was Mary Morrison. She had returned from the Great War—still quite young—to find her widowed mother unexpectedly dead. It was therefore only natural that she should yield to the desire of her Aunt—who was waiting to receive her on arrival—and go to Olinda "for a rest!" The suggestion was also made that she might there "quietly make up her mind as to what she was going to do in the future."

But Mary's mind was already "made up" as to employment. It was her full intention to seek a position in one of the Melbourne hospitals, and carry on with nursing work. And that is probably what she would have attempted to do had not her Aunt had another thought upon the subject. That capable woman—the wife of an ailing husband—was the owner of one of those little hillside stores which are such a God-send to people so circumstanced. The business was growing a little, and the indications were that it would further improve. The latter fact, together with a realisation that she was getting older and could do with some assistance, suggested the idea that her niece might set up as a Nurse—and—when there was no nursing to do—help about the house or in the store.

At first, Mary was not particularly enamoured of the proposal. Later, yielding to her Aunt's earnest persuasion she agreed to give it a reasonable trial. Very soon it was demonstrated that the services she was able to render were highly appreciated by those amongst whom she had come to live. From a broken finger to a birth she came at everybody's call. As often as not she had to advise that a Doctor be asked to see the patient before she could undertake the case. But for all sorts of minor troubles she was sufficiently skilled and efficient to act upon her own initiative. So it was that she found herself filling a "long felt want;" and "The Nurse" speedily became an established part of the social system of Olinda and district.

As can be seen, to send for "The Nurse" in such a case as Hewitt's was therefore just what the Roads men might have been expected to do. That she would come at once neither of them doubted. It never occurred to them—or, for that matter, to anyone else—that she might have personal affairs of her own to claim prior attention. As is so often found by those who perform public services, she was regarded as an institution rather than a human being, and not to have responded to a call for aid would have astonished those who sought it, and left them inwardly resentful. Some of this she understood; but so greatly did she love her work—and such was her nature—that she simply refused to assert her individuality, or to harbour ill-feeling against those who treated her more or less as a machine.

:: :: ::

In person, there was nothing particularly striking about Mary Morrison. She was neither tall nor short, and her figure, though fairly proportioned, would not have secured her a position as an artist's model. A ready smile—backed by a good set of teeth—soft brown eyes, and a slight curl in her dark brown hair were her chief attractions. Nevertheless, these were sufficient to cause some of the local young men to think her acquaintance desirable. It is certain, also, that more than one of them would have married her if she had been willing; but all advances which seemed to tend in that direction she playfully set aside.

There was only one man for whom the others thought she showed a preference. For him, even at her busiest, she would always spare a few moments to indulge in a

brief conversation. Why this should be so was the theme of constant speculation, for the favoured one had a hump on his back and earned a rather precarious living as a sort of "handy Andy." He was the odd jobs man "for everyone who lacked the right tools," or "couldn't see the way" to do a certain piece of work.

But there was nothing wrong with Jim Young's brain. It was only in personal appearance that he differed from ordinary men. His head was sunk between his shoulders. In consequence of this deformity, his legs and arms were out of proportion to his height. They seemed too long for his body. His face was drawn and thin; but he had a well-shaped nose, and his eyes were noticeably clear and blue. No wonder, then, that those who were hale and straight and strong were puzzled to know why "The Nurse" should pay so much more attention to him than to those of more presentable mould. Eventually, however, it came to be generally understood that sympathy for him was the only cause of her preferment.

However, Mary Morrison knew something that Jim Young did not seem to know. Years before, though she did not tell him so, they had both lived at East Brunswick. As children they had often played together. One day—she being somewhat boyish then—they were having a game of marbles on a piece of ground close to the edge of what had once been a blue-stone quarry. It was at that time partly filled with factory refuse, brick-bats and other kinds of dry rubbish; but careful parents still regarded it as dangerous, and warned the children not to go near the edge.

Whilst in the midst of their play another boy appeared upon the scene. He was slightly known to both of them, but, as neither liked him, he was left to look on without so much as a greeting. Sensing their aversion, or perhaps out of a sheer desire to annoy them, he pounced upon some of the marbles; held them in his open palm for both to see; and, with a taunting laugh, called out: "Findings keepings!"

"They're mine!" said Mary, sharply. "You've no right to pick them up like that! Give them back!" And she tried to snatch them from him. But he was too quick, and swiftly lifting and closing his hand he gave her a push and a kick that sent her sprawling. Her head was hurt, and for a minute or two she was too dazed even to rise.

The boy with whom she had been playing was witness to what took place. He immediately closed with the bigger, heavier one, and sought to wrest the marbles from his grasp. It became a fight! The marbles were dropped, and, weeping, Mary picked them up, but was far too interested to run away. She watched the struggle intently, and would like to have helped in the unequal contest, but could see no opening. The stronger boy was steadily driving the other before him. They approached the edge of the danger zone, and fearing what might occur, Mary loudly called upon them to "stop fighting!" If they heard they paid no heed, and presently the weightier boy gave the smaller such a punch that he fell backwards into the quarry hole.

As he struck the broken bricks and stones at the bottom he screamed and then lay still. Mary scrambled down and tried to get him on his feet. She found that she could not move him; he was too heavy and too inert. But during her efforts he regained his senses, and, with a hurried word about getting help, back she climbed to the top of the hole and raced into the street looking for assistance. A stone carter was coming up with his horse and dray. Swiftly she ran towards him, shouting: "There's a boy hurt down there, come and get him out! Oh! do come and get him out!"

By the time the stone carter and the girl reached the boy he was unconscious again. Between them they somehow managed to get him out of the quarry-hole and on to the footpath. Meantime his assailant had disappeared, and Mary and the man were left to summon such aid as could be found in a nearby cottage. Eventually—with the assistance of the woman living in the cottage, they succeeded in getting him home.

What happened after that Mary only knew by hearsay. Listening carefully to the gossip of the neighbours it appeared that, on the advice of the Doctor, the boy was sent to a hospital for treatment. It was a long time before he appeared at school again. Even then he was very weak, and, as everyone could see, Jim Young had a hump on his back.

:: :: ::

But to return to Jack Hewitt. Mary Morrison—"The Nurse"—paid no attention to the remarks he made to his

mates. She regarded his petulant observations as quite natural, for she had heard much worse language from shell-torn men at the War. One quick glance at his injuries and she set about her work.

In a moment, it seemed, she had coaxed the smouldering fire into a blaze, and warm water was available. Very gently, she cut away the ragged remnant of Hewitt's trouser leg, and gave first aid attention to the wound in his thigh. It was a bad one; but previous experience had taught her what to do, and she did it. Next she bandaged his eyes, telling him that they had better be kept from the light until the Doctor had examined them. That done, she washed and dressed the cuts and scratches on his back. Finally, in the skilled and modest way that Nurses have, she got him undressed and into his pyjamas. He was then made comparatively comfortable in his camp bed.

When the Doctor arrived, one quick glance at what "The Nurse" had done was sufficient to evoke his praise. Getting her to take off the bandages she had used, he carefully examined the patient's wounds, and then said that, in his opinion, it would be undesirable to move him.

"If," he said to Hewitt, "you have any female relative, or know of any other woman who can come and attend to your wants, that would be ideal. The Nurse will see that your dressings are renewed, and will do such other things for you as come within her province. I shall come again in a couple of days just to see how you are getting along. Do what the Nurse tells you to do and you'll be all right. Now what about a woman to help you?"

In answer, Hewitt said that his Mother was alive and well, and would come if asked. He gave her address, and, in response to an urgent telegram, she arrived the next day. It was also arranged that the Nurse should stay with him until late that night, and thereafter pay such regular visits and give such attention, as might be required until the Doctor otherwise ordered.

Being a perfectly healthy man, Hewitt's minor wounds soon healed. But it was quite a while before he recovered the full use of his eyes, and still longer before his leg was fit for service.

One afternoon, when he was well on the way to recovery, and whilst Mary was attending to his leg, he remarked:

"Somehow, I seem to know you! Feel as if I've met you before somewhere!"

"Oh! Many people say that sort of thing!" she replied. "I think they get used to seeing me about, and then get the fancy that they have seen me somewhere else!"

"Perhaps you're right!" said Hewitt doubtfully. "But I can't get it out of my mind that I have seen you, years ago!"

"Forget it!" she said.

"But I don't want to forget it!" he retorted, and smiled.

A few days later, his mother having gone to the store to get supplies, he caught the Nurse by the hands, pulled her to him, and gave her a kiss.

"Don't do that again!" said Mary sharply. "I don't like it!"

"But I do!" he answered with a laugh. "Mary," he added more seriously, "I'm sorry I spoke the way I did when you first came to nurse me! You've behaved like an angel, and I love you! Will you marry me?"

This sudden and unexpected proposal completely shattered Mary's professional composure. Temporarily, those feelings she had hitherto been able to control came to boiling point, and she could not restrain her speech.

"Marry you?" she questioned indignantly. "Not if you were as rich as Rockefeller, or the last man in the world! I've attended to you because it was my duty, and not for gain or because I like you. No! No! I know you too well! I've known you longer than you think! It was **you** who took my marbles from me and kicked me and pushed me as well. It was you who knocked the boy, who tried to help me, into the quarry hole. It was Jim Young you treated like that, and he's been deformed ever since. Marry you? Never! Never! Never!!!"

And being ready to leave she ran out of the shack.

The display of Mary's feelings, no less than her passionate rejection of his offer, gave rise to a riot of anger in Hewitt's breast. He burst into a fury, and cursed and swore in the most outrageous fashion. Passion and jealousy and rage were all aroused. "So!" he thought. "It is that damned hunch-back who is my rival! Pity he wasn't killed in the quarry hole! I remember it all now. Damn him!"

Well! Maybe I can teach them both another lesson. Let them wait. I'll fix them as sure as hell!" And he turned his thoughts in the direction of his desire to injure them.

Almost continuously Hewitt brooded over the matter. And all the time he watched for an opportunity to do either Mary Morrison or Jim Young bodily harm. There was no clear project in his mind; only a savage desire to hurt and maim those against whom his hate was directed. But nothing took place to give him a lead. He grew taciturn and sour with everybody. In the language of those who knew him best, "there was no living with the fellow!"

Eventually, however, something occurred which seemed to favour his purpose. Two months or a little more after Mary had so emphatically and dramatically refused his offer of marriage, she was attending a motor accident case. On her way to and from the sufferer's home she had to pass Hewitt's shack. Like many others, he knew her movements, and, as the days were drawing in and the dusk fell early, he saw the chance for which he had been looking, and made his plans accordingly.

His first move was so simple as to be unobserved. As Mary came pedalling home on her bicycle he pulled a string that he had tied to a small bush a little up the bank on the opposite side of the road to his own. Though it broke as it was touched by the bicycle it nevertheless had the intended effect. Mary lost control of her machine, and only just managed to avoid a fall. Before she could recover her poise and go on again, Hewitt—who had been hiding behind a tree—ran out, caught her in his arms, and made as fast as he could for the shack. Mary screamed and fought but was unable to break free. Within a few seconds he had her inside—thrown her on his bed, and, leaping back, had bolted the door.

The trick was well played; but, as sometimes happens, Providence seemed to take a hand. That same afternoon—unknown to Hewitt—Jim Young was working in a paddock on the other side of the road, putting an extra strand of wire into a fence. When "the accident" occurred he had finished his job; his tools were back in his carpenter's basket and, though hidden by the trees, he was within a few feet of the roadside when he saw what took place!

In less time than it takes to tell of his feat he was at Hewitt's door. To his dismay he found it securely fastened.

There was only one thing to do; he must break it down. But how? He tried a hammer; but it was too light, and made little or no impression. Then his Mother-wit aided him. Out of his kit of tools he picked an auger, and in feverish haste, used it to bore holes over and below the line of the door-bolt! And all the time—above the noise of the scuffling inside—he kept on shouting:

“Fight on! Nurse! I’ll be with you in a minute! Fight on! I shan’t be long.”

And so it proved, for the wood of the door was not thick. Very soon therefore, Young thought that a sufficient number of holes had been bored, and this time a hammer blow did its work; the bolt fell to the ground and the door swung open.

But Hewitt was too quick for Young. He saw the door open, and, in a flash, had flung himself upon the hunchback. They crashed to the earth, and Young would very soon have been a dead man had not Mary rushed to his rescue. Seizing an axe handle that stood beside the chimney she ran out and struck Hewitt over the head with it. The blow gave him such a shock that he lost his hold of Young and the two of them sprang to their feet at the same time.

No doubt, thinking to disarm her, Hewitt faced Mary first. It was an error in tactics that gave Young a lightning chance to secure a weapon. It was the auger that he had dropped after boring the holes in the door. And so it was that, even as Hewitt tries to disposses Mary of the axe handle, a painful prod in the back caused him to desist! He quickly turned about, and then jumped aside for fear of a double attack.

As all three realised, the struggle was now ended. Hewitt was almost beside himself in his fury. For a full minute he stood glaring at Mary and Jim in impotent rage:

“Damn you!” he hissed. “Clear out, or I’ll get my gun and do for the pair of you!”

But Mary knew this to be an empty threat. He hadn’t got a gun, and she moved aside as he strode towards the shack. Therein he disappeared, and there, apparently, he stayed; for there was no sign of him as Jim and Mary turned the corner on their way home.

Later on—that evening—four resolute men called to tell him that he must leave Olinda at once or they would take measures to see that their orders were obeyed!

He had already departed!

:: :: ::

An appeal was being made to raise funds for the relief of distressed sailors and soldiers. To assist in the sale of buttons for this purpose, Mary Morrison had gone to the city. And very nice she looked in her nurse's uniform; the red cape being particularly suitable to her complexion. As a consequence the eyes of many a mere male gave her more than a passing glance. Possibly she was aware of the attention she evoked; but, quite regardless of whom she addressed, her constant cry was: "Buy a button! Buy a button to assist disabled soldiers!"

It was in response to this invitation that, just about mid-day, some one fiercely said:

"Buy a button you bitch? Not on your life. I'll see you in hell first."

Mary swiftly raised her eyes to see the scowling face of Jack Hewitt. His eyes were glazing with malignant anger. As he took a step back, and clenched his fist, Mary feared a blow. But before she had time to speak or move a tall policeman looking on, promptly intervened.

"Stop that language!" he demanded. "And move on at once or I'll arrest you for offensive behaviour! Get on now! Get out of it!"

"Thank you!" said Mary, with a charming smile. And then she added—although she could not afterwards think why she did it—"I'm glad you were there! He hates me because I refused to marry him!"

The policeman was interested and attracted.

"Is that so?" he said. "Looking at his face I don't wonder you turned him down. Seems a bad lot. Got a devil of a temper I should think. But tell me, how are you getting along? Doing well with the buttons?"

"Oh! Not too well!" she replied. "The money box is not very heavy yet!" And she gave him a look which seemed to say: "How about you giving me a helping hand?"

He understood, and in her own vein said:

“Well! I’ll make it heavier by a shilling if you’ll pin the button on my tunic!”

“That I will with pleasure!” Mary answered. And as she was fastening it below his soldier’s ribbon, he asked:

“Where were you at the War?”

“Villers-Brettoneux!”

“So was I,” he said. “Got wounded there; but am alright now. Where do you live?”

“At Olinda!” Up in the Dandenong Hills.

“What? Why, I was born there!” he exclaimed in surprise. “What’s your name, and where can I find you?”

She told him.

“Be up to see you on Sunday!” he remarked as he moved away.

To Mary’s astonishment—for she was used to hearing such assertions—he kept his word. Moreover, he came again and again, and showed no sign of abandoning the practice! Soon she began to look forward to his visits, and was disappointed when anything occurred to prevent his promised coming. Before long, both knew that their greatest joy was in each other. Their engagement quickly followed, and, three months later they were quietly married.

:: :: ::

After Mary Morrison had become Mrs. John Alderton, she went to live at Carlton. About three months after settling there she received a disturbing letter from her Aunt at Olinda. That kindly woman had written—so she stated—at the very earnest request of Jim Young who was “very, very ill.”

He wanted to see Mary, he said, in order that he might tell her something before he died.

Mary left at once; only taking time to write a brief note to her husband to say where she had gone; and not to expect her back before the following day. Her haste was prompted by a knowledge of certain things concerning Jim that she had thought it wise not to communicate to any one else. That he loved her she knew without being told. She

had known it for a long time, and — although she did not love him in return, her womanly pity had been stirred by the helplessness of his case, and she had shown him as much kindness as she dared.

But after he had rescued her from Hewitt in the encounter at the shack, the situation changed. She knew that he was filled with an expectation of something more than a benevolent interest in his affairs. This made her wary. Not for anything would she hurt his feelings, and, in a well-intended effort to make his hopes subside, she refrained from seeing him as often as had been her previous habit. But this only led to his seeking her out, and she was not altogether successful in keeping their relations at the old standard.

When Alderton appeared upon the scene—not long after the Hewitt affair—Jim saw at once that such a man was bound to find favour in Mary's eyes. As the weeks passed—and he learned of the steady way in which she was being wooed—he became thoroughly despondent. After her marriage a kind of lassitude descended upon him. He seemed to sink into himself, and for long spaces would sit uncannily silent and still. Nothing interested him. Slowly but certainly he fell into a decline. Quite often he was unwell, and now and again had to take to his bed. All these things Mary knew—and she had secretly mourned over his condition. So it was that, when the summons came, she went to him without the least delay.

It needed only a glance to tell her that he was nearing the end. Nevertheless, she chose to speak to him in as cheery a manner as she could command.

“Why! What's the matter, Jim? You're not giving up are you? Pull yourself together, and make a bid to get well again. We all want you to live you know! Do try!”

And she smoothed his brow with her cool soft hand.

“I'm dying, and I know it!” he weakly responded. “But—before I go—I-wanted-to-ask-you-something. What-made-you-fancy-the-policeman, Mary?”

She smiled upon him as she said:

“I think it must have been the uniform, Jim! They say no woman can resist a uniform!”

"No! It wasn't that!" he wanly retorted. "Once—I—thought—you—loved—me!—— But, when—I—saw—the—way—you—looked—at—him—, I—knew—better.—— I—think—I've—always—been—in—love—with—you, Mary!—— After—the—fight—with—Hewitt—I—was—certain—of—it!—— As—you—can—see,—— I—hung—the—auger—on the wall. The—brown—bow—you—see—tied—to—it——is—the—one—that—fell—from—your—dress,— that—day!—— I've—never—used—the—auger—since. It's—a—it's—a—sort of—idol!—— I've prayed—for you—before it.

"You—don't—know—it,— Mary! but—I—fought—for you—twice.—— I—fought—the boy—who—tried—to—steal—your marbles——when—you—were—a girl!—— He—knocked me, into—the—quarry—hole, and—broke—my—back!—— Now, my heart's—broken, and—I'm going.—— Will—you—kiss—me—once, just—once,——and—let—me—go—in peace?"

Mary stooped and kissed him on the lips.

As she rose—a smile—an ineffable smile—lighted up his face; and then—as he took her hand in his—a calm content slowly took its place. He sighed—happily—as her fingers pressed upon his own. His eyes closed. The furrows on his brow smoothed out. Upon his cheeks an almost imperceptible touch of pink appeared. His breathing eased and softened. A moment later he was dead.

HORTICULTURAL PRESS PTY. LTD.
78a Victoria Street, Melbourne
